

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Jointly with

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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HELD AT: 250 Broadway-Committee Rm. 14th Fl.

B E F O R E: Eric Dinowitz
Chairperson

Robert F. Holden
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Charles Barron
Gale A. Brewer
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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

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

Derek Coy
Senior Program Officer at New York Health
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Joe Bello

Adrian Alfred [sp?]
CUNY Peer Mentor

Renee Cabrera Gonzales [sp?]
TDF Veteran Theatregoing Program

Doctor Linnea Vuario
NYU Langone Health

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Hello everyone.

3 Welcome to today's hybrid New York City Council
4 hearing of the Committee on Higher Education jointly
5 with the Committee of Veterans. Place all electronic
6 devices to vibrate or silent mode at this moment. If
7 you wish to submit testimony, you may send it to
8 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, that's
9 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for your
10 cooperation. Chairs, we are ready to begin.

11 [gavel]

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Good morning. I'm
13 Council Member Eric Dinowitz, Chair of the Committee
14 on Higher Education. Welcome to our joint hearing
15 with the Committee on Veterans chaired by Council
16 Member Bob Holden, Robert Holden. We're very formal
17 here, Robert, Robert Holden. Today's Oversight
18 hearing is on support services for student veterans
19 at the City University of New York, and before I get
20 to my opening statement, I do want to thank all of
21 our veterans who are in audience today and on the
22 panels, and as well as their family members for what
23 they give to our city and our country. We look
24 forward in this hearing to learning more about the
25 efforts of the City's Department of Veterans Services

2 and CUNY together and separately in recruiting,
3 enrolling, supporting, retaining, and graduating
4 student veterans, reservists, active service members,
5 and their families. We want to make sure that CUNY's
6 programs are serving all veteran and active service
7 member students equitably, including service members
8 of color and service members with disabilities. We
9 are interested in learning about best practices and
10 delivering services to this important population and
11 in understanding any gaps in education programs or
12 support services needed to serve this population more
13 effectively. On a personal note, I am looking forward
14 to this hearing with Council Member Holden who has
15 given many years to our city and to CUNY as a
16 professor, and as former Chair of the Veterans
17 Committee I have developed a deep, deep admiration
18 for the veteran community and veteran families. So
19 I'm very much looking forward to this hearing. One
20 of my staff members read in a news article recently
21 that CUNY's Queens College just finished hosting on-
22 the-spot admissions day for veterans and active
23 service members in order to streamline the admissions
24 process for the current spring semester. I applaud
25 that initiative in theory, and would like to know how

it worked in practice. The news article noted that Queens College has a rich tradition of student veterans, including the fact that 70 percent of the pioneer class of 1941 served in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II. A memorial to those student veterans on the campus quad reminds current students every day of a legacy of those veterans. Let me thank Queens College President Frank Wu for the following statement: "The veterans and military personnel taking courses here bring an unrivaled level of academic excellence to our institution. Their dedication to and sacrifice for our great country are inspirational and sustain our ideals. We take pride in the colleges consistently being designated as a military-friendly school and as a military-friendly spouse school, and are committed to providing support to this community through specialized services such as our Veterans Support Services Office." We look forward to hearing more about services like those at our hearing. And I want to acknowledge we've been joined by Council Member Paladino. I'd also like to thank Adam Starapoli [sp?] my Legislative Director, Jenna Claus [sp?] my Chief of Staff, Christina Yalamati [sp?] the

2 Committee's Counsel, Regina Paul the Committee's
3 Policy Analyst, and Nia Hyatt [sp?], the Committee's
4 Senior Finance Analyst. And now I'd like to turn it
5 over to Chair Holden to give his opening statement.

6 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you, Chair,
7 and good morning everyone. I am Council Member
8 Robert Holden, Chair of the New York City Council's
9 Committee on Veterans, and today, the Committee on
10 Veterans joins the Committee on Higher Education to
11 conduct an oversight hearing on support for student
12 veterans and the City University of New York-- at the
13 City University of New York. The Committee will
14 examine how the Department of Veterans Services and
15 CUNY can work together and individually in
16 recruiting, enrolling, supporting, retaining, and
17 graduating student veterans. Our members are
18 interested in learning about the best practices in
19 service delivery for veterans and uncovering any gaps
20 in education programming and support services for
21 veterans and their families. And as a former CUNY
22 professor myself, and student by the way-- started in
23 1969, so that's-- you can figure that one out. And I
24 taught 44 years as a CUNY professor. So, CUNY's in
25 my blood. So it's-- literally. And I'm looking

2 forward to this discussion, you know, that we're
3 having today. It was always self-evident to me that
4 our veteran students had different needs than the
5 average student, and that was from experience. And
6 besides having the life experiencing of serving in
7 the military, veterans were typically older than my
8 average student and were dealing with more serious
9 matters outside the classroom. It dates back to-- I
10 had many Vietnam vets in my class starting in the--
11 obviously, in the 70s. About half of post-9/11
12 veterans say it was difficult for them to readjust to
13 civilian life after their military service. Veterans
14 who served in combat are also more likely to say that
15 their readjustment was very difficult. So, and
16 overwhelmingly majority of surveyed U.S. service
17 members believe that higher education is a critical
18 component of a successful transition from military to
19 civilian life and a vehicle for upward mobility. So,
20 nearly three-quarters of surveyed service members
21 indicated that advancing education is one of their
22 primary motivations to serve. And with over half
23 listing educational benefits as their top motivating
24 factor. However, the transition to higher ed from
25 military service can be challenging for student

veterans and can be ripe with obstacles to successful completion of the required degree coursework. And many times they couldn't get-- my students couldn't get the courses they needed to finish in timely manner. It did cut off some of their benefits. Veterans must learn to integrate themselves into, you know, socio/cultural context of the campus and its student body and learn to relate to and interact with others in a new less-structured environment and-- so you know, all of this in addition to student veterans, especially those who served in combat, many have to deal with military service related trauma, often in isolation. These challenges can lead to and manifest themselves as mental health difficulties such as depression, anxiety, the inability to focus, as well as behavioral health disorders such as alcohol and substance abuse. So given the demonstrated value of higher education for veterans and their needs, it is imperative to ensure that student veterans are supported with carefully designed, thoughtful and culturally competent services while studying at CUNY. So, you know, I-- it's critical-- it's especially critical after the COVID-19 pandemic which actually made a lot worse for

2 the veterans in higher education, while the same
3 time, you know, there was some very huge barriers to,
4 you know, actually getting the resources and
5 services. So I want to thank the Administration,
6 CUNY's administrators, advocates, service providers,
7 volunteers, and any current and former student
8 veterans who have taken the time to join us today.
9 So, at this time I'd like to turn it back to Chair
10 Dinowitz.

11 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: thank you, Chair
12 Holden, and I can't believe I did this. I forgot to
13 mention that I too am a CUNY graduate. I got my
14 Master's and my father was a CUNY graduate as well.
15 I'd also like to recognize that we've been joined by
16 Council Members Barron and Nurse. Thank you, Chair
17 Holden. I'd like to remind everyone who wishes to
18 testify in person today that you must fill out a
19 witness slip. It looks like this. It's located at
20 the desk of the Sergeant at Arms near the entrance of
21 the room. Please fill this slip out even if you have
22 already registered in advance, that you will be
23 testifying in person today. To allow as many people
24 to testify as possible, testimony will be limited to
25 three minutes per person, whether you are testing in

2 person or on Zoom. I'm also going to ask my
3 colleagues to limit their questions and comments to
4 five minutes. Please note that witnesses who are
5 here in person will testify before those who are
6 signed in to the Zoom webinar. And now in accordance
7 with-- I'd like to read of the names of the first
8 panel. It'll be Commissioner Hendon, of course,
9 thank you for your service, Ellen Greely [sp?],
10 Nicole Orlando [sp?], Denise Maybank [sp?], and
11 Ricardo Garcia [sp?]. In accordance to the rules of
12 the Council. I will administer the affirmation to the
13 witnesses from the City University of New York and
14 the Department of Veterans Services. Please raise
15 your right hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth,
16 the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your
17 testimony before this committee and to respond
18 honestly to Council Member's question? I heard the
19 chorus of "I do's." That's good. Thank you. As a
20 reminder to all of our witnesses, please state your
21 name prior to your testimony for the record.

22 COMMISSIONER HENDON: My name is James
23 Hendon, Commissioner New York City Department of
24 Veterans Services, and just beginning my testimony
25 now. Good morning, Chair Holden, Chair Dinowitz,

2 Committee Members, Council Staff, veterans, and
3 advocates. My name is James Hendon. I am
4 commissioner for the New York City Department of
5 Veterans Services. I'm joined today by Ellen
6 Greeley, Assistant Commissioner of Policy and
7 Strategic Partnerships and Nicole Orlando, Policy
8 Analyst. I'd also like to acknowledge my colleagues
9 from the City University of New York who are here in
10 attendance. I'm honored to have the opportunity to
11 speak with you about student veterans, the unique
12 challenges and the services and programs our agency
13 offers to connect them with the resource and services
14 they require to achieve academic success. Since 1944
15 the Service Readjustment Act, commonly known as the
16 GI Bill, has provided educational opportunities to
17 generations of service members, veterans, reservists,
18 and their dependents. The post 9/11 GI Bill marks a
19 major expansion of veterans' education benefits,
20 which in turn has driven a rise in military connected
21 student enrollment across the country. According to
22 the Veteran Benefits Administration, there were more
23 than 836,000 student veterans and beneficiaries
24 receiving education benefits in Fiscal Year 2021. Of
25 that total, an estimated 23,884 student veterans and

beneficiaries used VA education benefits at colleges and universities in New York State. Recent academic studies indicate that student veterans enhance campus diversity, enrich the intellectual discourse, perform well academically, arrive on campus with ample financial support, and remain engaged members of the community after graduation. While student veterans are an asset to institutions of higher learning education, they must overcome significant structural barriers to enroll in and complete college. It is important to mention that these structural barriers and challenges are only magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to available data, student veterans are more likely than civilian students to be black, indigenous, and people of color, the first in their families to go to college and have families of their own. These adult learners are unique in that they come to higher education with challenges and strengths that differ from traditional college students. Putting into place best practice approaches to promote veteran students success is crucial for transitioning those who have served our country into post-military careers. Our agency is committed to ensuring student veterans, particularly those

2 enrolled at CUNY institutions, receive the resources
3 and supportive services they need to succeed.

4 Outreach efforts are an important part of our
5 commitment to encourage veterans' participation in
6 higher education. Our agency works closely with
7 local colleges and universities, both public and
8 private institutions, through our Veterans on Campus
9 Initiative. Veterans on Campus is a collaboration
10 between the New York City Department of Veteran
11 Services, our corporate partners and New York City-
12 based colleges and universities. The goals of
13 Veterans on Campus include assisting academic
14 intuitions in identifying and adopting best practices
15 that can create a support for student veteran
16 experience, inspiring new transitioning service
17 members and their families to pursue their higher
18 education goals here in New York City, catalyzing and
19 promoting academic resources that will lead to deeper
20 understand and innovation, and ensuring successful
21 transition to purpose-driven lives through
22 educational achievement and viable careers. We also
23 refer student veterans to CUNY's Project for Return
24 and Opportunity in Veterans Education, otherwise
25 known as CUNY PROVE. PROVE offers student veterans

community and transitional support through mentors and social work interns at select CUNY institutions, as well as private colleges and universities. We make available our website educational information and resources for student veterans and partner with local colleges and universities to host on-campus events for student vets. All student veterans can also take advantage of our Vet Connect NYC multi-service referral platform along with Vet Connect Pro and Empire Vets. Employment search engines which include a military translation tool that converts military service and civilian real-time job openings in both the public and private sectors. Our latest initiative is the virtual NYC Transition Assistance Program, NYC TAP, scheduled for Thursday, February 16th, 2023. NYC TAP will include a presentation by Columbia University's Center for Veteran Transition and Integration on tips for returning to the classroom after leaving military service. As the student veteran population continues to grow, it is essential for higher education administrators to add faculty to understand how the characteristics and backgrounds of student veterans shape their college experiences. To accomplish this goal, local

institutions of higher education must continue to invest in academic and social support services for student veterans that facilitates sustainable strategies to address the unique issues of returning service members and veterans. Local colleges and universities must be vigilant in support transitioning student veterans through recruitment, enrollment, retention and graduation while also building military cultural competency into the institution. In conclusion, our agency is committed to engaging student veterans and connecting them with the resources benefits, and supportive services they need. We thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important topic and look forward to answering your questions. Mr. Chair and Mr. Chair, separate from my remarks, given the timing of this hearing, I just want to use this forum to make two quick announcement to the veteran community members who may be here in-person and watching online. Number one, for all who are interested in applying to join their local Community Boards, the Community Board application deadlines are in the coming weeks. More information can be found at nyc.gov/vetcommunityboards. It's

2 nyc.gov/vetcommunityboards. Number two, for
3 nonprofits looking to apply for City Council
4 discretionary funding, the application deadline is
5 Tuesday, February 22nd-- 21st, Tuesday, February 21st.
6 please visit nyc.gov/vetcouncilfunding to learn more.
7 It's nyc.gov/vetcouncilfunding. Thank you.

8 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: Good morning.
9 Chairperson Dinowitz, Chairperson Holden, it's nice
10 to meet you and I'm so glad you're CUNY alum. And to
11 all of the members of the Committee on Higher
12 Education and I should have said my name first, I saw
13 the look. Okay, Denise Maybank [sp?] City University
14 of New York. I'm coming back to that, but to the
15 members of the Committee on Higher Education and the
16 Committee on Veterans, thank you for this opportunity
17 to provide testimony before you regarding services
18 for student veterans at the City University of New
19 York. My name is Denise Maybank and I have the
20 privilege of serving as the Vice Chancellor for
21 Student Affairs. The committee's interest in and
22 their focus on the services and care of CUNY students
23 is laudable, and I value all that you do and all that
24 you pay attention to in that regard. When we think
25 about what is to happen, I heard Chairperson Dinowitz

indicate that it is either together or separately that I serve with my partner in a commitment to wonder for student veterans. I am so honored to work with Commissioner Hendon, and I don't want to go past that and make it a light comment, because it is with his energy and with his focus that we are able to accomplish so much. I'm accompanied today by those on the frontline of serving student veterans, those best-positioned to offer the narrative and insights responsive to your interest and questions, and joining me in testimony today is retired US Army Veteran Ricardo Garcia who serves as the Veteran Coordinator at Hostos Community College. The most critical voices of our panel are those of two currently enrolled student veterans, Mervin Vincent [sp?], a student at Brooklyn College, and Shakima Wiley [sp?] from Hunter College. Additionally, I am accompanied by the leaders from our staff best in the known regarding our veteran referred-- I'm sorry, our veterans-related programs, Leora Shudofsky, Project PROVE Director, and Jessica Agatha Funes who is from the CUNY Office of Veterans Affairs. These experts are here as key resource support in answering your questions today. You will hear from them regarding

specific programs and services made available to our students and the impact of some of those supports on the ultimate success of students with disabilities and who are also veterans. As the largest urban university in the nation, the City University of New York is described as a transformative engine of social mobility that is a critical component of the lifeblood of New York City, an integral part of the University's mission is the provision of services necessary to support the accomplishment of the academic goals of each student. CUNY students deserve optimal circumstances in which to attain their goals, and we support them in having meaningful and fulfilling experiences. We have committed to our students not merely surviving, but to them thriving through the CUNY experience. Who are our student veterans? What do they-- what do we know about their needs and the things from which they benefit? Including in my written testimony is five years of student veteran enrollment data offering the numbers and percent for each of the years by ethnicity. Data for fall 2022 will not become available until later in the spring semester, probably the latter part of March, and so that is why it is not included.

Generally, the student veteran population has been one percent of the total university enrollment, ranging from a high of 1.24 percent in 2019 to 0.98 percent in 2021, the impacts of COVID. The population is predominantly male and the-- with the gender distribution showing an increase in female veterans from 22.9 percent in 2017 to 26.4 percent in 2021. The overwhelming majority of veterans enrolled are in degree programs and the percent of veterans enrolled as graduate students has increased from 10 percent in 2017 to 13.5 percent in 2021. Among the total enrollment for fall 2021, 3.5 percent of students were identified as students with disabilities. By comparison, a closer look at the student veteran population reveals a higher representation of students with disabilities at 5.1 percent. There are many ways in which the university serves offices-- I'm sorry, in which the Veterans Services Offices and the Disability Services Offices come together to ensure the coordination of services for student veterans with disabilities. So as to make necessary services evident while normalizing the engagement of student veterans on the campus so as not to stigmatize. Under the Division of Student

2 Affairs, two main units focus on providing services
3 to or connecting student veterans with services
4 across the university, the CUNY Office of Veterans
5 Affairs and the Project for Return and Opportunity in
6 Veteran Education, or PROVE. Both of these units
7 have benefitted from the generous support of the City
8 Council over the years, and for that we are sincerely
9 grateful. The CUNY Office of Veterans Affairs serves
10 the central coordinating role for the campus-based
11 units providing services for student veterans. The
12 office is staffed by a full-time director and full-
13 time assistant supported by student-- and is also
14 supported by student employees. COVA, as it's called
15 in short, because we make an acronym of everything at
16 CUNY, serves as the coordinating office for academic
17 and financial needs among all CUNY student veterans.
18 COVA orchestrates initiatives to retain student
19 veterans and their family members by implementing
20 best practices and complying with federal, state, and
21 CUNY policy. COVA also serves as a clearing house
22 for information across CUNY campuses. Working
23 collaboratively with community agencies, COVA aims to
24 increase awareness and univer-- I'm sorry, and
25 sensitivity to the unique needs of veterans. COVA is

2 responsible for administering the 180,000 dollars
3 allotted by the City Council for Fiscal Year 23.
4 These funds are distributed to campuses to support
5 the peer mentoring program. PROVE was founded in
6 2007 to serve the increasing number of veterans and
7 departments who would be using the GI Bill after
8 serving-- I'm sorry, and dependents who would be
9 using the GI Bill after serving in the global war on
10 terror. PROVE's innovative field model supports and
11 enhances existing campus veterans' services to meet
12 the concrete social and emotional needs of student
13 veterans. PROVE trains and deploys graduate social
14 work interns directly to the student veterans spaces
15 on campuses. PROVE's dual mission is to assist
16 student veterans with their transition to a higher
17 education environment and support their educational
18 journey while training a cohort of graduate social
19 work interns to develop practice, knowledge in order
20 to work with military veteran populations. Social
21 work interns provide direct service to student
22 veterans identifying unmet needs and assisting in
23 linking student veterans with the appropriate
24 resources reducing the negative consequences of
25 social disconnection and isolation and providing

social connectivity and a sense of belonging. PROVE regularly serves over 1,000 unique student veterans per academic year. The project was funded by the City Council from 2017 through 2021. The vast majority of CUNY campuses have a Student Veterans Resource Center or Veterans and Military Affairs or Services Office that is staffed by full and/or part-time employees. These spaces are meant to serve as a support for student veterans as well as a physical space for them to build community. Services offered by the Student Veterans Resource Centers include admissions support, identifying funding, applying for federal and state benefits, assistance with the VA certification process, help preparing resumes and conducting job searches and access to other support services as well. Our desire is to not simply meet the standard criteria for classification as a veteran or military-friendly university; we want to surpass those criteria by responding to the needs of a population of students deserving of their significance being recognized and honored through the programming and support made available. To that end, we are seeking to expand our offerings with a full complement of initiatives from admissions through to

2 completion. In coordination with my partner in
3 commitment and the New York City Department of
4 Veteran Services, we are implementing a deferred
5 admission program under the title Veterans Promise.
6 This offering will allow students graduating from New
7 York City public schools to be admitted to the
8 colleges for which they are eligible and to defer
9 that admission for two years of an enlisted service.
10 Upon completion of that service, the student will
11 return and enter the program of study for which they
12 have been receiving-- from which they have been
13 receiving ongoing communication through the campus-
14 based offices in CUNY Office of Veterans Affairs
15 while enlisted. The Credit for Heroes option will
16 allow veterans to receive credit for prior learning
17 through a structure offering to assess the
18 equivalency of prior learning to the coursework
19 required for degree programs. This offering will
20 reduce the number of courses to be completed and will
21 accelerate degree completion. Within expansion of
22 CUNY online course offerings, there will be an
23 opportunity for active duty military to amass credits
24 toward degrees. The reach of the online options
25 expand the possibility for enrollment, course

2 completion, and degree attainment to military across
3 the globe. These initiative will attract a greater
4 number of veterans and their dependents to CUNY
5 necessitating strengthened services through our
6 campus and central office veterans units. As we
7 would suspect, CUNY could utilize additional
8 resources to more holistically serve our student
9 veterans and address the needs associated with our
10 military enrollment including spouses and children
11 using benefits. Various academic fiscal staffing and
12 programmatic needs exist, challenging our ability to
13 attract and retain student veterans. Resources to
14 devise high-interest programming for veterans are
15 necessary, and interest that we may not be the same
16 as those for-- that-- interest that may not be the
17 same for those traditionally-aged students. Career
18 and professional development initiatives designed for
19 those with military experience attracts the attention
20 of industry leaders and provides important
21 opportunities for the population of PROVE. PROVE,
22 which has positive performance indicators, needs a
23 stable source of funding for the assurance that their
24 services and the benefits for the wellbeing of
25 students are maintained. In conclusion, our

engagement with student veterans is not merely about certification and verification for benefits, it is a-- it is-- nor is it intended to offer a thank you for your service to those who have sacrificed in so many ways to secure our democracy. Our outreach and engagement is about attracting talented and skilled individuals who want to expand their knowledge. our desire is to have veterans as a part of our diverse-- as a part of our diverse environment in order to engage mature individuals and influence the development of their peers in a vibrant community of learners. Our programming and support are about responding to the needs of our student veterans in the interest of their success, and our advocacy on behalf of student veterans is about securing the attention, commitment, and resources necessary to create spaces and environments in which veterans thrive. And ultimately become those individuals that make a difference and make the greatest contributions to our society. I want to leave you with a quote from Maya Angelou that says, "We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty." I believe that our veterans are those butterflies, and we need to

2 acknowledge that they have gone through in order to
3 enjoy what it is they've done and what they bring us
4 as members of our staff. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you, and I
6 think what you said at the end, that thank you for
7 your services very important. It has to be more than
8 words, and that's what we're seeking to do in our
9 city. I want to acknowledge we've been joined by
10 Councilwoman Ariola on Zoom, on Zoom. So first
11 question's for CUNY. How do you define veteran?

12 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: It's a-- well,
13 it's the person--

14 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing] Or
15 how does CUNY define veteran, not you?

16 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: Thank you.
17 Appreciate that. I'm going to depend on my folks
18 that are doing this on a regular basis.

19 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Sure.

20 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: But generally,
21 the person who has provided service and is not only
22 in active military, but it is also in reserve,
23 reservists, as well. But Leora?

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: There's more
25 testimony?

2 UNIDENTIFIED: Yes.

3 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So when I asked my
4 question I was joking.

5 [laughter]

6 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Alright.

7 UNIDENTIFIED: But see, we'll be ready
8 when--

9 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Alright.

10 UNIDENTIFIED: we finish testifying.

11 Can you hear me? Apologies for that. I
12 just wanted to make sure the young lady had a seat.
13 Good morning. Good morning. Good morning everybody.
14 God bless. Good morning, Chair Dinowitz. Good
15 morning, Chair Holden. It's a pleasure to be among
16 you. Good morning esteemed Council Members. I would
17 like to take-- first of all, I'd like to thank you
18 for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the City
19 University of New York's veteran population for
20 Hostos Community College. I'm honored to work at
21 CUNY's most impactful and diverse school which is
22 recognized as a Hispanic-serving institution
23 throughout the country. [sp?] Hostos Community
24 College. Before I begin, I'd like the panel to know
25 that I am a retired United States Army disabled

combat veteran. I served for 25 years on active duty, the reserves, and the National Guard. I am also proud to share that I served during our nation's and city's darkest hour, the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks. I also served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and countless other military operations, some of which were in New York City. In addition to my military service, I am also an Executive Board Member with the Bronx County American Legion. As a County Vice Commander and Post Commander, I represent and address the concerns and the issues of the veterans within my community and the borough of the Bronx. I currently serve as the Veterans Coordinator for Hostos Community College assisting transitioning veterans into academia. As a proud CUNY alum, graduating from John Jay College and continuing my graduate studies with CUNY's Graduate School of Public Health, I am all too familiar with the needs of our population and the barriers they face during their transition into civilian life. Since its inception, Hostos has worked tirelessly to be a resource and serve the south Bronx ethnically diverse yet underserved and disenfranchised community. Hostos is the proud recipient of the MacKenzie Scott Grant which has

2 allowed us to create initiatives that assisted so
3 many of our students. A few examples of the programs
4 that were created because of the grant are Families
5 United, Bridge Tuition Assistance Fund, Educating for
6 Diversity, and the Workforce Initiative just to name
7 a few. These programs have been instrumental in
8 helping students with economic hardships, housing,
9 and food insecurity. In addition, Hostos is also a
10 proud recipient of the Perkins Grant. The Perkins
11 Grant has given us the ability to increase both
12 career and technical education programs. We have
13 increased faculty and have purchase new equipment for
14 our students. I'm sure you're asking what this has to
15 do with the military population. Everything. Many
16 of our military members come with an array of
17 barriers that impede their ability to obtain their
18 degrees. From 2003 to 2019, over 4.3 million service
19 members have transitioned out of the military back
20 into civilian life. The United States Census records
21 that from 2017 to 2021 over 24,000 veterans resided
22 in the Bronx. From 2020 to 2023, my office, the
23 Hostos Office of Veterans Affairs, HOVA for short,
24 has proudly served over the 378 veterans, active
25 members and dependents. Hostos was recognized by GI

2 Jobs magazine as a friendly school-- as a military-
3 friendly school. I'm very proud of that designation.
4 HOVA's mission is to assist veterans in achieving
5 their academic goals by providing them with a strong
6 support system and centralized vet-friendly services.
7 Each veteran's degree ensures a successful transition
8 back into civilian life. Our office provides the
9 academic tools to achieve graduation. Our staff
10 consists of a Veterans Director, a Veterans
11 Coordinator, two VA School Certifying Officials, and
12 a Veterans Internship Peer Mentoring program, which
13 the Council here have funded. Thank you for that.
14 The Coordinator meets individually with each students
15 and evaluates their academic need. Once assessed,
16 the Coordinator works with key departments to create
17 an individualized academic plan that facilitates
18 their academic journey. HOVA works closely with the
19 following departments to benefit the students, and a
20 few of the departments involved in this endeavor are
21 listed below, as you can see on your copies there.
22 I'm not going to go through all those departments.
23 It's quite a few. Additionally, our office has
24 established partnerships with numerous veterans'
25 service organizations that enhances the services we

2 provide to our military community. The Hostos Office
3 of Veterans Affairs has created robust services and
4 multifaceted program that aides all our military
5 cohort. Ultimately, my goal is to strengthen the
6 existing office and its programs to better support
7 the needs of our population and expand on the service
8 and resources available to our military students. To
9 do this, we will need your continued support and
10 assistance. Please, be mindful that while we grow and
11 increase our veterans program, we will effectively
12 create a veterans program that will endure for the
13 college's future. Thank you for your time.

14 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. I'd
15 like to note that we've been joined by Council Member
16 Feliz. Will the next witness please-- before you
17 present your testimony, please state your name.

18 MERVINS VINCENT: My name is Mervins
19 Vincent [sp?], and I am a United States Marine Corps
20 Veteran. I am a student at CUNY Brooklyn College. I
21 am majoring in finance and accounting. I am a
22 Veteran Peer Mentor and Student Veteran of American
23 Leader [sic]. Thank you Chairman Dinowitz. Thank
24 you Chairman Holden for affording me this opportunity
25 to address this New York City Council for Higher

Education and Veteran Initiative. I am honored to represent CUNY student veteran's population.

Originally, I was born in Haiti. I grew up here in New York City. My love for this country and wanting to serve, right after high school I decided to enlist in the United States Marine Corps. After serving in the Marines for about 10 years, I began the transition into civilian life. Many of the adjustment and barriers including starting over with a new career path and also adjusting with life back of home. Originally I was planning with some friends that I've served with to move to Florida, get a place together and go to college at University of South Florida. However, when I was getting out the military, that was during the COVID-19 pandemic. I then decided coming back home and being closer to my family and supporting my family was a better choice for me and for my family as well. Since I've always been good with numbers and I have great interpersonal skills, I decided that to earn a degree in business was a better choice for me. Therefore, I decided to start looking into the universities with City University of New York, and I made the decision that Brooklyn College was the best choice for me.

Transitioning from a team environment and a regimented lifestyle into doing things on my own was not an easy transition. Since I haven't participated in a civilian classroom setting for years, my academic journey began with Queensborough Community College, and then once I graduated, I decided to transfer to Brooklyn College to major in finance and accounting. The veteran centers at Brooklyn College and Queensborough Community College played a major role within my campus experience. Each center assisted me in navigating the challenges of being a veteran attending college. Since it was my first time being back on a school campus, I received help in the following areas during my veteran's orientation. I received help with applying for the post-9/11 GI Bill, applying for financial aid and additional scholarships, applying my smart transcript from service towards my degree, receiving more information about the different types of degree within the business field, understanding the degree requirements and how to plan for academic success, how to enroll in classes, create weekly schedules, how to navigate the college spaces, staying engaged, as well as to apply for internship opportunities with

2 the CUNY Office of Veteran Affairs, and also
3 professional development. In 2021, I applied for VA
4 work study at CUNY Office of Veteran Affairs, COVA.
5 It has been quite an [inaudible] experience for me.
6 During my first year in college, everything was
7 remote. Being an intern at COVA has brought so many
8 benefits and motivating factors to my college
9 experience. I was able to interact with fellow
10 veterans who have similar lifestyles. Interning at
11 CUNY Office of Veterans Affairs for Peer [inaudible]
12 Student Veterans was a smoother transition from
13 military mindset to a civilian sector. I was able to
14 apply my skillset from service while also applying
15 new skillsets. COVA veteran Peer Mentor Program
16 initiate events related to culture competency, mental
17 health, physical wellness, and counseling. Each
18 Wednesday we hold Wellness Wednesday which challenged
19 me to do more within my community and outreach
20 methods to engage others who do not know how to ask
21 or where to receive help. The CUNY Office of Veteran
22 Affairs have built me up to become a Veteran Peer
23 Mentor at my campus at Brooklyn College. The Veteran
24 Peer Mentor is a program sponsored by New York City
25 Council. The initiative trains us to serve the

student veterans through providing a smooth transitioning back to college, a sense of belonging through veterans on-campus fellowship and support, dependability and reassurance that the Veteran Peer Mentor would serve as a liaison, referral to mental health and physical wellness services. During my time as a Veteran Peer Mentor at Brooklyn College campus, I have been able to reach out to over 300 CUNY student veterans, and also I have helped to restore the Veterans Club at Brooklyn College. So far, 100 of our veterans can have a place to call their own. Because of COVID, the club previously was shut down. Bringing the club back has been beneficial because now I can testify today on this panel that the veteran population needs a space at CUNY to build its community. By doing so, we have a better retention rate. Being a veteran student has many challenges. Transitioning out of military has been a financial hardship. Right before I was getting ready to transition, I realized that I had to downgrade my lifestyle, pay off my debt so that I could be able to attend college and focus on my education. The monthly basic allowance for housing from the post-9/11 GI Bill has been very helpful. However,

2 securing an apartment has been a nightmare within New
3 York City due to the fact that many landlords do not
4 accept the basic allowance for housing as income. In
5 the beginning of my school year, I had to work
6 several jobs making difficult to balance employment
7 and school. However, the Veteran Peer Mentor at
8 Brooklyn College and CUNY Office of Veterans Affairs
9 income [sic] had helped me balance school and work
10 while also focusing on my studies. COVA provides an
11 opportunity for veterans to work and live in, learn
12 new be mentored while being able to focus on a higher
13 education and succeeding. I want to thank you for
14 this time today to hear our voice. I represent many
15 student veteran voices that need to know that they
16 are supported in their hard work, heroism and
17 disabilities were not in vain. Martin Luther King
18 said, "We are not makers of history. We are made by
19 history." New York City Council have had history
20 made today by leaving a legacy for the next
21 generation of CUNY veterans. Thank you, ladies and
22 gentlemen.

23 SHAKIMA WILEY: Good morning, Chairman
24 Holden, Chairman Dinowitz, and all the City Council
25 Veteran Committee and Higher Education Committee

Members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. My name is Shakima Wiley and I'm a Hunter College senior majoring in public health, the mom of an eight-year-old and an active Army National Guard Member. I'm here today to share a little bit about my experience as a CUNY student veteran. I became a student at Hunter College in 2019. This will be my second attempt at pursuing my Bachelor's Degree, the difference being 10 years. The first few semesters at Hunter were isolating because I was a part-time student, and most of my classes weren't during the day. So many activities weren't operating at the exact times that I was on campus. My first challenge at Hunter was my interactions with the different academic advisors. It wasn't clear who would assist me and in what ways returning to college after so long coupled with being a transfer student, working fulltime, being a parent to a then four-year-old, and being a soldier in the Army National Guard. I had come to Hunter with a plan to be intentional and urgently needed all the support I could get to see that plan through. When I decided to attend Hunter, I ultimately did so with the idea of becoming a nurse midwife. So that meant pursuing Hunter's nursing

program and beginning to fulfil the pre-requisites.

COVID changed my professional outlook, leading me to declare Public Health as my major. Around the same time, I started to interact more on campus with the Student Veterans Resource Center. Although I knew of the center from the start of my time at Hunter, this was one of the places I couldn't access because of the times I was on campus. Being present in a center gave me a sense of belonging, whereas, being a non-traditional and transfer student had made me feel removed from other students in my classes who were fresh from high school. I started making my way to the Resource Center every chance I could, which helpfully staffed our campus PROVE team. Me and other military students and nurturing a network of support I hadn't discovered at Hunter before. Those relationships overflowed into my classes and personal life. Many different challenges would present themselves to me during my time at Hunter. However, I found an invaluable outlet and guidance from the relationship I forged with Leor Shudofsky, the Director and Educational Coordinator of PROVE. She became a counselor when needed, a resource navigator and encourager and so much more. As a second-year

public health student set to graduate this spring, I wholeheartedly believe my unorthodox journey to attaining my Bachelor's Degree landed me exactly where I was supposed to be, that being public health. The path it took me to finally realize the best career route that would allow me to utilize my skills and training from over the years make meaningful changes in my community and feel fulfilled was a challenging path. I'm beyond happy that while it wasn't the traditional route, I've reached my first higher educational goal, which sometimes seem out of reach. Since being a public health student I have learned about many topics and issues that are meaningful to me because of the neighborhood I come from and the different communities I'm now a part of. I've learned a lot about social determinants of health. This knowledge gave me the answers to so many questions I had growing up in Brownsville and Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York. Now I'm ready to hit the ground running, to be of service again to the places that are dear to my heart. At this juncture my goals include becoming a full-spectrum doula and a lactation counselor to directly support women who believe these services aren't for them due to lack of

understanding and affordability. This insight come from my focused studies throughout my program which has highlighted the realities, causes and possible solutions for the maternal mortality rate crisis in New York City. long term goals include opening a holistic women's health center and historically marginalized communities throughout New York City, and opening an Early Childhood Education Center to address the gaps in children from under-served neighborhoods. Being unprepared when starting elementary school. Each of these initiatives directly address a public health need and promotes the overall betterment of health for those communities. In closing, my time at Hunter has been wholesome and a supreme delight. Thank you for this opportunity.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And thank you all for serving and for your family. I know your daughter must be very proud. I want to make sure there's no one else testifying right now before I make the mistake again. Okay, we're good. So, I-- my first question-- what's that? The definition of veterans, yes, how does CUNY-- thanks for reminding.

2 How does CUNY in your application process for
3 prospective students defining veteran?

4 RICARDO GARCIA: Hello?

5 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Hi.

6 RICARDO GARCIA: Okay, great. So, I'm
7 going to clarify on the definition of veteran as far
8 as CUNY's concerned. Any person that has served even
9 just one day CUNY identifies them as a veteran. So
10 if you served one day in uniform, they will consider
11 that service, and recognize you as a service member.

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: That's great. You
13 know, one of the-- on the second part, does a
14 prospective applicant know that? Yes?

15 RICARDO GARCIA: So, I keep turning the
16 mic off. So, Agatha would just--

17 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Hi, I think you're
18 going to need to be--

19 AGATHA FUNES: Hi, my name is Agatha
20 Funes. I'm an Army veteran, and on the CUNY
21 application when student veterans are applying for
22 CUNY, it does state on the top of the application
23 that CUNY considers a veteran at CUNY or intending to
24 apply at CUNY: "If you are currently serving or have
25 served in the US Army, Army, Navy, Airforce, Marines,

2 Coast Guard, National Guard, Reservist for at least
3 one day." It's on the application.

4 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay, that looked
5 a little different than what I-- I'm going to get
6 some emails, because I started an application process
7 for undergraduate. That looks a little different
8 than what's on the website. I would just add that. I
9 don't know if the top of the application [inaudible]
10 paper application. So, I would just recommend just
11 reviewing the website. But the second reason I'm
12 asking is because in 2021, about the end of 21 I
13 think, New York City redefined and made very explicit
14 the definition of the term veteran. I worked with
15 Commissioner Hendon on this. It's actually my bill,
16 so I'm laughing to myself. So the term veteran is--
17 can we do something about the feedback, by the way?
18 Is that possible? It's not-- the laptop? Alright,
19 we'll deal with it. It's fine. Oh, they fixed it.
20 Whatever it is they fixed it. So we redefined the
21 term veteran to explicitly include anyone who has
22 served a day at all, and to explicitly state
23 regardless of discharge status, because one of the--
24 and I think one of the important things is explicitly
25 stating it, because as I understand there's a problem

2 with veterans sometimes self-identifying, and part of
3 that might be that 15 percent of veterans who were
4 discharged other than honorable. And my other
5 question is that it includes in New York City--
6 veteran also means a person who serves or has served
7 in the United States Stated Public Health Service or
8 as a commissioned member of the National Oceanic and
9 Atmospheric Administration. Is that aligned with
10 your definition of veteran?

11 UNIDENTIFIED: [off mic]

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay. Is that a
13 conversation that's been-- I mean, it sounds a bit,
14 too, you have frequent meetings, DVS and CUNY. Is
15 that a topic of conversation that has come up?

16 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: Not in my time
17 [sic]. I'm certain that Commissioner Hendon will be
18 sure to have that conversation with me following.

19 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Right, because as
20 we talk about student veterans self-identifying and
21 being sure that they are entitled-- that they know
22 themselves they are entitled to the services that are
23 provided in the first place. I think it's important
24 to make explicit whether or not people applying can
25 self-identified that without any question. So walk

me through it a little bit. Someone checks the box. So let's say all those other issues-- they identify as a veteran or an active service member, whatever it is on the website. They check the box. They do the drop-down menu. They say they're a veteran. What happens next from CUNY's side?

AGATHA FUNES: Then it prompt--

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing]
Microphone, yes, please.

AGATHA FUNES: Then it prompts you to request if you want to do a veteran's waiver, right? And then it would take you to the next prompt that you will be then [inaudible]

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So, once you're admitted to CUNY, right? A veteran applies, they-- the waiver, which is again for anyone who has ever served regardless of discharge status and regardless of how long they served. They get the fee waiver, and they're on campus. What happens next from CUNY's perspective?

RICARDO GARCIA: So, I can speak to the on-campus level. So, once the student is-- goes through the admissions process and the admission teams recognize that this is a veteran, then the

2 admissions team does the-- they expedite the
3 application as the CUNY promise to give them
4 expedited admission and what they do from there is
5 they go through the individual's application to make
6 sure that it's complete, and if there's anything
7 missing, they'll get in contact with us, the Veterans
8 Office, inform us, "Hey this individual applied,
9 please have them reach out. We are need of specific
10 documents." And from my campus, you know, we reach
11 out to the veteran and touch base with the veteran
12 and walk them down to the CUNY campus and also just
13 kind of go through what is needed to complete the
14 application process.

15 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Alright, so now
16 we've gone through the application, alright? Student
17 vet--

18 RICARDO GARCIA: [interposing] That's for
19 Hostos.

20 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: For Hostos. So,
21 I'll get to that-- I'm going to get to that question.
22 But let's say-- is there more?

23 RICARDO GARCIA: No, there will be once
24 they're admitted. But we're not there yet.

2 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [inaudible] are
3 you passing notes in class, is that what you're
4 doing?

5 RICARDO GARCIA: Exactly.

6 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Well, so that's my
7 question. You help them through the application
8 process, and then they're admitted, and then they
9 arrive on campus. They're admitted. They're a
10 student. They're matriculated, everything. What
11 happens? What support then comes after that?

12 RICARDO GARCIA: So, once the student is
13 admitted, I'll receive an excel spreadsheet from
14 Admissions annotating these are veteran students that
15 have applied, and then what I'll do is I'll reach out
16 to the veteran population that was provided to me by
17 the Admissions Office, and I will get in contact with
18 them and have them come into the office, because then
19 there's a series of documents that we need to
20 collect, for example, DD214, their certificate of
21 eligibility which denotes their education benefits.
22 Then from there we go over, you know, the service
23 members, if they're service-connected and they have a
24 disability rate [sic] to the Veterans Administration.
25 We do the referrals to, you know, the proper offices,

2 for example, ARC for disability services and support,
3 and we sit down with the student, look at eh major
4 that they're looking at, and-- it's a pretty robust
5 and intense process, but there's a lot of, you know,
6 just administrative work that's being done at the
7 campus level on our end to make sure that the
8 students assimilate beautifully into academia. It
9 can be rough sometimes.

10 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I like your
11 qualifier, at my campus. That's your qualifier.

12 RICARDO GARCIA: Exactly.

13 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: But let's-- I do
14 want to zoom out for a second, because is that a
15 standard practice throughout all CUNY campuses that
16 students are guided through the admission process,
17 and then they get to campus and have outreach from a
18 veterans coordinator on campus.

19 AGATHA FUNES: Yes, it is. We have
20 veteran-centered directors that also when they're
21 receiving the information that a student has
22 identified as a veteran or dependent or spouse, then
23 the veteran center director conducts a veteran
24 orientation to inform them of the benefits available
25 and also the campus departments like for Chapter 31

2 students which is a bulk [sic] rehab employment for
3 disabilities, and the accessible services that are
4 available for them on campus.

5 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So, CUNY pol-- so
6 this is a well-structured position that CUNY central
7 has made clear guidelines of your job is to help
8 veteran students through the admissions process, and
9 then once they get to campus, proactively reach out
10 to them to make sure that they-- to continue their
11 support.

12 AGATHA FUNES: Correct.

13 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And what do you do
14 at the campuses that don't have that veteran's
15 coordinator? What do they do, rather? I think it's
16 La Guardia and Baruch.

17 RICARDO GARCIA: So, this is why it's
18 integral to have one in every single campus because
19 what happens is as a veteran that went through that,
20 you know, I was fortunate to find other veterans that
21 were able to guide me and help me. So, what they'll
22 do is once a veteran comes into, you know, to a
23 campus setting, they'll look for a community
24 immediately. And this isn't just for veterans. This
25 is any population. So, once they see a community,

2 for example, a veterans club, then they're going to
3 go to that community and start asking for support and
4 guidance and help, but if there is a director, a
5 coordinator, an office that established within each
6 campus, that is the critical piece to helping these
7 student veterans assimilate back into academia, back
8 into civilian life, and it really removes a lot of
9 the hurdles that they're going to endure, because
10 it's a daunting process going through, you know,
11 registration, enrollment, applicant [sic] fine [sic],
12 getting your cla-- for someone who hasn't ever done
13 it, coming out of the military, it can be a little
14 intimidating. So that's why it's critical to have
15 one on every campus, and this is why we need your
16 help.

17 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And so what do
18 you-- what do they do? Meaning if you're a veteran
19 on one of those campuses that does not have a
20 Veterans Coordinator, is the sort of hope that
21 they'll find a student group that-- like, find that
22 community themselves?

23 RICARDO GARCIA: So, what most students
24 ending up doing is they'll either-- they'll look for
25 a veterans office or veterans representative or

they'll look to the central office, and they'll contact them and reach out to them, or they'll look for either a PROVE or a peer, a veteran peer intern. Mostly, you know, they'll look for some type of veteran office or veteran service to [inaudible].

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Does CUNY, or can CUNY, or have you considered doing it kind of flipped from the way you said? At these campuses, at Hostos, you have a person who's reaching out to them. At the campuses that don't have the veteran's coordinator, it sounds like you're expecting the student to reach out to administration to CUNY central. Does CUNY central fill gaps when there are, well, vacancies in these positions?

AGATHA FUNES: Currently, La Guardia has a veteran manager that serves as a counselor until there is a Veteran Director. Baruch right now does not have a veteran director. However, the mission of central is that we do engage the Baruch students and we work along accordance [sic] with PROVE also to engage, do the outreach. That's what central is there for where it's missing a veteran's director, central will contact the students.

LEORA SHUDOFISKY: Hi.

2 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Please state your
3 name.

4 LEORA SHUDOFISKY: Leora Shudofsky.

5 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

6 LEORA SHUDOFISKY: I'm a Director at
7 PROVE. One thing to point out is every campus,
8 whether they have a veteran's coordinator or not has
9 a certifying official. So there is a designated
10 person who deals with the GI Bill needs on campus,
11 and that's really important. So, Baruch, for
12 example, has a very longstanding certifying official
13 who will do the outreach because people need to see
14 him in order to get their veteran's benefits
15 straight, in order to get their registration
16 straight. So he is very well-positioned. So he
17 can't do outreach all throughout the year, but a
18 veteran comes into school, he is the person that is
19 designated while he works for, I believe, enrollment
20 management.

21 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. I'd
22 like to turn it over for a moment to Council Member
23 Barron who has a question.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you, Mr.
25 Chairman. I just wanted to say, I've been in the

2 Council for 12 years prior to this, and we've always
3 supported students, veteran students, and will
4 continue to do that, but you're not going to like
5 this. Honesty compels me to say that I'm very
6 concerned about the role of the American military in
7 the world and domestically, American military-- Haiti
8 was mentioned. They occupied Haiti, the Marines, and
9 supported the exploitation of Haiti, which most
10 people considered an imperialistic policy. American
11 military went into Vietnam. We mentioned Martin
12 Luther King. Martin Luther King spoke out against
13 the war in Vietnam. And when you look at the history
14 of the American military worldwide, even when Barack
15 Obama was president, the American military expanded
16 its military bases in Africa called an Afri-command
17 [sic] or Afri-com [sic], and instead of humanitarian
18 aid, they put military bases in about 50 countries in
19 Africa to exploit the economy and another kind of
20 cultural imperialism in Africa. I supported the
21 Black Vets for Social Justice under Joe Mashariki
22 [sp?], because these black veterans, we supported
23 them getting jobs and schooling, but they spoke out
24 against the military's role in the world, and they
25 spoke out against even the National Guard suppressing

movements in the United States. So these things have to be said. They're uncomfortable, but they have to be said. America propped up dictators, Duvalier in Haiti, Poppa Doc and Baby Doc, murderers. The military propped them up. Isn't that correct? The Shah of Iran, the reason why Iranians hate Americans is because when Mosaddegh in 1955 was duly elected their leader, American military pulled a coup d'etat and bought the butcherous [sic] Shah of Iran into Iran and murdered people that opposed him. Somoza in Nicaragua, a murdered, America supported him. In Haiti and Chile, you name it-- Pinochet, the general, a murdered. Chile elected Salvador Allende, a socialist president, and America supported a coup d'etat; took him out. So, you know, I'm sayin' that while we support the students, we got to tell the truth about the role of the American military and the world and stop doctoring it up, and go for the justification that they said they tryin' to stop communism from spreading. They trying to stop-- well, let me finish. Don't interrupt. I didn't interrupt you. Let me finish. If he wants you to respond, he'll let you respond, but don't interrupt because you don't like what you're hearing. But the

bottom line is that the American military had been imperialistic, has been capitalistically exploiting countries around the world supporting the murderous regimes. You're not going to like this. Even in the Middle East, America props up the state of Israel and their role in exploiting the Palestinian people, and they murder children and women and justify it as defending Israel. So, I know you don't like it, but there are different perspectives on things that as we are on the college campuses, we got to look at all perspectives. Everybody has one and that's my perspective. And while I will continue to support the City Council and what they do for students, we also got to say how about the recruit drives on the campuses? I concerned about recruitment on college campuses and even in high schools. They recruit our people into military and because our communities are suffering economically, sometimes the military is the only way out. Or they might consider the best way out. So they go into the military for economic opportunities, for education opportunities, but the fact of the matter is Malcolm X was against it. Martin Luther King was against it. Maya Angelou that you mentioned was against that kind of behavior, and

2 most of our leaders in civil rights to black power
3 was against the role that the American military had
4 played throughout the world to exploit economies on
5 behalf of brutal dictators. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: thank you, so
7 much, Council Member.

8 RICARDO GARCIA: If i--

9 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing]
10 Barron, I would just remind everyone here, every
11 Council Member is entitled to speak for their five
12 minutes, to ask questions. I would also remind
13 everyone here that this committee and the hearing is
14 about supporting our students veterans who regardless
15 however anyone feels about the American military,
16 served with honor, and deserve our deepest respect
17 and admiration and support, and that's what this
18 committee hearing, this joint committee hearing here
19 today is for. It's to support our student veterans
20 and to work together to find the gaps in CUNY and
21 DVS, bring to light the incredible work that you are
22 doing that our service member's former and current
23 do, and support them in the City any way we can. I
24 will also note that not only did I not like many of
25 the things you said, that were said, I also happen to

2 think many of them are factually incorrect. But
3 because--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: [interposing] I'm
5 not going to let you say that.

6 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: You can let me say
7 that, Council Member.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: They're not--
9 they're not, not factually incorrect--

10 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing] Thank
11 you, Council Member Barron so much.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: [interposing] You
13 don't agree with them. You don't agree with them--

14 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing] I
15 don't.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: but you can't say
17 they're not factually incorrect.

18 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I sure can.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: These things
20 happened.

21 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I sure can.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: These things
23 happened.

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I sure can,
25 Council Member Barron. Thank you so much for your

2 five minutes. I will continue with the questions
3 about our student veterans.

4 RICARDO GARCIA: Councilman, can I just
5 respectfully--

6 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing] About
7 student veterans, I'd like to keep it on topic,
8 please.

9 RICARDO GARCIA: Okay.

10 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And I understand
11 there are a lot of feelings about what was said.

12 RICARDO GARCIA: No, no, this-- I-- in no
13 way will this be disrespectful. There's a quote that
14 says, "Love the soldier, hate the politics." And a
15 lot of the things that Council Member discussed are
16 policy issues, not military issues. The soldier,
17 above all others-- the soldier, above all others,
18 prays for peace. For it is the soldier who must
19 suffer and bear the deepest wounds and the scars of
20 war. And that-- for the 25 years when I walked on
21 the grounds of the World Trade Center after the ruins
22 in uniform searching for survivors, I did that out of
23 love for my country and love for the City for New
24 York. When I went to Iraq, did I agree with it?
25 It's irrelevant. I did what my country asked me to

2 because of my love for the country. And while it's
3 not the greatest and while it is not perfect by any
4 means, it is definitely far better than some of the
5 countries where I've actually fought in and had to
6 serve.

7 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. I'm
8 going to turn-- I'm going to turn it over to Chair
9 Holden for his line of-- for some questions.

10 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: And so now back to
11 the veterans that we're here to serve and to honor.
12 I just want to get into and if I have-- Vice
13 Chancellor, I have just have some questions as to--
14 mentioned that Hostos-- you're at Hostos, and how-- I
15 just want to-- sorry, Ricardo, just a couple of
16 questions before I get to the Vice Chancellor. At
17 Hostos, is it you-- you're the Coordinator, the
18 Veterans Coordinator and the rest of the staff is
19 interns?

20 RICARDO GARCIA: So, no, we have a
21 Veterans Director who-- our office actually falls
22 under ARC, which is the Accessibility Resource Center
23 which is a disability office, and he's our director.
24 We have two school certifying officials of which I am
25 one, and then we have Peer Veterans Internship Peer

Mentor-- I'm trying to remember the acronym, but the VIP, in which you guys funded. Thank you so much for that because that was instrumental in the support of our office and many of the other offices within the CUNY campuses.

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So you have a very active office.

RICARDO GARCIA: Very.

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Do you have more veterans than the other campuses?

RICARDO GARCIA: No, I actually have the smallest portion of veterans believe it or not.

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay. But you have-- but you have an extensive office at least-- I mean, compared to-- Baruch has no office and La Guardia has no office. They do? What's the second campus that-- I can't-- you got to put the mic on.

: [off mic]

RICARDO GARCIA: The Vice Chancellor said La Guardia--

VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: So, it was--

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] They have it.

2 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: They have a
3 person that is serving as a manager part-time. So
4 the configuration is different on every campus, and
5 they don't have an-- they don't have the structure
6 that the other campuses have, but they do have a
7 person [sic].

8 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Why is that?

9 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: Some of it has
10 to do with transitions associated with time and
11 people leaving, and you know, not being-- those
12 positions not being refilled, because if I'm not
13 mistaken, La Guardia did have an office. Yeah.
14 Yeah, so it's a matter of turnover and decisions
15 being made about what can then happen going forward.

16 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, because I have
17 a friend who attended La Guardia. He's a fire
18 fighter, but he served in the military, and they
19 actually recruited him because they had an office
20 then. That's why I was quite surprised. And he
21 tells me that that program helped him so much in not
22 only raising his income and getting better, you know,
23 better position and education, but he had no
24 intentions of going to school, but he-- because he
25 got recruited. So it's so important to have the

office, but when I, you know, taught in CUNY the biggest complaint I got, and I did hear Shakima Wiley mention this and I think Mervin's-- I'd like to ask him a question in a few minutes. But many of the veterans couldn't get the courses that they were trying to get. Many of them were working during the day and were attending at night to, you know, obviously get a better job and they had families. So they had a lot more-- just like Shakima was saying. She had a family. It was very, very difficult and her advisor, at least-- there was no veteran's coordinator or advisor available on weekends when she was attending or at night, and that was a major complaint I got. So I had to be the veteran's advisor even though I wasn't a veteran. I had to try to fight for my students in getting the course substitutions because their courses weren't available in their major so I had to figure it out. We had a lot of veterans because of the hours of our coordinator or veterans office on campus that they couldn't access, which was I thought ridiculous. I said, why don't we do a straddle [sic] program like afternoon and evenings, you know, so they could reach everyone rather than 9:00 to 5:00, whatever. And I

don't know the hours on campus, but I did get-- that was the number one complaint, and it's-- it almost is-- it's self-defeating because many of them-- and here's what I would tell them. They wanted life experience credit, too. They wanted-- many were trained in the armed services. They took many of the programs that we could have given them credit for in the college, but if you went to a committee and just, you know, made a-- let's say, an application to get these courses transferred or get college credit or to get life experience, most of the time they were turned down. And I said, fight for that. Fight-- question that. Don't just take no for an answer, and many times it worked. If I-- but I had to step in as an advisor, you know, curriculum advisor to get them their credits. And it saved them sometimes, you know, six months to a year of-- in classes and in expense. So Vice Chancellor, let me just ask you on the way we're structured with getting their financial aid and so forth, getting their courses paid for, did they still have where they had to do it in a certain amount of time or take a minimum amount of credits when they were attending?

2 RICARDO GARCIA: I, as a school
3 certifying official, oh [inaudible]

4 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: I'm sorry,
5 repeat the question, please.

6 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, many of the
7 students have-- they had these kind of restrictions
8 on, you know, taking a certain amount of courses.
9 Let's say they had to. If they couldn't get them--
10 let's say the course wasn't offered, and I had to try
11 to do a course substitution, they still couldn't get
12 the number of credits to fulfil requirements or they
13 had to also finish their college education in a
14 certain time limit. I know that PROVE kind of, you
15 know, fixes that a little bit, right? But I don't
16 know if you have to enroll in that.

17 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: [inaudible]

18 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright, it's
19 musical chairs. We should get a-- sorry.

20 DIRECTOR SHUDOFSKY: Sorry, just to
21 clarify, in terms of adding any kind of time in
22 school does not help with that. I want to just be
23 very clear. But I think Jessica could answer the
24 question about the time limit and the credit, full-
25 time credit.

2 AGATHA FUNES: Okay, so as a School
3 Certifying Official, there is a time limit you--
4 depending on the VA educational program that you're
5 taking, specifically with the GI Bill, and it also
6 has to do with the student wanting to receive the
7 BAH. So a full-time student will require it, like
8 they would want to receive that full-time BAH. For
9 VOC Rehab, the counselor does require them to meet
10 their degree plan in a certain timeframe. So, within
11 CUNY, if a student is not able to have-- like, a
12 course is not available, the academic advisors, the
13 school certifying official along with the veteran
14 director will help the student find another course
15 that will go a part of their degree program. So,
16 it's not that a student is like, oh well, I have two
17 years. In their mindset, two years to complete this
18 plan, and I'm not able to get my courses. CUNY does
19 work with the students so they can find a way to
20 graduate on a timely basis. The overall objective is
21 if the student wants to finish their degree within
22 two years, less than that, or if they want to then
23 transition over to a four-year college. So, each
24 department does service the student so they can meet
25 their degree.

2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: But what are the--
3 so it's the GI Bill that's restricting that.

4 DIRECTOR SHUDOFSKY: Yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: What is the time
6 limit for most-- like, let's say for a bachelor's
7 degree.

8 RICARDO GARCIA: So you--

9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] Is it
10 five years? Is it six?

11 RICARDO GARCIA: You have 36 months on
12 the maximum under the certificate of eligibility
13 that's provided. And it varies, too-- time in the
14 service, active time in service, the benefit that
15 you're utilizing. For the most part I've seen at the
16 top end of 36 months, which equates to about roughly--
17 - if you're looking at four months per semester, four
18 and a half months, that's four, eight, eight, 16, 16,
19 32-- so it's about four years, a little just over.

20 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, if they're going
21 part time?

22 RICARDO GARCIA: If you're going part-
23 time, then it will--

24 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] Which I
25 think most--

2 RICARDO GARCIA: [interposing] take a
3 little bit--

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: of them are, right?
5 Most--

6 RICARDO GARCIA: [interposing] No, no, we
7 have--

8 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] That's
9 what it was when I was--

10 RICARDO GARCIA: [interposing] Yeah, so
11 it varies also on the student. Again, some of the
12 veterans depending on their familial obligations,
13 their employment, they're studying at night, so it
14 really depends on each individual students. Some
15 students have the luxury of going full-time to
16 school. Other-- some veterans do. Some other
17 veterans do not. They're gainfully employed and have
18 families to support. So, it varies.

19 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I just want to
20 know how-- what percentage part-time and full-time of
21 the veteran students? Do you have that data?

22 RICARDO GARCIA: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: How many part-time
24 students, how many full-time students? Can you make
25 sure the mic's on.

2 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: we could get--
3 so it's supposed to be red when it's on? Okay.

4 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: It should be
5 green, right?

6 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: that's what I
7 would think. But nevertheless. We will get back to
8 you with that specific. I also wanted to address
9 something that you said, Chairperson Holden, because
10 you were talking about when services are not
11 available. That's a part of why we now have a peer
12 mentor program, because students are available to
13 students outside of the regular times an office might
14 be open. So the peer mentor program that's being run
15 through the CUNY Office of Veterans Affairs is
16 critical for that, because it puts them in
17 relationship with someone who has access to
18 information that is important for their engagement.
19 The other thing I wanted to make sure I addressed is
20 the credit for prior learning. That was difficult
21 when you were there and that you had to facilitate
22 and try to help people understand, no, this does
23 matter. What it is they did as a supply chain
24 manager for the service impacts the program that they
25 might be studying in, and so there should be some

credit for that prior learning that happened in that context. So we are now looking forward to formalizing that with our Credit for Heroes effort, using our credit for prior learning process to focus in on what's happening in the military and to apply it as students come in, because it does matter that they get these additional credits to shorten the time. So all of these things are linked in terms of what then happens for a veteran as they come to fulfil that time.

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, is there an articulation agreement with the armed forces in any field? Let's say computer programming--

VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: [interposing]
You see me looking at the experts, right? Not to my knowledge, and we will check and see if there is anything that--

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] Because I think we could estab-- if one doesn't exist, I'd love to propose that, where we could-- we can get the armed services-- I mean, I can't see-- one student came to me. They were doing web design, and that's what this person was doing as communications in the-- I believe it was the Army, and he knew web design. I

1 taught graphic design communications. So, web
2 designers would come to us as veterans and they'd
3 say, "I have to take, you know, this basic class or
4 these two classes?" And I said, no, you shouldn't,
5 but it was a fight. But I had-- somebody had to
6 recognize that. I found many students just attending
7 the class were veterans or had computer programming
8 or some other, you know, armed services-related
9 experience. Some had extensive experience, which
10 that's why we need kind of like somebody to evaluate.
11 Whether it's CUNY central to say, you know, you
12 learned this, and they show you their resume and it's
13 a very impressive resume, but that's where we could
14 really help our veterans.

16 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: And that's the
17 process that Credit for Heroes will offer us, that
18 equivalency and that review of the experiences and so
19 forth to identify credit. The other place that I
20 think it becomes important, the other initiative that
21 I think becomes important is the expansion of our
22 online programs, our courses and programs--

23 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] That's
24 good. That's great, yeah.

2 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: to make certain
3 that even while you're serving, you can still
4 complete credits toward your degree.

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Right.

6 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: And then have
7 that when you get back and, again, shorten the time.

8 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: I think Mervin's had
9 a-- I'd hate to have you get up again, but-- it's
10 like-- we should get more mics over there.

11 MERVINS VINCENT: Yes, to answer your
12 question, like when someone join the military, we
13 receive a lot of training and one thing we do have in
14 the military is something that's called a Joint
15 Service Transcript, also known as the Smart
16 Transcript, where all the training that you received,
17 all the schools that you went to while you were
18 serving, you get college credit for the schools.

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Is that only at
20 Brooklyn College you're doing? No?

21 MERVINS VINCENT: Negative. Yeah, it
22 covers CUNY.

23 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: so it covers CUNY.

24 MERVINS VINCENT: Yes. And also, all
25 universities throughout the country as well. For

2 example, I was a recruiter for three years. When I
3 get my Joint Service Transcript I was able to skip
4 marketing class at Brooklyn College.

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So you didn't have
6 to fight for it.

7 MERVINS VINCENT: I received credit for
8 it.

9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: You got it accepted
10 through the Veterans Office.

11 MERVINS VINCENT: Yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: You got the credit
13 accepted from-- so do you have an idea of how many
14 credits they accepted in your-- I guess, your
15 bachelor's degree, or?

16 MERVINS VINCENT: With my school
17 certifying official, I was able to get 18 college
18 credits.

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Eighteen?

20 MERVINS VINCENT: Yes.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: That's-- see that's--
22 - that's great.

23 MERVINS VINCENT: That's over a semester
24 of college.

2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, and I don't
3 know if that's-- you know, again, if that's really
4 the norm, though. And that's what I-- at least when
5 I was in-- I'd left CUNY in 2017.

6 MERVINS VINCENT: The problem is a lot of
7 student veterans do not know of the Joint Service
8 Transcript.

9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: That's it. That's
10 the problem.

11 MERVINS VINCENT: So that's what we do at
12 our offices. We make sure we let them know about it,
13 how to log into the website and pull the transcript
14 so they can apply it towards their degree.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: But course-- just
16 one other question, because it-- by the way, thank
17 you. I mean, you're really a hero serving 10 years
18 you said?

19 MERVINS VINCENT: Yes, sir.

20 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: In the Marine Corps,
21 right?

22 MERVINS VINCENT: Yes, sir.

23 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Ten years and then
24 you actually help reopen the Veterans Club, which is
25 another really great accomplishment. I hope you'll

2 have a lot more. And this-- you're still at Brooklyn
3 College?

4 MERVINS VINCENT: Yes, sir. I am
5 currently a junior at Brooklyn College.

6 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay. I love when
7 he says yes, sir. It just feels-- but so how could
8 we-- like, what are some of the like-- because I did
9 hear you were praising on it. What are some of the
10 problems other than the course substitutions that you
11 thought maybe you could have, you know, helped many
12 more veterans? But what are some of the pitfalls you
13 have in maneuvering through your academic career?

14 MERVINS VINCENT: one of the major
15 pitfalls was due to the fact everything was remote. I
16 didn't know too much and I was not in touch with
17 other veterans on campus. When I first-- I just
18 applied to go to school, and the only veteran I had
19 contact with was the school certifying official over
20 at Queensborough Community College, and through her,
21 I was able to know a lot more, like how I could apply
22 my military benefits as well as the Smart Transcript
23 towards my education, and one of the biggest pitfalls
24 is that a lot of veterans are attending school and
25 they do not know some of the benefit they have

1 available to them, and they're not taking full
2 advantage of it. And I ran into one of my fellow
3 recruiters on campus and I was talking to him, and it
4 old him like, "Oh, yeah, I didn't have to take this
5 class because I was able to use my Smart Transcript
6 to skip the class." And he was telling me, "Wow, I'm
7 actually in this class right now." It seems like
8 it's-- I'm repeating [sic]

10 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] And
11 that's frustrating that you're taking a course that
12 they didn't really-- and they're, you know, may times
13 they're using it-- and by the way, the 36-month
14 issue, that means you'd have to tell your veteran
15 students front load your courses, which is I think a
16 flaw in the GI Bill if they're doing that. Because
17 we should try to change that where-- I mean, why
18 wouldn't you bend over backwards for our veterans,
19 especially someone like you ten years in the Marine
20 Corps, and then you got to really front-load your
21 credits. Even though it may not fit if you're
22 working or if you're, you know, you had a family.
23 That would be an extra burden. And that's what I
24 always noticed, that we didn't really help our
25 veterans enough. We went about 50 percent of the

way. So I think we need to re-evaluate the courses, the course substitutions that we could work on, because that was a major, major battle, course substitutions. I mean, I would lose battling, and I was on the curriculum committee of the department. So I said I'm giving this person the credit for this class. "Well, we disagree, Professor Holden," they said. We don't think-- because, you know, they only worked two years and I'd hope not [sic]. Field experience versus, you know, sitting in the classroom, there's no comparison. And that's the battle we constantly have. I see you shaking your head with that.

RICARDO GARCIA: Yeah, I couldn't agree-- yeah, I couldn't agree with you more. To your point, Chair, some of the problems with the credit for prior learning is the Joint Services Transcript, depending on your military operational skill, which is the job that we get in the military, you know, for the rest of the Council Members, it gives you a list of credits that are evaluated by the American Council on Education, and then therefore it's transferred into an official transcript which is then given to the college. So, what happens is some of the students

will come in and they'll want to go into a nursing major, but in the military they were an engineer. Some of them will not allow them to [inaudible], you know transfer over. Now, if they stay within the same field, then a good bulk of the credits should be transferable, and that's where, you know, the process has to be streamlined. Just evaluating what is the student's degree plan. What was the student's military occupational skill? Can they relate and fill in for specific courses. Lehman does a fantastic job with credit for prior learning, Lehman College. They're very well known for that, and they have done a fantastic job with that, and it's a model to be emulated. Our campus does a good job of evaluating and every veteran that comes in. One of the things that we worked with them admissions now, thanks to admissions, we ask them for their joint services transcript when we evaluate their credits. Now, in one of the issues also, because we're a two-year college, some of the credits will fall into an elective. So it'll eat up all of their electives, and then what ends up happening is when they're at the end of the academic time at the two-year level, they'll have maybe one to two courses left to take up

2 and then it will-- you know, they'll-- they won't
3 have any flexibility because all their electives will
4 be absorbed.

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Just one other
6 question and then I'll turn it back to my co-chair.
7 CUNY BA, do you use that? Do they still have CUNY
8 BA?

9 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: CUNY BA?

10 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: CUNY BA?

11 RICARDO GARCIA: Sorry, that's
12 [inaudible] we're not familiar.

13 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: CUNY B-- because I
14 think was around still in 2020, because-- CUNY BA was
15 a bachelor's degree that you could put together your
16 own. So that means somebody comes from the military
17 can say, "I want to do a CUNY BA," which is a-- you
18 guys still get a 100 and let's say 20-- you know, 20
19 credits, but you could put together your own, you
20 know, program based on your experience in let's say
21 the Marines, based on your experience in life, based
22 on your work experience. You get some college
23 credit. But the CUNY BA I thought was a good option
24 where somebody had dual-- like, dual experience in
25 different areas, whether it's health and computers,

2 and they wanted to combine and inform their own
3 bachelor's degree. I thought that was a tremendous
4 tool for veterans at that time. The fact that-- does
5 it still exist?

6 AGATHA FUNES: Yes, yes--

7 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] It
8 still exists, okay.

9 AGATHA FUNES: Yes, it does.

10 RICARDO GARCIA: It still exists, yes.

11 AGATHA FUNES: I did that for Queens
12 College Sociology.

13 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, we-- as
14 faculty members, we had to volunteer to mentor, and
15 you wouldn't get extra pay. You wouldn't get extra
16 time. You just have to, you know, volunteer, and I
17 always volunteered because I thought it was a great
18 program for students that-- especially younger
19 students who didn't know what they wanted to do.
20 Instead of, you know, going through two and three--
21 they find out in their third and fourth year that
22 they're in the wrong program, and we have a problem.
23 So, then I could say, then you're going to go to CUNY
24 BA.

2 AGATHA FUNES: So, credit for prior
3 learnings works-- they're affiliated. And I just
4 wanted to clarify. Sorry. So I just wanted to
5 clarify, the central office for the Veterans Affairs
6 works with the American Council of Education within
7 the CUNY Department of Credit for Prior Learning that
8 we're trying to do the initiative for Credit for
9 Heroes to inform students regarding the Joint Service
10 Transcript. So everything is coming into fruition,
11 but we need your help.

12 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: I'll help. Sign me
13 up. Well, thank you so much. Back to my Co-chair.

14 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So, I just-- I
15 have-- it's for Mervin so I don't want to-- You're
16 the rock star today, man. I just want to clarify
17 something. You know, so based on the testimony
18 before, it sounds like CUNY helps veterans with the
19 application process. There's someone on campus who
20 then proactively reaches out to the veterans, right?
21 That's still true? And as part of that, do they go
22 over the Joint Service Transcript?

23 AGATHA FUNES: Yes.

24 MERVINS VINCENT: Yes. Over at Brooklyn
25 College, when we have new veterans on campus we make

2 sure that we go over the Joint Service Transcript
3 with them, and also every time they are recertifying
4 for the new semester, we'll be sure to go over with
5 them once more, and we also show them the website how
6 they can go and put a JST trans-- Joint Service
7 Transcript so they can apply it towards there, too.

8 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I was a little
9 confused just-- well, from the story you said,
10 because it sounded like you ran into someone on
11 campus who's like, "Oh, I'm already enrolled in this
12 class. I didn't know I didn't have to be enrolled in
13 it." I guess my question is, if all of the steps are
14 happening where they get that outreach, where the
15 veteran student gets that outreach and they go over--
16 and it's through admissions, through scheduling their
17 courses, why does it exist that a student would be
18 enrolled in a class they didn't need to be enrolled
19 in, if it's-- if they didn't need to enroll in it?

20 RICARDO GARCIA: So, what happens, and I
21 can speak to this because it still happens on--
22 sometimes students don't self-identify, and for a
23 variety of different reasons.

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Right.
25

2 RICARDO GARCIA: And they're unfamiliar
 3 with the capabilities as Marvin [sic] has stated or
 4 the services that are provided to them. And in
 5 addition that, sometimes they're unaware that the
 6 Joint Services Transcript will fill that void,
 7 because they are either undeclared or they don't go
 8 to the veterans office to seek the support. And
 9 despite the campuses reaching out and some of the
 10 veterans offices reaching out, some students are just
 11 too busy or, you know, too focused on their day-to-
 12 day and their particular classes they don't really
 13 kind of look at anything at the larger picture of
 14 what is available to them. And we do an extensive
 15 job of promoting this information and trying to get
 16 the veterans to utilize all these benefits, but there
 17 are some that slip through the crack unfortunately.

18 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I want to ask to
 19 more questions, two more things, and then turn it
 20 back to Chair Holden. As part of your process a
 21 veteran student admitted helps with, you know, the
 22 beginning part, is there consistent-- from the
 23 Veterans Office, not from like the peer mentor- the
 24 Peer program, but through the Veterans Office, is
 25 there consistent or recurring outreach to the veteran

2 student throughout their time at CUNY whether it's
3 once every semester or does it kind of just-- like an
4 orientation type thing? Here it is at the beginning.
5 You're good.

6 RICARDO GARCIA: So, I'm going to speak
7 at the campus level and then I'll turn it over to my
8 colleagues to speak at the university-wide level.

9 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

10 RICARDO GARCIA: So, at the campus level,
11 we have veteran orientation at the beginning of every
12 semester to introduce the veteran population to the
13 services, and I am fortunate to have many of our
14 directors participate. They're very actively
15 involved and they really want to engage the
16 population. So, we get financial aid, Ver-sars
17 [sic], advisory units. Everybody comes in and
18 introduces their office and it's kind of like a show
19 and tell. This is who we are. This is what we're
20 doing for you. Then throughout the semester, we
21 engage the students through a variety of different
22 programs that we provide. In addition to the
23 programming, for example, like we have a financial
24 literacy program that's coming soon. We do the
25 Memorial Day programs, Veterans Day, whatever it is

for that time of year. And we reach out to the students at minimum three times per semester just to do a welfare check. Hey, can you come in to the office. We just need to evaluate your academics, see how you're doing, and you know, just kind of see where you're at, and if there's any discrepancies that are identified and we try to mitigate them or address them. And what I mean discrepancy we mean any barriers, financial hardships, personal, health, academic and we kind of do it all on assessment. We try to do it at the campus-level, at my campus particularly. We meet with the students at least three times per semester, a minimum. I have students come every day and I love it. It's great. I just wish I could attend to them all. There's not enough hours in the day.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And is that-- is that process-- so it's sound-- it sounds like you have a process at least three times a semester, every veteran student on your list. Is that a CUNY central mandate or suggestion that the Veterans Office will reach out to every veteran x number of times during a semester for as long as they are a student enrolled in CUNY?

2 AGATHA FUNES: So, CUNY central Office of
3 Veterans Affairs' vision is to hire work studies
4 which Mervin Vincent also works [inaudible] from up
5 here, and we--

6 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing] Says
7 everything.

8 AGATHA FUNES: We train our work studies
9 to do the outreach through the social media, through
10 events, through phone calls, through emails, because
11 we believe that one-on-one student outreach is more
12 effective. So, in central office there's continuous
13 training on a weekly basis. We give them a list of
14 campuses to reach out to. We also work with the
15 Veterans Center directors, informing them we will be
16 reaching out to your student if they need any, you
17 know, resources, internal resources for CUNY for
18 mental health, physical fitness, nutrition, and
19 outside organizations. So, on our Wellness
20 Wednesdays that occurs every Wednesday, once a week,
21 we send out flyers, social media information that we
22 have outside organizations coming [inaudible]. We're
23 partnering with many organizations to provide these
24 services. So there's continuing ongoing outreach.
25 That is the vision of central office.

2 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. And
3 others, what--

4 DIRECTOR SHUDOFISKY: sorry, I'll be very
5 quick.

6 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: No, it's--

7 DIRECTOR SHUDOFISKY: for the campuses
8 that have PROVE interns which there are eight CUNY
9 campuses at the moment, they have consistent
10 outreach. That's part of the mandate of the social
11 work interns, and they reach out on a weekly basis
12 and entire-- the entire list. They also help put
13 together events on campus, and we aim for at least 50
14 percent engagement. And the campuses vary in term of
15 size. So we're very-- actually very proud to say
16 that we are 52.4 percent engagement for the fall
17 semester which is, I think, extraordinary, because
18 we're talking about a lot of veterans. And we're at
19 eight campuses, not at all of the CUNY campuses.

20 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. Before
21 I turn it back to Chair Holden, I just-- I ask this I
22 think at every CUNY hearing, and I was reminded
23 because Ricardo said the word promoting. So, I do a
24 lot on my browser. I obviously do a lot of searching
25 for veterans' issues. It's my form of chairmanship,

obviously for this hearing, a lot of education issues, college issues, that's my current hearing. I don't get any advertisement. I just searched, "I am a veteran in New York City applying for college," and CUNY was not advertised at all, and it also wasn't even one of the first-- one of the first hits. And so-- and again, with CUNY, this is like a CUNY central thing, I think. It's-- I ask, you know, about every initiative we talk about every hearing. Is there any sort of budget for advertising, for promoting the work that you do to engage more students, more veteran students, more veteran students with disabilities? Because as what I've said, the work you're doing is extensive. We obviously want to make it better, but we-- it does nothing if no one is engaged in these programs.

RICARDO GARCIA: So, to answer the question, there's-- the amount of money that you guys provide, we are deeply grateful, but there are still gaps that need to be filled. And there really is-- I can't even think of a number to put on it, because it just-- whatever you're thinking times it times two.

2 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Well, I'm thinking
3 you spend zero dollars. So zero times to two would
4 still be zero. That's--

5 [laughter]

6 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I took some math
7 classes at CUNY, so that's why I did that math real
8 well. But seriously, like, you know, I know we have
9 the initiatives, and I think they're great, the
10 council initiatives, but you get varying sources of
11 money, and to some degree CUNY central has a role in
12 deciding where those dollars go. And is there any
13 decision at all that some of those dollars go to any
14 sort of, you know, campaign, public campaign to bring
15 in and attract more students?

16 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: So, additional
17 resources have been allocated for the CUNY Reconnect
18 effort and to make certain that there is publicity
19 and marketing, and so yes, that's on the trains, and
20 it's general, I realize that. If you see any of
21 that, you know that it's inviting and making the
22 overture for people to come, but it is not specific
23 in the way that you were asking, and we need to go
24 back and talk about it. I think we need to really
25 promote the idea that there are particular

2 populations of students who need certain overtures to
3 know that we are open and available, accessible,
4 affordable, and attainable in those contexts, and
5 those are the things that we have to do. So, I think
6 you've seeded a few things, and I expect my partner
7 in commitment to be in touch with me. I don't even
8 want to look over there right now, because he's making
9 notes. He's scaring me.

10 [laughter]

11 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: But
12 nevertheless, I know that, you know, that I'm going
13 to hear something about articulation agreements and
14 making sure that we make that clear about the
15 service-- the Joint Service transcript. I know that
16 I'm going to hear more about how we promote what it
17 is that happens for veterans should they choose to
18 come to CUNY, and together, I believe that we can
19 make that happen, that we can do it in a way that
20 puts the information in the hands of those who need
21 it earliest, and the earliest point possible.

22 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And before they
23 choose where to go.

24 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: Exactly.

25 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: That's the other--

2 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: [interposing]
3 Exactly.

4 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: You know, we've
5 had-- this has been brought up on our hearings here
6 today, veterans, workforce development, disabilities
7 of course, online learning. So this is a recurring
8 theme. So I'm sure next year I'll be saying the same
9 thing.

10 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: I'm going to
11 hope not, because I hope by then we'll do the show
12 you.

13 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah. I'm going
14 turn it back to Chair Holden.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Before I-- Council
16 Member Paladino has some comments, but before I turn
17 to her-- and we've been joined by Council Member
18 Brewer. Some ideas on getting the word out, and I've
19 always-- and I've said this in another hearing, and--
20 we had a couple of billboards that were in my
21 district that were peeling for months, and I brought
22 it to the attention of the sign company. I said, you
23 know, you got this- these two billboards on Myrtle
24 Avenue, and I said it look horrendous and it's
25 peeling and it's littering our streets below on a

train truss, two side by side. You know that they put up, recruitment posters. They're still up years later. And I said, well, you know, in hearing that we're not getting the word out, you're not doing much advertising, but we're trying. I think we have an opportunity, and I think we could get the students at New York City College of Technology where I taught who are graphic designers to design something, and I could, and I think Council remembers, all our Council Members could look at billboards in their district that are, you know, not used, graffiti'd or anything else that-- and get free advertising for our CUNY veterans or at least to recruit veterans. With-- because if it's designed, if it's, you know, camera-ready, we can get those up immediately, and they put them up right away. Like I said, this is like two years ago and its still up. So, yeah, we're recruiting for our armed services, but how about helping and recruiting education for our veterans. So, I'll-- if you-- I'll work with the campus if you want and reach out to them, and they'll give it as a, you know, a senior project let's say. Students are about to leave and design, you know, some advertising for, you know, recruiting CUNY veterans to CUNY, or

2 recruiting veterans to CUNY. I want to turn it over
3 to Council Member Paladino.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Good afternoon
5 everybody, and thank you very much for coming. First
6 of all, I want to say you are heroes. You are
7 survivors. You are never give up, never give in.
8 you are the best of the best, and the very fact that
9 you represented our country in a time of need and
10 when it wasn't in a time a need, you need due
11 respect. And you have represented the very best
12 country on this planet. So, despite what might have
13 been said earlier today, I thank you all from the
14 bottom of my heart. Now, we'll get back to-- we'll
15 talk a little bit about money. I'm reading here,
16 180,000 dollars was allocated from the City Council
17 for Fiscal Year 23 for COVA. Now, that's not really
18 a sufficient amount is it?

19 DIRECTOR SHUDOFISKY: Not at all.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Right, that's
21 drops in a bucket. I deal with money. I like to talk
22 about funding and I like to talk about how we can do
23 better. We talked about getting the word out there
24 for everybody to see. Everything costs money.
25 Nothing is for free. Bob had an excellent idea, and

2 I think we should follow-through on that. But the
3 bottom line is, I think the budget the last Veterans
4 hearing or two hearings ago, it think we said total
5 city budget was 12 million dollars for the veterans.
6 Twelve million dollars out of a 101.1 billion for
7 Fiscal Year 23 is a drop in the bucket. I think we
8 need to do better for that. We need to help our
9 young men and women or middle-aged men and women who
10 are struggling just to get through every single day,
11 and you Marvin [sic], you were amazing. And Shakima,
12 where is she?

13 : She had to go to class.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: She is
15 unbelievable. I mean, I sat here and I just wanted to
16 like-- I wanted to squeeze you both, because I just
17 can't believe your endurance. You see, this is what
18 our city needs. This is what our country needs. This
19 is what our workforce needs, people like you who will
20 lead by example, strong example. Just the fact that
21 Bob remarked that you said yes sir. You know, that's
22 woah. People snap their heads back, but that means a
23 whole lot. And anybody who's fortunate enough to have
24 you and have others like you, don't understand-- or
25 understand and value you. You should never be

undervalued. We have to do the best we can. Now my office in District 19 is a Veterans Resource Center. I wanted to become a Veterans Resource Center when I campaigned for this office, and Commissioner Hendon saw to it that it happened. Now, I've had in my office Tanya Thompson [sp?] and I had representative from CUNY right over here, because I'm in District 19 which is northeast Queens, so our Queensborough, it's right there. You could throw a rock and hit it. I'd like to open my doors up to you to set it up, so this is not just for our older veterans that are Vietnam vets, and we even go back further than that. I had somebody come in who was 101 years old and had all his marbles. He was amazing just to listen to him talk. But I want to do whatever I can. My office is there for you. Every other week it was arranged with Commissioner. It's every other Wednesday. This Wednesday, tomorrow, will be the first one for February, and we are there from 10 in the morning. We have a representative there from 10 in the morning until four in the afternoon. You may want to use my office for people to come specifically for their needs dealing with school. And going back to the original, how do we get the word out there? I use my

2 social media, and social media is fine, but we need
3 to do other ways. Now, if your CUNY's and your
4 univer-- where are you located Hostos?

5 UNIDENTIFIED: [inaudible] in the Bronx.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: It's in the
7 Bronx. I mean, we are literally right over the White
8 Stone Bridge or the [inaudible] Bridge. We're a
9 stone's throw. Lehman's College is right there, too.
10 So, we got a great location, and I want you to be
11 able to use my office and send somebody to my office,
12 and we'll do everything in our-- you guys have it,
13 okay? Just let me know if you could work with that
14 Wed-- every other Wednesday would be great. But I
15 think if we start to localize what we can to do the
16 best we can for our veterans who are coming out and
17 need the time and the need the skills and need the
18 help to get themselves on computer and figure out
19 where to go, what to do, how to navigate. Use my
20 office. And I hope other City Council people,
21 members, will be able to be given the opportunity my
22 office was given, and if we could start to localize,
23 I think that will help us a great deal. Thank you
24 very much for coming today, and like I said, you move
25

2 me tremendously, and I want to do whatever I can to
3 help you. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you, Council
5 Member. Just a couple of-- let's bring up
6 Commissioner Hendon. You're not going to get off
7 easy.

8 [laughter]

9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: We want to bring him
10 up here because I have a line of questioning. Thank
11 you. We're going-- we might have to bring you back,
12 but thank you so much. I'm sorry for the workout.
13 Thank you. Thank you. I'm sorry we have so many
14 great panelists and we got wrapped up with-- we don't
15 want to snub you, Commissioner. I'm sorry you were
16 delayed in your testimony. By the way, I understand
17 that you visit other cities to try to recruit
18 veterans to go to school here and live in New York C
19 City?

20 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Yep, that's right.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So you go on road
22 trips, and--

23 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We try and attract
24 more veterans [inaudible]. In the larger picture,
25 it's what we do to attract them to come, so they can

2 be able to enroll in great institutions like CUNY and
3 matriculate and then get great jobs and ultimately
4 stay. And so Ellen went to the Council of College
5 and Military Educators.

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER GREELEY: Yep,
7 sure. So, Nicole and I tabled at this Council of
8 College and Military Educators last January, and we
9 actually promoted CUNY Office of-- Special Program
10 for the Office of Professional Studies and their
11 online program. And there's a lot of competition out
12 there. I mean, this is not the only one. I just
13 wanted to just kind of qualify a little bit. You got
14 very much into the weeds on how things really operate
15 at the university--

16 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] Could
17 you please move the mic closer?

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER GREELEY: Yep.
19 But there's a whole lot of decision-making that goes
20 on even before you figure out what school you're
21 going to. I just want to run you through, just give
22 me two minutes about it. So, you know, part of it is
23 when you're preparing for transition is what do you
24 want to do when you leave military service. Have I
25 taken the course work to support a civilian career?

2 What educational credentials do I need? Do I need to
3 apply to a two or four-year academic higher ed
4 institution? Should I be looking a public school, a
5 public college or private college? Is it a yellow
6 ribbon school, a for-profit school, a foreign school,
7 a flight [sic] school, correspondence in even going
8 back to high school? Will my educational credentials
9 I earned while in the military be accepted by the
10 higher Ed institution? You got into that a bit and
11 it was really an interesting dialogue. Would
12 attending a technology school receiving a
13 certification be as useful? Could I take advantage
14 of the Vet tech provider's on-the-job training
15 programs? Where will my GI Bill's benefit go
16 furthest? Will my living expenses be covered by my
17 BAH? Where will I live? Can I afford the housing?
18 Can I afford the transportation? And as non-
19 traditional student, will I fit into any of these
20 institutions? Is there an active student veteran
21 office? Is there a Veteran Resource Center, and is
22 there a Student Veterans of America Chapter? Those
23 are some of the very major questions you kind of go
24 through even before you decide what school to go
25 through. And it's that type of assistance that's

really required. You have to be quite strategic, because you do only have 36 months and 26,000 dollars to cover for tuition, plus, you know, your BAH.

Might I add that one of the major issues is that the BAH differentiates between the four boroughs here, versus that of Staten Island, which makes the college of Staten Island a less-favored school because they're receiving about 477 dollars monthly less than the other CUNY colleges as well as-- yeah [inaudible]

COMMISSIONER HENDON: I just wanted to [inaudible] the question about being on the road. There was the event that Ellen recalled to you last year where folks that is-- to get eyeballs with education counselors at active duty military installations. We have about two million people in the military-- 2.1; 1.3 million are active duty. 800,000 like myself and those who testified are reserve. And so for the 1.3 million, about 200,000 leave service each year. So, 200,000 people leave active service each year. Half of them settle down in a place they're not from. And so there's Amazon HQ factory trying to get these folks to come and live and work where we are, and so we're trying to be on office to feel into the system of having folks come

1 to New York City. And so that conference that Ellen
2 and Nicole attended was one where the Ed Center at an
3 active duty installation, that's the center of
4 gravity [sic]. That's the place where I'm getting
5 ready to get out. I want to talk to someone about
6 what my options are, and they may say, "Hey, why
7 don't you look at going to CUNY remotely? Why don't
8 you look at going to New York City in general and
9 look at CUNY in-person at some point?" We were at
10 the Student Veterans of America Conference earlier
11 this year, and that is just all the different student
12 veteran leaders from various schools across the
13 country to still make that case: live, learn, work
14 in New York. Maybe at [inaudible] now. Why don't
15 you think about coming to New York City? We got
16 great academic institutions. Let's roll the red
17 carpet out. So we're trying to continuously put
18 hands on our brothers and sisters who are making the
19 decision: Where do I go once I leave the service?
20 To have them decide to go to New York City. Does
21 that-- that answer that question.

22
23 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: And the great lure
24 of CUNY, meaning there's so many campuses with so
25 many different disciplines and the price is right, I

know-- if they come from other states, they can still-- they have to establish residency here for a period--

COMMISSIONER HENDON: [interposing] No, it's the way that CUNY-- I'm sorry. It's honored-- regardless of where I'm from, I can receive that same rate as someone who's a New York City veteran would receive coming to CUNY. So it helps--

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] Same rate as a--

COMMISSIONER HENDON: [interposing] Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: as a resident?

COMMISSIONER HENDON: Yeah, same rate.

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, if they come from Arizona to New York City, they can get the in-state right away.

COMMISSIONER HENDON: I want to flag-- the issue for us is we're-- so, of the 200,000 who leave active service each year, we've now received information just a few months ago. We estimate that it's about 3-5,000 are coming to New York City, and we're learning more about them. You know, we-- a majority of them are coming to school. We believe that that majority who are coming to school likely

1 attend CUNY. CUNY is this-- it is the third largest
2 university in the country. So, we've gotten them to
3 come. The issue is having them stay. The comment
4 was made earlier today about, you know, how do-- what
5 do we do to convince them to stay? A lot of what we
6 also do, and we talk with the Vice Chancellor, we
7 think about at DVS everything from a fertile
8 environment, you know, that's cultivated in schools
9 amongst student veterans all the way to-- I as able
10 to find a good job opportunity, too. I was able to
11 find housing. So that's the chess that we're playing
12 to try to-- we can easily grow our veteran
13 population. We just got to be as compelling as
14 possible from the live, learn and work here.

16 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, there are
17 hurdles obviously with housing, the cost of living
18 for New York City. I think what CUNY does is it
19 offsets some of that, and just the fact that you have
20 a lot of good choices. And they still have where you
21 can go-- let's say if you were-- you went to Queens,
22 you could also take course at Brooklyn. So, it was--
23 my tenure was called Permit, the Permit. So, and we
24 used to do that, and that was a tremendous advantage.
25 I even utilized that as a student, because I thought

a different campus had different selections and something that suited my schedule or where I was working at the time. So I think that's a tremendous advantage. CUNY has so many options, and I sound like a commercial here, but it is-- you can recruit. If you get-- you know, how many veterans are about to leave the service, if you can get that information and go, and go to fair, and I think you're doing that. I think it's a tremendous advantage for CUNY. It actually fulfills. It's a win/win. It helps, you know, obviously helps the veterans establish themselves in private life, and then it also help CUNY with enrollment, because I know retention in CUNY has always been a problem because of the hurdles our students have, always have.

COMMISSIONER HENDON: Something I want to flag, too that we're-- we're trying to solve this riddle, Mr. Chair, you know, us and CUNY side of it. It's not just the veterans, it's a veteran family. If you think about the typical person who does leave active service--

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing]
Excellent point, yeah.

2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: you got-- I
3 graduated from high school. They've done something
4 to work one or two year and I joined the military
5 around the age of 20; did four to eight years. I'm
6 roughly 26 years old now. I'm coming to New York
7 City. I've likely have already met my partner, the
8 person that I will start a family with, or soon meet,
9 and so how do we appeal to the entire tribe that that
10 veteran is bringing when they come to the City.

11 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, the family-- you
12 know, again, that's-- I don't see-- that's another
13 area that we have to advertise, the family of
14 veterans can go to school. And are the benefits the
15 same, I mean in tuition or in the length of stay and
16 so forth? The same restrictions of the GI Bill?

17 : [inaudible]

18 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright, you have to--
19 - I'm sorry. That's an important answer here.

20 DIRECTOR SHUDOFSKY: [inaudible] it just
21 depends on what benefits they're using. So,--

22 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] Is the
23 mic on there?

24 DIRECTOR SHUDOFSKY: if the Spouse is
25 using post-9/11 GI Bill, then it would be the same.

2 If the spouse is using survivor's dependent benefit,
3 it's not-- it's not as robust.

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Oh, okay.

5 DIRECTOR SHUDOFSKY: So, it's somewhat
6 dependent, and it's very-- that's very in the weeds as
7 Ellen was saying. There's so many permutations and
8 variations.

9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, but that--
10 that's a very important program to-- we could
11 utilize.

12 DIRECTOR SHUDOFSKY: they are considered
13 veterans on campus.

14 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: That's great. That's
15 great.

16 DIRECTOR SHUDOFSKY: In other words, we
17 count that as [inaudible]

18 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Alright. That's a
19 very good-- so, let me just get to a couple of
20 scripted questions that we had-- so other than your
21 testimony, Commissioner, can you discuss any other
22 projects you've worked with CUNY on or any joint
23 messaging for-- your agency has done with CUNY?

24 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'll speak to a few
25 things and then turn it over to--

2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] Okay.

3 COMMISSIONER HENDON: [inaudible] When we
4 look at CUNY, back to this idea of what are we doing
5 to attract these veterans and then what do we do to
6 keep them plugged in and then have a strong footprint
7 here in New York City, a foothold. The-- you heard
8 the Vice Chancellor mention, one of the things we've
9 been looking at is this veterans promise program
10 where a way to say, look, if you have graduated from
11 a New York City high school and you enlist in the
12 military, do two years of active time and a minimum
13 of six years Guard Reserve and have guaranteed
14 admission preferred enrollment to CUNY. That's one
15 thing that we are pursuing with our partners at CUNY.
16 Another on is the tuition assistance program at
17 elementary. This is with SBS, but largely we want
18 any serviceman, wherever you are in the world-- you
19 can be in Germany, you could be in, you know,
20 California, be in the Dakotas, be in Korea-- that you
21 can use CUNY as a remote learning option. Each
22 active service member has roughly 4,500 dollars
23 tagged to them per the tuition assistance programs.
24 So I'm active service member, then I can spend up to
25 4,500 dollars in tuition assistance, you know, for me

to attend school during that federal Fiscal Year.

And so we want to make sure that folks know about the remote offerings CUNY has, not just SBS, but also we say a KCC [sic] flex [sic], Queensborough community college--

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing]

Alright, but on that point, just before I forget it was-- let's say they're in the Reserves and they get called up midway through the semester, what happens? And they can't work remotely because they're being deployed somewhere, what-- what happens in that--

COMMISSIONER HENDON: [interposing] I have to defer to my friends at CUNY on that, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Sorry about that.

AGATHA FUNES: The question is what happens to our veterans and our reserves--

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] In the Reserves, yeah, mid--

AGATHA FUNES: [interposing] [inaudible]

CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Mid semester let's say.

AGATHA FUNES: Okay, so they will-- they will not get penalized if they have to go over to active duty. What we do is that [inaudible] and then

2 they continue on their education. If they have the
3 opportunity, depending on the mission, then they
4 could do their online classes.

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, that's the only
6 option, withdraw from the class?

7 RICARDO GARCIA: Well, it depends on the
8 [inaudible]

9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: You can get an
10 incomplete.

11 RICARDO GARCIA: Yes, correct, they can
12 get an incomplete, exactly, and then the professor
13 will work--

14 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] See, I
15 know these things. Well, I should after 44 years.
16 The-- but it would seem that we could bend-- we could
17 do a little bit more to accommodate them, because
18 they are serving our country. So I think we-- yeah,
19 we could-- I mean you might have some suggestions. I
20 might have some also that we could talk about because
21 I think we should give them every benefit possible to
22 further their career whether it's remote at a future
23 time, whether it's the incomplete. The only problem
24 with the incomplete, you know, you have until the
25 following semester, like a week or two into it. It

was at that time. I think we could actually stretch that out if we had to, and figure out something to work with the veterans. So there are-- so I mean, I think there's some internal things we could do at CUNY. Not the-- I don't want to give off your expertise, Commissioner, but there are things we could, I think. Because I-- that was frustrating. We had a few students like that. They did have to drop the class, which was-- it sets them back. You were fin-- I'm sorry, I interrupted you.

COMMISSIONER HENDON: No, no, I was going to-- I was [inaudible] keeping [inaudible] not to mention as far as attracting veterans. What we would want to do is tie more of our active service members into CUNY remotely, and the veterans promised to kind of make sure that those who enlisted here from New York City stay within the CUNY ecosystem as far as knowing I have guaranteed admission, preferred enrollment to CUNY once I finish serving my time. And then there's Credit for Heroes that the Vice Chancellor mentioned, just ways to deal with how do we account for all of that experience, all those veterans [inaudible] got in the uniform once they transition into academic environment. And then I'll

2 defer to Ellen to speak to this next piece of it
3 which is, okay, we got you here. Now, how do we keep
4 you plugged into our community? What are we doing
5 with our mentorship [inaudible] benefits we offer or
6 the cultural reasons [inaudible] according to
7 [inaudible]?

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER GREELEY: Sure.

9 So, a couple of things that we've done just to-- just
10 to talk a little bit about our partnership.

11 Recently, Bronx Community College co-hosted the
12 Veteran Bronx Crisis Suicide Prevention Crisis
13 Management Team with us. They also-- they've also
14 hosted a meeting of the Vet Connect NYC partners
15 which we greatly appreciated. DVS in collaboration
16 with the Mayor's Office, Mayor's-- New York City
17 Mayor's Office to advance New York City. We raised
18 money to provide scholarships for CUNY students to
19 attend the Student Veterans of America national
20 conference back in 2022 in LA. We brought about 26
21 students over to LA to attend that very special
22 conference. We also have paid registration fee for
23 [inaudible] was the director to attend Student
24 Veterans of America national conference this year in
25 Florida. We-- as we've talked about, promoted the

2 online graduate school professional studies program,
3 we encourage CUNY students to register for the VA
4 Work Study Program and we advocate for the expansion
5 of the Fair Fares program who are for students
6 themselves. With respect to mentoring, etcetera,
7 etcetera, we're all part of something called a very
8 major program called the-- yeah, Expirations of Terms
9 Service Program. It's a national program where the
10 representatives from this national team go to the
11 various installation to register those transitioning
12 service members will be leaving service, and it's
13 really at that time where we really encourage these
14 expiring service members to come and to sign up for a
15 mentor, particularly if they're coming to New York
16 City. So we're very active with trying to create
17 [inaudible] sponsors of which I am one of those. So
18 I do mentor a-- actually, a student from Fordham
19 University and have lived and have listened to some
20 of the trials and tribulations she's gone through in
21 terms of trying to proceed becoming integrated back
22 into civilian life.

23 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So how many staffers
24 at DVS do you have for the education component that
25 are assigned to that?

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER GREELEY: So, I
3 have Nicole who is our on-the-ground person who helps
4 to orchestrate, and in fact, maybe Nicole, do you
5 want to say a quick hello to your grandfather who
6 happens to be a veteran who is watching the program
7 and streaming at this time. So we think it's
8 important.

9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Pull the mic a
10 little-- yeah. Thank you, okay.

11 NICOLE ORLANDO: My name is Nicole
12 Orlando. Like Ellen said, I'm a Policy Analyst here.
13 I'm a proud grand-daughter of the United States Navy
14 Veteran. I'm also am a CUNY Baruch graduate. Well,
15 like Ellen mentioned, I work with the Veterans on-
16 campus network, so this is student veterans from
17 campuses all over the city, CUNY and non-CUNY, and we
18 try-- the pandemic has halted us and now we're trying
19 to bring that back, that sense of community back. So
20 we put on different events like a barbeque,
21 information sessions whenever we have a, you know,
22 private partner reach out to us, and have like a
23 movie screening or something for a play. We share it
24 with our CUNY student veterans as well as our other
25 student veterans that we deal with. So we're just

2 building up this community back to what it was pre-
3 pandemic, and just making sure we're sharing all
4 resources that we get in real-time with student
5 veterans, as well.

6 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you. Thank
7 you for that. So, Commissioner, you know, I looked
8 at Vet Connect. What happens after a veteran submits
9 a form to Vet Connect for assistance with the
10 education. Like, you mentioned-- we have only two
11 people that are a part of the whole DVS veteran
12 schooling?

13 COMMISSIONER HENDON: So, we-- there are
14 35 of us in DVS--

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] I know,
16 I know, I know--

17 COMMISSIONER HENDON: [inaudible]

18 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: I just wanted it for
19 the record.

20 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Yeah, it's-- there
21 are 35 and you've got Nicole oversees the veterans on
22 campus effort, and she reports to Ellen, so yeah.
23 And then-- yeah, so when it comes to--

24 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] And so
25 they're the two experts.

2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: These are--

3 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] Is your
4 workload, you know--

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER GREELEY:
6 [interposing] I wear a lot of hats.

7 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay. Oh, you wear
8 a lot of hats. So you're not only assigned to educ--

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER GREELEY:
10 [interposing] [inaudible]

11 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: That's right.
12 That's right. No, that one--

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER GREELEY:
14 [interposing] Let's not forget about that.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: I'm not-- you're
16 carpenters, too.

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER GREELEY:
18 [inaudible]

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: So, could you just
20 walk us through like once they apply or they want
21 information on Vet Connect? By the way, I think that
22 the education component could be more prominent on
23 the Vet Connect, I think. It was a little hard.

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER GREELEY: if you
25 go into DVS--

2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: [interposing] The
3 website is nyc.gov/vetconnect. And just-- I guess
4 the easiest way to explain it is think of us as a
5 pizza shop where there are different ways to order
6 that pizza. You can either call us to order. You can
7 visit our website to order. You can go to our online
8 ordering portal which is Vet connect. So,
9 nyc.gov/vetconnect. You can also message us on
10 social media as far as just different ways, or email
11 us to be able to see the services. No matter how the
12 service comes into us, it ultimately goes to our Care
13 Coordination Center, our Care Coordination Unit, and
14 they triage and decide what do we do with this. At
15 the agency we do three things. We either provide
16 referrals. So if it's something where we know a
17 great group that can support the veteran with this,
18 we make a referral. It's synergies [sic]. So
19 anything where we work with stakeholders and make a
20 one plus one equals three dynamic, so if it's
21 something that involves the synergistic aspect we do
22 that. And the other piece is direct services. The
23 only direct services we offer at DVS, Mr. Chair, are
24 benefit claims, helping veterans navigate the--
25 whatever benefits they receive at the VA. Working

2 with our veterans who are housing insecure, helping
3 them attain housing. Anything that involves someone
4 who's couch surfing in the shelter system, helping
5 them, you know, go up a notch within that housing
6 ladder as we call it, wherever they are. Another one
7 is working with our veterans who have passed away and
8 do not have the means to have the appropriate funeral
9 and burial honors [sic], indigent veterans. And then
10 the other service is simply picking up the phone on
11 behalf of the City when they say, "hey, I'm a vet, I
12 need help," is a service in and of itself, because
13 that's something--

14 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] Right.

15 COMMISSIONER HENDON: where we get things
16 that come inbound from 311 through our site. Other
17 agencies reach out with us. And so really you hit
18 us, and then it goes to our Care Coordination Unit.
19 They decide which of these three buckets does it go
20 to and how do we kick this out to the appropriate
21 entities so we [inaudible].

22 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Can we put an ad on
23 your page to link to CUNY?

24 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We have-- so we
25 got--

2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing]

3 Advocate for CUNY--

4 COMMISSIONER HENDON: [interposing] Yeah,
5 listen how we can do this-- you can question-- what's
6 tough here is I love CUNY. There are more than 120
7 schools, institutions of higher learning in the City,
8 and so we've got to be mindful.

9 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, but we love
10 CUNY.

11 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I do. I taught at
12 CUNY for years as far as teaching ROTC. Mr. Chair,
13 so I'm with you. I love CUNY too, but--

14 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing]
15 There's only one-- there's only one public university
16 system in New York City.

17 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Touché, touché. We
18 can look-- we can look into it and get back to you.

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: so, the answer is
20 yes.

21 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I'm hearing yes.

22 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: I like that.

23 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I just want to make
24 sure. For me, it's just the same thing I tell all
25 groups as far as making sure that we are-- there's

2 not an appearance of impropriety as far as how we're
3 promoting things.

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [inaudible]

5 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Even with dealing
6 with Vice Chancellor, it's about we're selling New
7 York City, and so yeah.

8 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay, Council Member
9 Brewer, you have--

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. Thank
11 you, Commissioner. Thank you for being nice to my
12 family. First of all, on free advertising-- I think
13 CUNY does this, but the kiosks for whatever they are
14 in the streets are all free. I assume CUNY advertises
15 there already, but I'm just letting you know, there's
16 one thing for free and that's the kiosk because I do
17 it all the time. So it is free advertising.

18 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We at DVS have used
19 [inaudible] have used those kiosks.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right, exactly.
21 So I'm just saying for CUNY to talk about it in terms
22 of the military. Couple questions. First of all, is
23 there an evaluation of any of these programs? This
24 is more for CUNY than for you, but I think Ellen
25 knows everything. I know Ellen. She knows

everything. So, is there an evaluation, do you know, of any of the programs that you're talking about that, you know, in terms of CUNY or others that you're using?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER GREELEY: We're actually working pretty closely these days with-- Columbia University has a separate entity that is--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] Pull it towards you.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER GREELEY: Sorry, okay. Thank you. So there's the Center for Transition and Integration at Columbia University. They are kind of our secret sauce in how we're putting together our transition assistance programs series, and they really will focus on that assistance that's needed prior before you select a school. And clearly, CUNY has a clear advantage because of the tuition dollar associated with it, and the fact that you can go to a CUNY and then save some of your money to use for graduate school in New York City also. So we're real-- we're real good about trying to get that-- you know, it's that frontloading conversation that you had earlier that's really important. Part of the whole concept is how do you get our folks to

be more strategic, okay, and really get the decision-making prior to making that selection of the school because you don't want to waste your money. The woman that I'm mentoring at this point, she's just about finished with a degree in social work, and I turned around and I said to her, "Okay, maybe I can help you figure out a job because certainly social workers are high in demand." She said, oh, she wants to be a dietician. And this is after she spent some significant dollars and cents attending Fordham University for that particular reason. So these-- so, you know, part of it is how do you get them-- how do you move the curb earlier to really sit and chat with them, and that takes expertise, and you know, again, Columbia Center for Transition and Integration helps--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] Is that--

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER GREELEY: with that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Is that a General Studies, I know well then [inaudible]

COMMISSIONER HENDON: I just want to say, too, Council Member, I'll defer to CUNY as far as any

2 evaluation question specific to CUNY. For us, we do
3 have a military family community survey that we've
4 now began to issue, which is something that was, you
5 know, passed in law by the Council, I should say
6 that. We had our first survey which was instituted
7 this last year, and our next one will be within in
8 the next year as far as putting that out, and it'll
9 be in a four-year data rhythm going forward. We'll
10 think through how we can put questions in there that
11 can help us scratch the itch of learning more that
12 can be of value to all of us with ways we can help
13 the community. I just wanted to flag that.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I appreciate
15 that. And in terms of being in New York, housing,
16 housing, housing being a challenge. So, can people
17 stay on any military base as opposed to trying to
18 find an apartment in the City of New York? Is that
19 something that has come up or an issue?

20 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'll speak and if
21 any of our CUNY counterparts want to mention-- so
22 with the housing at Fort Hamilton, it's privatized
23 housing. And so it's-- you know, so anyone can stay
24 there. Priority goes if you have some sort of
25 military assignment it links you to it, but right now

2 you can't be someone who's in general public who
3 stays there. But that's a market rate, so even
4 though it's at Hamilton, it's still market rate. For
5 us, when we think about housing-- first off, we tell
6 our veterans to go to nyc.gov/vethousing,
7 nyc.gov/vethousing.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right.

9 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We also help people
10 connect the dots with Mitchell-Lama Connect with--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]
12 That's my bill. Thank you. I'm very familiar with
13 that bill.

14 COMMISSIONER HENDON: And--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] My
16 bill.

17 COMMISSIONER HENDON: And Housing Connect
18 and make sure they know about the Mitchell-Lama
19 veterans preference as well--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] I
21 know about that.

22 COMMISSIONER HENDON: and the state
23 programs that we-- we have an urban fellow with us
24 now who just focuses on affordable housing issues, so
25 we can try to help triage things. Something someone

said earlier, something that we do, whenever a student veteran has a incident where they feel like-- and I came here to school. I remember landlords saying I need extra money as far as your deposit because you're a student veteran, I don't trust his income. I didn't know at the time that I could go-- and we tell people look, come to us. We connect them with the Commission on Human Rights so that they know what is and is not acceptable, and then CCR will reach out to that landlord. It's nyc.gov/vetrightrights.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know but these are harder--

COMMISSIONER HENDON: [inaudible] listed right now.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: This is hard stuff to try to do, and I'm just-- so there isn't any other military housing except the one Port Hamilton, that's is what you're saying. Okay.

COMMISSIONER HENDON: And even-- I have some [inaudible]. It's also [inaudible]. It's private. So it's on a base, but it's privatized.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright. I'm just trying to think of other suggestions that something that maybe as a city we should be thinking about,

2 like what kind of military housing we could build
3 with the dormitory authority in Albany, something to
4 put on the agenda. Homeless-- so, my understanding
5 from years and years and years of these hearings is
6 that coming from the military, this may have changed.
7 It's really hard to know who's coming to New York
8 City. Now, you're trying to get people to come to
9 New York City. Do they tell you before-- every
10 single person who's coming-- I'm asking because this
11 is about homeless as well as students and potential
12 New Yorkers. So, every single person who leaves, you
13 know, the military tells you when they're coming.
14 Does somebody tell us when they're coming to New York
15 City?

16 COMMISSIONER HENDON: What we get is--
17 it's a DD214 where--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]
19 Okay.

20 COMMISSIONER HENDON: it just says what
21 the last address is that I want someone to know
22 about.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

24 COMMISSIONER HENDON: That's all we have.
25 And so when we say the 3-5,000, just based on the

2 past few months receiving this data, that's just
3 based on whose put that. So we're running these
4 seminars now that Ellen and Nicole are spearheading
5 where we're having welcome home seminars for-- we're
6 looking at doing four to six of these every year for
7 these service members so we'll learn more about them
8 and their plus one's [sic].

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And these are the
10 people who had New York City as an address before
11 they went into the military or everybody who said--

12 COMMISSIONER HENDON: [interposing] Good
13 question.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm going to New
15 York.

16 COMMISSIONER HENDON: These are people
17 who said I'm-- these are people who said, "I want my
18 last known address to be that of New York."

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I got it.

20 COMMISSIONER HENDON: So, it could be
21 someone who-- my mom, this is her address, I'll put
22 it down, or someone who, "I'm going to go to Baruch.
23 I'm going to put it down." What's key on this, this
24 is an internal thing with the DOD, but they are-- We
25 pray that by the end of this calendar year, we won't

just know who has just come to New York City. We'll also know who has said, "Within a year, I'll be going to New York City." And so that's some internal things going on with DOD where someone--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] That would be fabulous if you can-- we've been trying for 30 years to get that, Commissioner. That would be fabulous. Honorable and dishonorable, how does that ply and hat are the numbers? Is that an issue? In terms of going to CUNY, obviously, not coming to New York City is not a problem, but is that an issue for getting into CUNY or any of your services?

COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'll defer to my counterparts as far as on the CUNY side, yeah.

RICARDO GARCIA: So their discharge--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] My husband's a vet, so I listen to all this stuff at home. Go ahead.

RICARDO GARCIA: So, Councilwoman, the discharge status is irrelevant when you come into CUNY. So, we don't look at that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, alright.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Which they're going to make explicit on their website.

2 RICARDO GARCIA: Very possible.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Final question is
4 just-- we got a lot of homeless. I think I've managed
5 to get 135 of them in, 100 in 330 West 95th Street.
6 So I work with them all day long. How-- I mean, when
7 they're coming to New York, sometimes they end up
8 homeless, right? How do we get them into your system
9 as opposed to into the shelter and the other
10 alternative? Is that something that you're working
11 on? People end up homeless, veterans. We don't want
12 them to be homeless. We want them to have an
13 education, etcetera. Particularly, for some of the
14 younger ones, how do we get them-- how are you
15 focused on trying to get them into an educational
16 track as opposed to the-- or maybe a lot of them are
17 at Bellevue and at CUNY, just like so many others.
18 I'm trying to see how CUNY and homeless can work
19 together.

20 COMMISSIONER HENDON: So, we have--
21 there's a-- just to start with the data. The most
22 recent point in time counts 482 homeless veterans in
23 the City of New York, just to put it out there.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You're talking
25 about in the shelter system?

2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: As far as shelters,
3 and that's shelters, and that's eight street
4 homeless.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right.

6 COMMISSIONER HENDON: And then the
7 remaining balance of 472 in the shelter system.
8 Right now we're actively-- make sure I got this name.
9 We're working with our partners within government to
10 see if we can identify more veterans who are in the
11 different services and systems that the City uses.
12 There's a portal the VA has called Status Query and
13 Response Exchange System, SQUARES. It's a VA web
14 portal whereby you can enter someone's basic
15 information and it comes back and says is this person
16 a veteran or not. And so we're in active talks, you
17 know, with our peer agencies about what can we do to
18 enter this information. Nothing's reported to the
19 VA, so you can maintain data integrity, so that you
20 can know who you have out of all who may be in say
21 the shelter system, or out of all may be using Health
22 + Hospitals or maybe all who maybe within the ACS
23 system.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah.
25

2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Who are the
3 veterans here, because not everyone's self-
4 identifying? And so we want to take that data and
5 hopefully we get to a place where we can know who's
6 in the system and then better help them. And there's
7 something else I had to mention, you know, on the
8 self-identification point some things were said
9 earlier. I just want to say that let's not forget
10 many of our veterans do not self-identify and there's
11 several reasons why. One of those reasons can be
12 simply the fear of my own community looking down me,
13 saying things that may be painful to me. And so I
14 just want to acknowledge that as far as what we're up
15 against with-- even the numbers with CUNY, the-- I--
16 and it's not their fault. I don't believe they know
17 who all the student veterans are, nor do we, because
18 you could have someone who's not using their GI Bill
19 benefits but going to CUNY. They can say, "Look, I
20 wnt to save my benefits for my kids. So I'll be the
21 typical students you see who's a-- who's working
22 fulltime and going to CUNY, and it not show up." And
23 so that's-- you know, as much as we may ask a
24 question, and you couple this with knowing that
25 roughly-- you know, you see me that two to three

won't identify. You have some folks who may say, look, I want to keep this in my back pocket for now. That's a community we may not be aware of. So I just want to flag these things.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I think--

COMMISSIONER HENDON: [interposing] Not at all-- nothing at all against my friends at CUNY or any--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] No, I agree. I just finally-- so I assume that the people who are homeless, the 400 and something are leaving money on the table essentially, if they could be using it for education. So,--

COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'll start and then I'll defer to anybody else on it. So, it's-- yes, you know, could say that. I mean, we're running the numbers looking at the-- VA puts a gross domestic expenditures report out saying here's how much money's coming to New York City.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right.

COMMISSIONER HENDON: From the veterans who are here. You estimate it's roughly 42,000 that each veteran brings in. It's just federal benefits.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right, I know.
3 I'm aware.

4 COMMISSIONER HENDON: by plugging in the-
5 - you know, so--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] I
7 know all about those benefits.

8 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Yeah, and so it's--
9 that's one way to look at it. Another way to look at
10 it is we're working hard to try to identify people so
11 they even know about all that's available to them.
12 We have people who are worried about taking the
13 benefits. Another example, many of our vets don't
14 even know there's a state scholarship program just
15 for combat veterans with honorable discharges, where
16 the state will pay up to eight semesters of
17 undergrad, six semesters of grad school, or six
18 semester equivalents of vocational training. It's a
19 veteran tuition award program. Many of our people
20 don't even know, and so a lot of our workers try
21 inform vets about all these things so they can take
22 advantage. Someone said something about, you know,
23 my peer didn't even know about the Joint Services
24 Transcript. You know, it's like this I something
25 we're trying to scratch the itch on, Council Member.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I think everybody
3 knows about the property tax exemption, though. Go
4 ahead. I mean-- I'm laughing because they-- people
5 all know about the property tax exemption when
6 they're vets, but go ahead. Yeah.

7 RICARDO GARCIA: I'm definitely taking
8 advantage of that.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes, I know. I
10 am, too, I'll be honest with you.

11 RICARDO GARCIA: So, Councilwoman, to add
12 to the Commissioner's statements in regarding to the
13 homelessness--

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]
15 Money on the table.

16 RICARDO GARCIA: So, some of the homeless
17 veterans, you have to keep in mind not every veteran
18 may be eligible for education benefits.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No, I understand.

20 RICARDO GARCIA: And then in addition
21 that, depending on the specific veteran, they may not
22 have access to those education benefits, because of
23 their time of service [inaudible].

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay
25

2 RICARDO GARCIA: And those are some of
3 the key issues that we face in addition to that. As
4 far as the services that are provided, the Veterans
5 Administration has a very strict criteria to their
6 definition of homeless. So to them you literally
7 have to be homeless on the street, not in a car, not
8 in someone's couch. Even though you're homeless, you
9 have to be literally on the street, and that's their
10 complete definition before they get involved, and
11 it's a really grueling process. They go through the
12 social work. So it takes months, maybe two or three
13 months before an individuals can get something
14 stabilized, but as far as the education benefits,
15 most post-9/11 era veterans are recipients of this
16 very lucrative GI Bill.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah.

18 RICARDO GARCIA: Any one prior to that,
19 the GI bill is not as, you know, as bulky financially
20 as this new way is. And that, you know, is part of
21 the problem. For those that are post-9/11 era
22 veterans, they definitely have a significant amount
23 of money that will be at their disposal if we could
24 get them stabilized, you know, in secure housing. I
25

2 worked with this not only at my college level, but
3 also in the Bronx.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, thank
5 you very much.

6 COMMISSIONER HENDON: And I just want to
7 say, just an opinion, from what you said that
8 exchange about homeless veterans. It isn't just
9 about veterans, I think we've seen this echoed in the
10 non-veteran community as well where many of our
11 veteran female parents may be couch surfing, may be
12 in spots where they're not in the shelter and we're
13 not seeing them. So it's about how do we even
14 identify this group, too, because female veterans is
15 the fastest growing demographic in our community, and
16 we want to be able to treat them. Yet, you know, if
17 you've got that child and you may be staying with
18 someone but you need the help because you are check
19 to check and you're keeping your head above water.
20 You literally are couch surfing for all intents and
21 purposes. How do we find you? That's something else
22 we're-- we're internally, you know, thinking about.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
24 much.

2 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So, I have one
3 more question, and then we'll move on to public
4 testimony, or one more set. And first, just to
5 recap, it sounds like there's a lot of confusion on
6 the front end, right, which is veterans having access
7 to programs at CUNY, right? That advertising piece.
8 But then once they get to the application process, it
9 sounds like there are some veterans who feel as
10 though if they say that they are a veteran they will
11 be required to use their GI benefits. That's what it
12 sound like you said in your testimony, Commissioner?

13 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Well, [inaudible]
14 it-- you got two different things happening at the
15 same time, Mr. Chair. One is, many of choose not to
16 self-identify. I wish it weren't that way, but many
17 of us choose not to self-identify. Then you've got
18 folks who say look, I-- let me hold onto my-- I want
19 to-- I'm going to give my benefits to my kids or pass
20 it on to a spouse, something like that. And so let
21 me just work and then go to school and someone
22 wouldn't-- simply, we just-- it just not be on our
23 radar because of that.

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: But irrespective
25 of-- let's say they would otherwise identify, but

our-- it sounds like you're suggesting that the people would identify. They may not want to identify as a veteran on their application because they may feel compelled to use their GI benefits. Does that sound-- is that--

COMMISSIONER HENDON: [interposing] I can't speak to that. I won't say that. I won't say that. It's not-- it's not about being told or not--

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing] Okay.

COMMISSIONER HENDON: It's more so about I have this scholarship thing, this incredible opportunity where I can pass it to my children.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I'm more concerned about that first step.

COMMISSIONER HENDON: It's not-- yeah.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: About like even ident-- that first thing. I'm more concerned about even identifying the veterans so that they can get that outreach in the first place, but I see by the head-shaking that it's not really the case that people don't identify because they'll feel compelled to use their GI benefits.

COMMISSIONER HENDON: Yeah, I don't think that's it.

2 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay.

3 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I don't think that-
4 - yeah, I don't think those who-- that's--

5 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing] Okay.

6 COMMISSIONER HENDON: They're not linked
7 as far as-- I understand what you're saying.

8 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah, no, thank
9 you for clarifying that. And the-- I guess my last
10 question is, I understand that there's work done
11 together between DVS and CUNY. But what sharing is
12 there, or are you even allowed to share information
13 about students so that there's a continuum of
14 services. So there's a students who identifies as a
15 veteran at CUNY is not suddenly left in [inaudible]
16 after they graduate or get their-- you know, get
17 their degree or certification, and they can continue
18 to receive benefits and information from our city
19 agency, the Department of Veterans Services.

20 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Currently, we don't
21 have a data sharing agreement in place, but you asked
22 a great question. It's something we'll definitely
23 discuss offline. I can tell you our main focus right
24 now, we're working a data-sharing agreement with the
25 speaker's office for the City Council so that all of

the City Council Members will receive the constant [sic] information for the veterans who are in their district and that's in real-time. So we've been knocking that out. We've also been doing data-sharing agreements with our peer agencies. We haven't had a discussion with CUNY yet, but we will. And I appreciate you for flagging that.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah, I would-- and I understand since we first met, I know you've been working with the city agencies. You know, I recognize student information is certainly a lot more complicated than other information from city agencies with non-students or adults, but again-- and CUNY's also not really a city agency, so I recognize the complication, but I think if we're truly going to support our vets, our veterans, that in that intake process, much as we do in the city agencies, there should be some sort of question about sharing with DVS, and I would imagine that if someone said they do want assist-- you know, free housing or financial support for housing, all the other wonderful benefits DVS provides, that may be incentive for some of those students to self-identify as veterans. And I would imagine who may be some students who don't know why

would self-identify as a veteran in the first place if they don't already know the benefits entitled to them.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER GREELEY: so, there are several-- several CUNY colleges that are on our Vet Connect system already, so there is a sharing that does occur between-- for those that get referred to us from CUNY, a lot through PROVE, actually. They are-- so that is-- it is happening.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: We need more chairs, that's what we need.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER GREELEY: Here, here Agatha.

AGATHA FUNES: Okay, so we have FRPA [sic]. So, there's information like certain personal information that we cannot do the data sharing. However, we can refer students to DVS if they need resources, but we cannot share students' information like social security numbers. If the student is not willing to divulge that information. So FRPA does not allow CUNY to provide that information.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: No, I certainly understand and want to obviously respect the law and the intent behind the law, which is why it was really

2 about putting it as a question on the application,
3 which you know, you're not going to automatically
4 share. Which is to say are you a veteran? Great.
5 You know, what was your-- whatever-- active,
6 reserves. Should we with your consent-- you're
7 probably 18 and older if you're in college or if you
8 were in the armed services, you're certainly above
9 18-- with your consent share this with DVS to provide
10 you more services. And I think that that is
11 certainly some-- I would encourage you to explore to
12 really provide our veterans with all of the benefits
13 to which they are entitled, and to provide DVS with
14 some of that information that they're craving, which
15 is to identify as many of the veterans in New York
16 City as possible. Okay. With that, wrap up this
17 section of the hearing. I want to thank you all so
18 much for your testimony, and especially the students
19 and the service members who testified today. We're
20 going to move on to our public testimony.

21 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: I just have one
22 gift to give. I did--

23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing] It
24 can't be more than 50 dollars.

2 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: Don't worry.

3 It may be five cents per page. It's a dataset.

4 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: OH, wonderful.

5 VICE CHANCELLOR MAYBANK: the latest
6 [inaudible] of veterans. I thought you might want
7 that.

8 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay, yes, please,
9 and a number of the committee members were asking
10 about that. Thank you so much. Alright. I've been
11 informed by the Ser-- from the Sergeant of Arms we'll
12 have two minutes for public testimony, plus
13 additional time for Council Member questions. Three
14 minutes. Three minutes. Alright, so our first panel
15 is Joe Bello, Derek Coy, Lisa Carling, and Vishal
16 Balani. You can step up to the table. And again,
17 before you testify, please state your name. Vishal?
18 Would you like to start off? Sure. So let's go to
19 Lisa. I read left to right.

20 LISA CARLING: good now? Okay. Whoa.
21 My name is Lisa Carling. I am Director of
22 Accessibility Programs at TDF. Many thanks to Chairs
23 Holden and Dinowitz and members of the Higher
24 Education and Veterans Committees for providing me
25 this opportunity to testify. TDF is the nation's

2 largest performing arts service organization
3 dedicated to the audience. Previously known as
4 Theater Development Fund, TDF brings the power of the
5 performing arts to everyone, including veterans. TDF
6 theater going program began in 2017 thanks to support
7 from the Committee on Veterans. Fast facts since
8 then: distribution of 4,000 tickets, discounted
9 tickets, to city veterans and their families;
10 admission at no cost to 53 different Broadway and
11 off-Broadway shows; accessibility accommodations for
12 any vets with vision, hearing, mobility loss, or
13 PTSD; talk backs after each performance when
14 possible; ticket distribution partnerships with over
15 50 veterans service organizations throughout the five
16 boroughs. CUNY Office of Veterans Affairs is our
17 largest ticketing partner. CUNY has distributed 550
18 program tickets to some of its roughly 3,000 student
19 vets since our program began, and giving them the
20 opportunity to enjoy some of Broadway's most popular
21 shows like the Lion King, the Book of Mormon, as well
22 as Radio City Christmas Spectacular around the
23 holidays. During the pandemic, with free Broadway HD
24 memberships, Luis Soltero [sp?] from Lehman College
25 and Rob Timmins [sp?] from New York City Tech

2 moderated discussions for us, keeping the veterans
3 community connected, especially the CUNY events. We
4 appreciate the Committee on Veterans' support for our
5 programs here, and I hope you can join us for one of
6 our spring shows. But the decreased funding had
7 direct impact on over 200 veterans, many of them CUNY
8 vets. Their being our largest partner with its long
9 wait list for tickets. We sincerely hope you could
10 please restore the 22,000 cut from our allocation so
11 we can help bring more of the healing power of the
12 performing arts to our city's veterans, especially
13 CUNY vets. In closing, here's feedback from one of
14 our program participants, "My mother recently passed
15 away from cancer, and as a female veteran, the
16 Beetlejuice play really helped me put my emotions and
17 thoughts into a better perspective. As a female
18 veteran, theater is a perfect place, even on a Sunday
19 afternoon to let go, enjoy the moment, feel like part
20 of a community, and let go of negative emotions and
21 grow." End of quote, thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Alright. Vishal?
23 Alright. You're not going first, don't worry.

24 VISHAL BALANI: I'm not. I am not going
25 first anymore. Alright, I'm going to try to keep

1 this as very short as possible. Thank you. My name
2 is Vishal Balani. I'm a resident of Floral Park in
3 the Queens section, so northeast Queens. Thank you
4 to the Committee Chairs and Council Members, staff,
5 and the veterans who are here today. Today's hearing
6 on veterans hits very close to home. A valued mentor
7 and former tennis teaching colleague of mine served
8 in active duty during Vietnam, and asked me not to
9 share his age during today's hearing, but completed
10 his bachelor's degree over the recourse of six years,
11 over 15 years after the completion of his service. I
12 cannot add insight with regards to veteran's services
13 in exceeds of what has been presented here today by
14 the many thoughtful speakers who have proceeded me.
15 I'm here today to note my belief that-- and that of
16 many others in the City of New York, that integrity
17 and ethics must underpin debate about those
18 challenging issues that we face. I have the
19 misfortune of living in New York's Third
20 Congressional District, which means that as of
21 January 3rd, my representative in Congress has been
22 Mr. George Santos, also known as Anthony Devoler,
23 among many other aliases. It would not be a stretch
24 to say that this individual who fabricated among many
25

2 other things the idea that he attended both Baruch
3 College and New York University, would not be suited
4 to au pine on any of the issues in front of the
5 committee today. However, one of his strongest
6 supporters and someone who still refuses to call for
7 his resignation continues to sit on this panel today,
8 an attempt at normalcy that is profoundly shameful.
9 Councilwoman Vickie Paladino campaigned vociferously
10 with Mr. Santos and was one of his earliest
11 supporters. Other low lights of this parade of
12 horrors include fictional attributions of his
13 grandparents escaped from the horrors of the
14 holocaust, his mother's death on 9/11 and the
15 subsequent death of hers due to 9/11-related cancer,
16 and the disgusting theft of 3,000 dollars from a
17 disabled homeless veteran that was designated for
18 life-saving surgery for his service dog. Sapphire,
19 the veteran's longtime friend passed away, driving
20 the veteran Richard Ostoff [sp?] to experience severe
21 suicidal ideation and forced him to panhandle to
22 raise money for cremation. This seemingly conscious-
23 shocking fact has not phased Councilwoman Paladino.
24 At a meeting of the group of which she is President,
25 the White Stone Republican Club, she doubled down on

2 her support for Mr. Santos, declaring that she wanted
3 him to remain in office because of her belief that a
4 Republican candidate would not be able to win the
5 seat in a hypothetical special election, referring to
6 Ms. Ednis Fried [sp?]. Anything less than a call for
7 his resignation indicates complicity and comfort with
8 his fraud, grift, and web of lies. Issues are not
9 given the deference and respect that they deserve
10 when compromised voices are able to masquerade as
11 legitimate. It is easy to vocalize support for police
12 and military, but one's true feelings are betrayed
13 when they question, as she has done, whether the
14 sedition of the January 6th attack on the US Capitol
15 was bad, and post adoringly that former President
16 Trump who called service members who died in combat
17 "losers and suckers." I could go into more details,
18 but the salient point is how can this individual be
19 trusted to handle the pressing issues today?

20 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you so much.
21 Thank you.

22 VISHAL BALANI: Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Derek Coy? Is
24 your-- sorry, you can start the time over. Is the mic
25 on?

2 DEREK COY: Check. How's that?

3 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: It's good.

4 DEREK COY: Thank you Chairperson Holden,
5 Chairperson Dinowitz and members of the Committees
6 for the opportunity to testify today. My name is
7 Derek Coy and I'm a Senior Program Officer at the New
8 York Health Foundation. I'm also a former Sergeant
9 in the United States Marine Corps, veteran of the
10 Iraq War, and as a proud graduate of the City College
11 of New York, a product of the CUNY system.
12 Understanding in addressing the health-related needs
13 of New York's veteran population is a fundamental
14 part of my role at the foundation, so I hope that
15 both my personal and professional experiences provide
16 insight to guide and inform the work and knowledge of
17 these committees. The overwhelming majority of
18 veterans rather transition rather smoothly out of the
19 service and back into communities like New York City
20 once their time on active duty has come to an end.
21 Yet, many veterans like me do face unique challenges
22 after transitioning out of the military that can
23 intensify if left unaddressed, including issues with
24 mental health, substance abuse, financial
25 instability, and suicidal ideation. Student veterans

2 are of course no exception. In my written testimony
3 I shared more background information on the
4 characteristics of student veterans, statistics about
5 suicide and mental health and some of the promising
6 programs in place to meet the needs of student
7 veterans. I want to use my time here today to tell
8 you more about my own experience as a student veteran
9 at City College. There was no singular cause or
10 solution to my challenges as a student veteran. Years
11 of unaddressed trauma and substance abuse issues
12 rendered on-campus counseling resources inadequate.
13 They were simply ill-equipped for the complex
14 services I required. Delays in the GI Bill payments
15 that I received forced me to live my entire first
16 semester without income. So after constantly
17 choosing between paying rent, buying food, and
18 supporting my substance abuse in one of the most
19 expensive cities in the world, my mental health
20 worsened as I teetered on the brink of homelessness.
21 The task of seeking out individual services for each
22 issue and navigating resources while I was attempting
23 to further my education became an unbearable burden.
24 Had I had access to comprehensive coordinated
25 services in one location, my time as a student

2 veteran would have been drastically different.

3 Fortunately, things are much different today. New

4 York City's Department of Veterans Services operates

5 as a consolidated resource center. There are dozens

6 of community-based organizations student veterans can

7 access at no cost to them, which simply didn't exist

8 when I was in grad school, and we have a much better

9 understanding of the unique issues that veterans

10 face. But more work still needs to be done to ensure

11 that student veterans have access to the services

12 they need without feeling overwhelmed as they pursue

13 both higher education and improved health. First,

14 access to culturally competent services on campus is

15 paramount. We must meet veterans where they are.

16 Second, on-campus resources need to be able to

17 seamlessly refer veterans to physical and mental

18 health providers in the community if that's what they

19 prefer. And finally, providing access to peer

20 mentors when clinical services aren't required has

21 been proven effective and can greatly help veterans

22 if they need a trusted advisor who can help them

23 navigate student life and other challenges they may

24 encounter. It is my hope that I with help the

25 committee and other people testifying today can make

2 sure that veterans who choose to pursue higher
3 education will have it easier than those who came
4 before them, and I look forward to serving as a
5 resource for the important work that you all do to
6 ensure that that's the case. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I didn't even need
8 to reset the clock. You had the extra time to go.
9 Thank you, and thank you of course to you and your
10 family for your service and commitment to this
11 country. And last on this panel is Joe Bello.

12 JOE BELLO: Thank you. Thank you.
13 Chairman Holden, Dinowitz, members of the Veterans
14 and Higher Education Committee, thank you for giving
15 me the opportunity to testify. It's good to see you
16 all. As we know, CUNY is the third largest
17 university system and has oen of the most diverse
18 student bodies in the United States. Because of this,
19 one of the primary missions of CUNY is to serve as a
20 vehicle of upward mobility of the disadvantaged in
21 New York City. This is particularly relevant for
22 veterans. As we know, veterans tend to have high
23 earnings and lower unemployment than non-veterans
24 once their transition from active service is
25 complete. Higher education is a major part of that

transition. This year marks the 15th anniversary of the signing of the GI Bill into Federal Law, as well as the 10th anniversary of the CUNY Veterans Taskforce which was convened to address the needs of student veterans and examine CUNY's practice while developing recommendations to improve the experience for its student veterans. In its 2013 report, the taskforce acknowledged that CUNY was uniquely positioned to offer returning veterans an opportunity in higher education and stated that the number of veterans and military personnel applying and studying at CUNY was predicted to grow larger as the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan draw down. So why then doesn't CUNY today have better, equal, and a more robust support system for its student veterans? There are several reasons. As I've often said, CUNY is like a kingdom. The Chancellor sends its directors and policies to the nobility, which is the College Presidents. The colleges receive these directives, but unfortunately, dependent upon each president, we've seen over the past several years little has been accomplished depending on each campus. As a result, as I said in the Gotham Gazette article back in 2016, as a consequence, the more

student veterans in a community talk about those campuses that are providing the services, the more student veterans will only consider those that are. The more veterans struggle on colleges with minimal services, the higher their attrition and transfer rates will be. We see this now. We've been seeing this on campuses such as John Jay and the MCC which have robust services, resource partnerships and enrollment numbers of veterans in comparison to such colleges as Baruch which recently stated nobody does it better as a higher education institute, yet has not had a dedicated-only veterans services coordinator since the CUNY taskforce report back in 2013, or the gap in services for veterans-- and let me remind you, we just started the semester-- at City Tech, Medgar Evers, which currently don't have veterans coordinators. They might be in the process, but they didn't have a veteran's coordinator for those [inaudible]. Along with the unresolved issues back from 2016, when Project PROVE got involved, had no unresolved issues and no coordinator at La Guardia Community College. And just for the record, I worked at La Guardia Community College for almost 15 years, and I was the Director of the Veterans Upward Bound

2 Program at one time. This leads to one of the
3 fundamental problems with instituting policies to
4 provide services, the need for personnel to carry it.

5 It was testified today that the number of veterans
6 attending CUNY was increasing up until the pandemic,
7 but the number of staff at CUNY Central Office of
8 Veterans Affairs stayed at one person, not including
9 interns, until this just past November. Now with two
10 personnel, this continues to be unacceptable and a
11 strain on those working to provide information
12 regarding services and resources. I thought it was
13 very interesting that the Vice Chancellor needed
14 experts in the veteran's space, but she's been
15 overseeing COVA and has been there at CUNY for over
16 two years now. It also hinders CUNY's ability to
17 look in on the campuses to make sure they're carrying
18 out policies and have adequate baseline services for
19 student veterans. So because of the lack of
20 personnel and the lack of oversight, CUNY colleges
21 are a hodge-podge of services for veterans with some
22 campuses doing well and others having the bare
23 minimum, all based on each campus Administration's
24 regard towards veterans. This makes the Council's
25 veterans initiative funding to CUNY for its veterans

2 peer-to-peer across the campuses so important,
3 because you could imagine and you heard testimony
4 today what the campuses would look like without that
5 initiative funding.

6 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Can you try to
7 wrap it up. The time is--

8 JOE BELLO: I'm wrapping it up right now.

9 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

10 JOE BELLO: So the cost of living--
11 again, as the Commissioner testified, the money is
12 provided over 600 million in federal funding to the
13 local economy through the GI Bill. however, the Pugh
14 Research Center recently released a study that showed
15 living costs have become the dominant component of a
16 cost of attending college, as was said here, older
17 veterans juggling financial institutions, higher cost
18 of housing, caring for other family members, and even
19 childcare. As a result the Pugh Institute has stated
20 that many are now having to borrow or take loans to
21 cover living expenses. As a result of the pandemic
22 and the lack of affordable housing and the cost of
23 living, many active duty members and student veterans
24 are choosing to find better, more affordable, and
25 friendly states to come home. In 2016, student

2 veterans came before this council to share what was
3 going on in their campuses and what services were
4 needed. They wrote an op-ed in the Gotham Gazette.
5 I've enclosed it with testimony as it is still
6 relevant today as it was then. In conclusion, as we
7 begin the Fiscal Year 24 budget, more resources and
8 funding need to be devoted towards CUNY's Central
9 Office of Veterans Affairs so they can better support
10 student veterans and make sure all the campus
11 services meet a standard of service. I would also
12 propose Chancellor Rodriguez create a new veterans
13 taskforce to review the past decade, see what has
14 worked, what has changed, and what we need in the
15 future, and I would recommend not funding Project
16 PROVE. We funded them for five years, and as the
17 former Citywide Veterans Director, I have some
18 insights on that. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you, Joe. I
20 have a couple of questions. now, you know, I like
21 the fact that, you know, that we should have veterans
22 offices at every campus, on every campus at CUNY.
23 That is, to me, paramount. And I think, you know, we
24 are talking to increasing the veterans budget for
25 multiple agencies, and I like the idea of-- you know,

2 talking to the Chancellor and I would definitely
3 commit to that from my committee, to fire off a
4 letter saying that any increase in support from my
5 committee for funding should have dedicated strings
6 attached almost, I would say, that you must create an
7 office in-- a veterans office in every campus, on
8 every campus, and that it will increase funding only
9 if that happens, and I think that's a very, very good
10 idea, and I think nobody could disagree with that,
11 especially in CUNY. If we're going to back our
12 veterans, then let's be consistent. Let's not have--

13 JOE BELLO: [interposing] Yeah, again,
14 this goes back to what I-- like, recently Councilman
15 Dinowitz had an anti-Semitism hearing, and you know,
16 there was pressure on the Chancellor, so the
17 Chancellor made the pressure on the Presidents to
18 make sure that the policies and regulations regarding
19 anti-Semitism were in place and carried out. We need
20 the same thing for veterans.

21 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Just a question on
22 my own education. On Baruch, let's say, what-- have
23 they changed Presidents or what happened?

24 JOE BELLO: They changed Presidents, but
25 even during the changing of Presidents they haven't--

2 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [interposing] It's
3 still consistent?

4 JOE BELLO: Yeah, it's still consistent.
5 What they did was-- Vice Chancellor Maybank's
6 predecessor tried to put a leads and veterans person,
7 leads being disabilities, and the work was just so
8 overwhelming. That individual wind up quitting and
9 they wound up never replacing that person in that
10 office. And again, there should be a standard
11 veterans coordinator and a standard person that's
12 doing the financial aid, not some of these
13 counselors-- some of these coordinator's directors
14 are doing that as well.

15 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay. Derek, I'd
16 like to talk to you, give you my card after the
17 hearing, and just I'd like to pick your brains,
18 because obviously you have-- you have some very, very
19 good insight as to how we can improve certainly
20 helping our veterans inside the college campus. So,
21 please--

22 DEREK COY: [interposing] Be happy to be a
23 resource, absolutely.

24 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Yeah, if you have--
25 yeah, certainly. And Lisa, the arts saved me. I came

2 from the arts, and it gave me purpose. It gave me a
3 focus, and it made me feel that I was pretty good,
4 like I was-- I had something to offer, and that's how
5 I had a career in the arts, so I understand that, and
6 we will focus on definitely restoring funding and
7 then some. Because I believe-- going to a play can
8 change your life, and I see you have some background
9 in the theater because of your testimony, the way you
10 did that. But thank you so much for your testimony.
11 We'll talk also about that. Thank you. Thank you,
12 all.

13 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. Our
14 next panel is on Zoom, and the panel is Adriana
15 Alfred [sp?], Renee Cabrera Gonzales [sp?], Doctor
16 Linnea Vaurio, and Alex Stein was signed up, though.
17 I'm not sure they're on Zoom anymore. Okay, if you
18 can unmute Adriana Alfred.

19 ADRIAN ALFRED: Yes [inaudible] Can
20 anybody hear me clearly?

21 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: We hear you great.

22 ADRIAN ALFRED: Okay, I just want to say
23 greetings to the Chairman, the Committee Chair, and
24 especially Lisa, Vice Chancellor, and all the
25 Committee Members, and all the veteran students. My

name is Adrian Alfred. I'm a retired Army veteran. I'm a graduate student from Central Texas College, Kingsborough Community College, and I'm currently at John Jay College. I've-- I don't want to-- what I want to say, I do appreciate every conversation when it comes towards veterans, both in the military and out of the military. And I also want to compliment Ms. Lisa for the great work she's doing and allowing me to be a part of the CUNY Central Office, the Peer Mentorship of Students. A little bit of what I do as a Peer Mentor, I'm responsible for 125 students in Kingsborough Community College. And the important work that Peer Mentors do helps these students to stay in college and feel welcomed home [sic]. As one of the gentleman mentioned, I don't remember his name, with veterans communicating with other veterans it brings a sense of welcomeness and calm to these veterans. We are on a level where we can communicate with them. We are military members. We know how to speak to them and how to articulate in certain situations. And the Peer Mentor program is very important because sometimes we don't only look at these students as just regular. We look at as one of our own, and as I said earlier, we put our life on

2 the line for our country and we love our country and
3 we're more than happy to do it again. So, we bring
4 the attitude now in civilian work, the way we treat
5 students and veterans the same way. As simple as
6 calling a veteran student and finding out how they're
7 doing in college, how are they doing with a
8 professor, how are they financially, do they have a
9 good amount of resources, and are they-- if they need
10 something, like any apartment housing? These-- all
11 these information is being provided by the CUNY
12 Office of Veterans Affairs. Sometimes we have
13 Wellness Wednesdays where speakers from all cross of
14 life where there's different veteran agency comes and
15 speaks about suicide, financial management, and
16 resources. These are important things that keep the
17 veteran going, right? So, I just want to-- in
18 closing, I just want to say that I'll be greatly and
19 highly appreciative if the Veteran Peer Mentor
20 program could be more funded along with CUNY Office
21 of Veteran Affairs, because the work we do for
22 veterans and for our community is extremely great.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

24 ADRIAN ALFRED: Thank you. I've seen it
25 with students. Thank you very much.

2 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. Renee
3 Cabrera Gonzales on Zoom.

4 RENEE CABRERA GONZALES: Yes, good
5 afternoon Chairmans [sic] and Council Members. My
6 name is Renee Cabrera Gonzales. I am a United States
7 Marine Corps veteran. I would like to thank the
8 Council today for the opportunity to testify today on
9 behalf of TDF Veteran Theatergoing Program. I'm
10 testifying today to discuss the impact that TDF
11 Veteran Theatergoing Program has on the veteran
12 community. First, I would like to start off with my
13 personal experience and the joy this program has
14 provided to me and my family. For one, for many
15 years the thought of me going to a Broadway show was
16 non-existent. It was until recently I was awarded
17 with some tickets to see Aladdin on Broadway, that I
18 grew in greeter interest in the overall experience.
19 I was able to share the experience with my family.
20 Wow, I have never-- did I experience something so
21 wonderful. The visual sets, great acting, music, and
22 followed the storyline to the T. It even brought my
23 wife tears of joy. Not to forget the other veterans
24 that were in attendance, some familiar faces and new
25 ones to me. It was a great time thanks to TDF.

2 Looking around the theater, it filled me joy to see
3 how many veterans were in attendance, their smiling
4 faces, and how they connected with others in the
5 room. I say this is an essential program for
6 veterans to help them get out of their comfort zone
7 and reconnect with society. It's true that veterans
8 do have a tendency to be introverts and shy away from
9 society because of fear of what they may do or how
10 they feel around the general public or crowds. This
11 is usually due to the mental, physical disabilities
12 which can be provoked by just about almost anything.
13 Not to forget, there is a portion of the vast
14 population of veterans that can't acclimate to
15 civilian life so easily due to their physical and
16 mental disabilities such as PTSD, depression,
17 anxieties, withdrawing form society because they have
18 the feeling of not fitting in, or being understood.
19 These programs help to bridge the gap between
20 veterans and his feelings, the connection one gets
21 from another person who has the same interest as
22 oneself. This is a great way to help veterans
23 reconnect with the general public, get to know a
24 different side of views on culture be a great story
25 teller. I firsthand know that veterans may need

2 extra attention and guidance in different subjects
3 and life challenges. In my work, I too am a veteran
4 peer mentor at Lehman College. At Lehman College
5 CUNY, one of my main roles is to guide and help the
6 veteran community with one-on-one sessions, direct
7 education assisting, mentoring, helping with
8 resources, programs, anything available to them, and
9 my resource is given to them. You know, a fear of
10 crowds is common within the veterans. The Veteran
11 Theatregoing Program can help diffuse the issue by
12 bringing people from different backgrounds together
13 with music, acting,--

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
15 expired.

16 ADRIAN ALFRED: And thank--

17 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing] If
18 you can please wrap it up. Thank you.

19 ADRIAN ALFRED: Yes. In conclusion, this
20 is why programs such as the Veterans Theatregoing
21 Program needs funding to continue the work to provide
22 to the veteran community. It's one of those programs
23 that helps open us veterans up to new views and new
24 experiences. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you so much.
3 I have to jump on the bandwagon, too. You know, I
4 taught in arts schools for high school kids, and I've
5 seen the transformative power of the theater and the
6 arts. So I want to thank you for your testimony, and
7 of course, for the work that TDF does. Next we have
8 Doctor Linnea Vaurio, and I apologize in advance if
9 that pronunciation of your name is off.

10 LINNEA VAURIO: That's actually exactly
11 right.

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Oh.

13 LINNEA VAURIO: So, nice to meet you. I
14 am Linnea Vaurio. I'm a clinical Neuropsychologist
15 at the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Center at NYU
16 Langone Health. Good afternoon Chairs Holden and
17 Dinowitz and members of the New York City Committee
18 on Veterans and the Committee on Higher Education.
19 The Cohen Military Family Center was established just
20 over 10 years ago with the goal to fill gaps in
21 mental health services available to veterans and
22 their families in the New York City area. My
23 testimony today will aim to provide insight into the
24 types of challenges faced by student veterans and how
25 we at the Military Family Center serve NYC student

veterans. We are grateful to the City Council for its funding support for our center and my position specifically, and we urge the Council to consider further supplementing citywide capacity to meet ongoing demand for supportive services for student veterans. As the City Council is aware, some student veterans are experiencing challenges in successfully pursuing their academic plans after military discharge. At times, daily difficulties in completing school work can be due to mental health conditions such as PTSD, a condition frequently represented in the population. Challenges can also include difficulties originate after experiencing a traumatic brain injury or due to previously undiagnosed developmental disorder such as ADHD or learning disorders. The specific challenges may first arise or become apparent when a veteran returns to an academic environment and has new demands to manage. Often times, veterans are unaware of how to request help or hesitant to do so. It is essential that we as providers are empathetic and familiar with appropriate and accessible services. While the benefits offered by the GI Bill offer potentially life-changing access to higher education

opportunities, the challenges of mental health conditions or learning disorders may present barriers to veterans' success. Often individuals who are struggling academically are told that these challenges are not mental health-related and that typically avenues for support are not available to them, leaving a gap in services. At this point, student veterans facing these challenges are often referred to private providers in the community which can be cost-prohibitive, or these individuals may not be culturally competent with veterans' experiences. Very often veterans who are not able to access evaluations in the New York City area go without such support services. With support from the City Council's discretionary funds, our center has been filling this gap in care by providing comprehensive neuropsychological evaluations and treatment to veterans free of charge. Many of the veterans seeking support through this program are students and our model lifts common barriers to this type of care and support, and therefore, allows veterans to focus more specifically on achieving their higher education goals. A comprehensive neuropsychological evaluation can serve to identify cognitive and emotional

2 struggles that a veteran is experiencing secondary
3 to--

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
5 expired.

6 LINNEA VAURIO: to these conditions I
7 mentioned before, and with these accommodations they
8 are more likely to achieve their goals professionally
9 and academically in order to remain in New York City.
10 So thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

11 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you, Linnea,
12 and by the way, you have a marvelous program we
13 became aware of when I became the Chair of Veterans.
14 And I don't want to put you on the spot, but your
15 great work-- I know you had a waiting list, right?
16 You still do have a waiting list? How many veterans
17 did it grow, is it up to now?

18 LINNEA VAURIO: That's difficult to
19 estimate, because we have been meeting to refer out.
20 On my individual waiting list there's at least, you
21 know, 10 people that are waiting to get these
22 services and many of whom are really kind of
23 desperate to get accommodations in school, but in our
24 clinic waiting list they would have to defer to our
25 clinic director. We can certainly get you those

2 numbers for services more generally for veterans and
3 families.

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Let's meet about
5 funding, additional funding that you could help all
6 veterans that request it. We'll schedule something
7 soon. Thank you so much for your testimony.

8 LINNEA VAURIO: Wonderful. Thank you.
9 Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Is there anybody
11 else on Zoom who wishes to testify? If so, please
12 use the raise hand function. I'll turn it over to
13 Chair Holden.

14 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Well, thank you
15 everyone, both remote and in-person here. Excellent,
16 excellent hearing. I think I've learned a lot and I
17 think we have certainly an agenda now that's been
18 expanded thanks to CUNY's testimony which was
19 extensive, and I appreciate that, and also DVS,
20 thanks Commissioner and your staff for the great work
21 you do. And all the advocates that are here and
22 remotely, excellent, excellent testimony, and thank
23 you all.

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I would like to
25 note that written testimony which will be reviewed in

full by committee staff may be submitted to the record up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing by emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov. I would also like to thank DVS, CUNY for all the witnesses who testified. To my co-chair Holden for your years of service in elected life, at CUNY bettering the lives of people here in New York City, and as was mentioned, there's certainly an agenda, not just budgetary but functionally how are we going to help our veteran students. And I know we dived into that today and there's still a lot more work to do, and I look forward to working with co-chair Holden, with DVS and with CUNY to ensure that our veterans are getting the services and support that they have earned with their service to this country. With that I close out the hearing. Thank you.

[gave]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date February 9, 2023