

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

----- X

December 20, 2023
Start: 12:18 p.m.
Recess: 12:34 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 BROADWAY - COMMITTEE ROOM, 16TH
FLOOR

B E F O R E: Robert F. Holden, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Joann Ariola
Sandy Nurse
Vickie Paladino
Kristin Richardson Jordan

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Mercedes Narcisse
Eric Dinowitz
Jumaane Williams, Public Advocate

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning. This is a
3 microphone check for the Committee on Veterans.
4 Today's date is December 20, 2023, located in the
5 16th Floor Committee Room, recording done by Pedro
6 Lugo.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Welcome to the New York
8 City hybrid hearing on the Committee on Veterans.

9 Please silence all electronic devices.

10 Chair, we are ready to roll.

11 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: [GAVEL] Good
12 afternoon, and welcome to today's hearing. I am
13 Council Member Robert Holden, Chair of the Veterans
14 Committee. Today, our Committee will hold a vote on
15 Proposed Intro. number 1237-A sponsored by Council
16 Member Dinowitz, a local law in relation to the
17 collection of demographic data on veterans, Proposed
18 Intro. 1239-A, sponsored by Council Member Lee, a
19 local law related to community outreach and
20 engagement on mental health resources for veterans,
21 and Proposed Intro. 1241-A sponsored by Councilmember
22 Narcisse, a local law related to an annual report on
23 the provision of mental health services by City
24 agency to veterans, Proposed Intro. 1244-A sponsored
25 by the Public Advocate, a local law in relation to an

2 online resource tool and pamphlet for veterans, and
3 Resolution 837, sponsored by myself, calling on the
4 New York State Legislature and the Governor to sign
5 S4717 and A3149 to authorize the New York State
6 Department of Veteran Services to provide eligible
7 veterans with financial assistance for the
8 purchasing, training, and upkeep of service dogs and
9 emotional support dogs for, again, our veterans.

10 The legislation being voted on today
11 represents the second stop in the New York City
12 Council's Mental Health Roadmap focusing on our
13 veterans. This package is a first step toward
14 ensuring that New York City veterans receive the care
15 and support they deserve.

16 At this time, I would like to acknowledge
17 my Colleagues who are here today, Council Member
18 Richardson Jordan, Council Member Paladino, Council
19 Member Ariola, and Council Member Narcisse to talk
20 about her bill.

21 Also, I would like to thank the Committee
22 Staff who worked to prepare this hearing, David
23 Romero, to my right, Legislative Counsel, and Ross
24 Goldstein, Finance Analyst, and finally, my Staff,
25 Daniel Kurzyna, Chief-of-Staff.

2 I'll now turn it over to Council Member
3 Narcisse who will talk about her legislation.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you,
5 Chair, for the opportunity to speak to about this
6 bill. This is so important.

7 Our veterans have served our nation with
8 distinction, and it's our duty to ensure that they
9 all receive the support and the service they deserve
10 and earned. Suicide and mental health distress
11 disproportionately affect veterans in the United
12 States, and recent studies show that more than half
13 of all veterans experiencing a mental health
14 condition and not receive timely treatment. An annual
15 report by the Commissioner of Veteran Services will
16 help us better understand the needs of our veterans,
17 thus being able to provide them with the best
18 possible mental health services while improving their
19 overall quality of life. I can sign on it as a nurse
20 saying that I have seen our veterans, they spend
21 their time, their energy, their passion, even expose
22 themselves to so many things for us, for our freedom,
23 so we owe it to them, so therefore, I am so happy to
24 be here with you all, and I hope my Colleagues
25 support, and I'm looking forward for your vote. Thank

2 you, and I vote aye. Sorry. I'm so excited. I'm
3 already voting.

4 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you. You should
5 be excited. It's very good, and we have to actually
6 do more to support our veterans so I appreciate
7 certainly the bills here today.

8 I'll now turn it over to the Clerk to
9 call a roll, and we're going to hold it open for the
10 Public Advocate. Is Council Member Dinowitz coming?
11 Okay. So we're going to hold the vote open and wait
12 for their comments after we do this initial vote.
13 Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE CLERK DISTEFANO: Matthew
15 DiStefano, Committee Clerk. Committee on Veterans
16 roll call vote, all items are coupled. Chair Holden.

17 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: I vote aye.

18 COMMITTEE CLERK DISTEFANO: Richardson
19 Jordan.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDSON JORDAN: I vote
21 aye on all.

22 COMMITTEE CLERK DISTEFANO: Ariola.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Aye on all.

24 COMMITTEE CLERK DISTEFANO: Paladino.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Aye on all.

2 COMMITTEE CLERK DISTEFANO: By a vote of
3 four in the affirmative, zero in the negative, and no
4 abstentions, the items have been adopted.

5 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Okay, we're going to
6 hold the vote open for two other Council Members who
7 want to report on their bills. Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE CLERK DISTEFANO: Continuation
9 of roll call vote. Council Member Nurse.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: I vote aye.

11 COMMITTEE CLERK DISTEFANO: Okay, the vote
12 is now five in the affirmative, zero in the negative,
13 and no abstentions.

14 CHAIRPERSON HOLDEN: Thank you.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Good afternoon.
16 I'm proud to be here today to talk about my bill and
17 Stop Number Two of the City Council's Mental Health
18 Roadmap, and in this stop we were talking about
19 mental health support for our veterans. My bill,
20 number 1237, will require any City agency to include
21 demographic questions related to veteran status on
22 forms for individuals seeking social services. This
23 bill will provide two main benefits. First, it will
24 better enable City agencies to connect veterans with
25 critical services most narrowly tailored to their

2 needs. Second, it will help us better understand the
3 number of veterans struggling in our city. We all
4 know that veterans are suffering. Many of them are
5 suffering from poverty, with mental health issues,
6 some with long term physical health issues. What we
7 do not know, however, is exactly how many of our
8 veterans are living with these hardships, who exactly
9 they all are, or where they are. With this
10 Introduction, we will be able to identify those in
11 need without impeding on their right to privacy as
12 all disclosures are voluntary. It is time that we
13 resolve the crisis of veterans' mental being and
14 remedy our nation's and our city's failures.
15 Introduction 1237 is one small step in achieving
16 that, which is why I urge all my Colleagues to sign
17 on to this important piece of legislation. I would
18 like to thank Chair Holden for the opportunity to
19 speak today, for hearing the bill, as well as Speaker
20 Adams for her leadership in developing this important
21 initiative, the Mental Health Roadmap. Thank you.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDSON JORDAN: Okay,
23 we're going to hold it open awaiting the Public
24 Advocate.

2 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: Thank you so
3 much. My name is Jumaane Williams, and I'm the Public
4 Advocate for the City of New York. I thank Chair
5 Holden and the Members of the Committee on Veteran
6 Affairs for holding this vote.

7 Transitioning to civilian life can be
8 difficult for our veterans, many who upon coming home
9 face heightened suicide rates, increased drug and
10 alcohol abuse, and PTSD stemming from traumatic
11 events experienced while in the military, including
12 violent combat and sexual assault. The New York City
13 Department of Veterans Services, or DVS, connects our
14 city's veterans to a variety of resources and
15 services, all tailored to meet the needs, but despite
16 our best efforts to support these individuals, data
17 suggests that some veterans are unlikely to
18 immediately access the resources and services
19 available to them, if they're even aware of them. In
20 2022, more than half of veterans experiencing mental
21 illness did not receive treatment in the previous
22 year, and more than 90 percent of those with
23 substance use disorder did not receive treatment. We
24 need to ensure that veterans know about these
25 services. This is why we are voting on Intro. 1244

2 today, a bill that would facilitate outreach to
3 veterans seeking assistance and maximize DVS' limited
4 resources by enabling local elected officials,
5 community boards and offices and other social
6 services agencies to assist veterans seeking services
7 by centralizing information in one place.

8 I'd like to also thank my Colleagues in
9 the City Council for sponsoring this bill, and thank
10 my Staff for working on this legislation, Veronica
11 Aveis, Chief Deputy Public Advocate for Policy; Rosie
12 Mendez, Director of Legislation and Policy; Solomon
13 Acevedo, Deputy Public Advocate for Housing and
14 Health Equity; Cerima Olivares, Legislative and
15 Policy Associate. Thank you so much and I hope
16 everyone voted aye. Thank you for staying, Council
17 Member. I appreciate it.

18 COMMITTEE CLERK DISTEFANO: Final vote,
19 five in the affirmative, zero in the negative, and no
20 abstentions.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDSON JORDAN:
22 Awesome, so I now call this committee meeting to a
23 close. [GAVEL]

24

25

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 December 23, 2023