

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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May 13, 2014  
Start: 10:23 a.m.  
Recess: 10:30 a.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers  
City Hall

B E F O R E: ERIC A. ULRICH  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Alan N. Maisel  
Andrew Cohen  
Fernando Cabrera  
Paul A. Vallone

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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Good Morning. I am Council Member Eric Ulrich, Chair of the Council's Committee on Veterans. Today, we are voting on Resolution 159, a resolution in support of Senate Bill 2182, the Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act. Introduced in the United States Senate early this year by Senator John Walsh of Montana. The SAV Act would extent VA healthcare for veterans from five to fifteen years, review wrongful discharges, and foster a greater collaboration between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense to ensure a seamless transition of care for our men and women in uniform. In our April hearing, this Committee reviewed the SAV Act, explored the greater mental health issues facing veteran return... and returning service members, and heard testimony from veterans' service organizations, mental health subject matter experts and other stake holders on a range of topics and policy concerns. We had a very constructive exchange and I am acting on some of those issues... this Committee is acting on some of those issues that were raised at that hearing.

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2 New York City is home to roughly  
3 200,000 veterans and many more service members will  
4 be leaving active duty, and returning home to the  
5 boroughs in the subsequent months and years ahead.  
6 Given existing demand in this looming reality, New  
7 York City must ensure that sufficient program  
8 services and policies are in place to meet current  
9 mental health challenges and issues facing the post  
10 9-11 veterans are now experiencing.

11 After April's hearing, the Committee  
12 has a strong understanding of what steps the City  
13 needs to take on this front, moving forward. With  
14 an estimated twenty two veterans dying each day by  
15 suicide, and many more grappling daily with the  
16 complex mental health challenges that stay well  
17 beyond the years of service, we need to act now.  
18 The Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act is  
19 not perfect, but it is a solid starting point and  
20 draws much needed attention to the invisible scars  
21 and injuries that stay with veterans well beyond  
22 the years of service. I am confident today that  
23 this Committee will pass Resolution 159 and I  
24 deeply urge the members of Congress and the  
25 President to act on this important health

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2 initiative, and pass and sign the Suicide  
3 Prevention Act swiftly.

4 I want to acknowledge my colleagues,  
5 Council Members Vallone, and the bill's sponsor  
6 today, Council Member Cabrera of the Bronx, for  
7 joining us. And I want to recognize Council Member  
8 Cabrera for introducing this very important piece  
9 of legislation and I would ask him to say a few  
10 words on the bill before we vote, and then the  
11 Committee will vote on the matter at hand.

12 MR. CABRERA: Thank you so much, Mr.  
13 Chair. I want to take a moment to just express my  
14 dear appreciation because you have been a champion  
15 of... for veterans and your leadership is one in  
16 which you do it from the heart, and I appreciate  
17 your support on this Resolution, the Suicide  
18 Prevention for American Veterans Act. You know, it  
19 is one thing to lose American soldiers overseas,  
20 fighting for us, but it is another thing to lose  
21 them while on our ground to suicide. Having had a  
22 grandfather who contemplated suicide, he was a  
23 World War II veteran, this hits home first hand.  
24 The other day I was with a World War II veteran who  
25 is ninety-something years old and just to see that

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after, even from the forties, all the way to right now, talking about how war was hell. He couldn't stop, just saying that. I was just really... the impact that he felt, and having spoken to so many veterans to date, we... this is about saving lives. And, this is why we must urge Congress through this Resolution to provide the health that our veterans, desperately, desperately need. And, this is a good beginning. It is not the end of all, in regards to our veterans, but it is a good beginning and we must, again deal with these mental health issues because we are literally losing soldiers by the day. The numbers are clear where the rate of suicide among veterans are much higher than the general public. And, there are programs, there are ways to help our veterans in making this transition. It is taking us all of this year to really learn how to do this, but we must have the pathway for them to do so. So, with that, I encourage all of the Committee Members to vote on it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you,  
Council Member Cabrera.

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2 Council Member Vallone, do you want to  
3 speak on the bill before we vote?

4 MR. VALLONE: I just wanted to say thank  
5 you, and how proud I am to be a part of something  
6 as important as this. Twenty two veterans dying a  
7 day is unacceptable. So, anything we can do to  
8 help provide additional services and support they  
9 need in transitioning, back to civilian life, I am  
10 proud to stand with them. So, thank you today.

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. Seeing as  
12 there are no other members who will speak, but  
13 there are the members who will come, and I will  
14 make sure that the role will be kept open so that  
15 they will have the opportunity to vote.

16 Before we do go to the roll call, I do  
17 want to thank the Committee Council, Kelly Taylor,  
18 and also the Policy Analyst for the Committee,  
19 Redmond Haskins(sp?) for their work on drafting  
20 this Resolution. And, of course, I want to  
21 acknowledge and thank, again, the bill's primary  
22 sponsor, Council Member Cabrera of the Bronx.

23 And, I will ask the Clerk to call the  
24 roll.

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CLERK: Kevin Pin, Committee Clerk.

Clerk call the Committee on Veterans Reso. 159,  
Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act.

Council Member Ulrich?

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I vote aye.

CLERK: Cabrera?

MR. CABRERA: I vote aye.

CLERK: Vallone?

MR. VALLONE: Aye.

CLERK: Three in the affirmative, zero  
in the negative, no abstentions, the item has been  
adapted. Members, please sign the Committee  
report.

(pause)

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: The roll will  
remain open until 11:00 a.m., at which time it will  
be closed, but until 11:00 a.m., other members may  
come and speak on the bill, and vote.

(recess)

(BACKGROUND NOISES)

CLERK: Cohen?

MR. COHEN: Aye.

CLERK: That's it for four in the  
affirmative.

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(pause)

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: The hearing is  
adjourned.



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. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.



Date 05/16/2014