

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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February 10, 2015
Start: 1:38 p.m.
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm,
16th Fl.

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

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

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

Loree Sutton, MD

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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

Commissioner
Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs

Kristen Rouse
Representative
New York City Veterans Alliance

Jason Hansman
Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America

Fang Wong
Army Veteran
Former Commander, American Legion

Vince McGowan
Chairman
Veterans Advisory Board

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, good
afternoon. It is 1... [background comments] it is
1:35, [gavel] I am late; I apologize... [interpose,
background comment] exactly. [laughter] Exactly.

1
2 If I could catch my breath I could probably do it,
3 but anyway.

4 I first wanna recognize some of the
5 members of the Committee who are here and some guests
6 before we begin, because I know some of them have
7 other hearings -- Transportation -- and other
8 meetings that are going on, so they might need to be
9 excused. But I'll start on my far right, not
10 politically, but in seating, is.. [background comment]
11 exac... he's more to the center, is Council Member Alan
12 Maisel from Brooklyn; seated net to him is Council
13 Member Andrew Cohen of the Bronx; Council Member
14 Fernando Cabrera of the Bronx; Paul Vallone of
15 Queens; myself; Eric Bernstein, Committee Counsel,
16 and one of the bill's sponsors which we are
17 considering today and the Chairman Emeritus of this
18 Committee, my predecessor, Council Member Eugene of
19 Brooklyn.

20 Good afternoon; I am Council Member Eric
21 Ulrich, Chair of the City Council Veterans Committee.
22 Today we are here to consider three important bills
23 that will help the City better serve our veterans
24 population. First we will examine two bills designed
25 at strengthening the Veterans Advisory Board. I have

1
2 introduced Int. 0612, which will provide for greater
3 transparency and accountability of the Board's work
4 by ensuring that at least one public meeting is held
5 in each borough every year and that all public
6 meetings are broadcast for the benefit of those
7 unable to attend in person. MOVA, the Mayor's Office
8 of Veterans Affairs, will also be required to provide
9 advance notice of these meetings so veterans know
10 when they are taking place and can arrange to attend
11 as well.

12 Additionally, Council Member Mathieu
13 Eugene has introduced Int. No. 0611, which would
14 increase the number of board members from 9 to 11 and
15 require MOVA to provide each of them with a public
16 available email address. This will allow veterans
17 across the five boroughs to engage with members
18 directly to express concerns and give ideas on how
19 the City can improve services for veterans. Such
20 input is essential for the Board to fulfill its
21 responsibility of acting as the liaison between the
22 veterans community and the City government
23 representing them.

24 We will also hear Int. No. 0600,
25 introduced by my friend and colleague, Council Member

1 Paul Vallone. The data on veterans in New York City
2 is too often insufficient and this bill will require
3 agencies such as NYCHA, HPD, DCA and HRA, among
4 others, to report the number of veterans currently
5 benefiting from existing programs. While these
6 agencies do good work, this will help identify where
7 greater outreach is needed so that veterans receive
8 the services to which they are entitled.

10 As veterans and their families in New
11 York City continue to face many challenges, we wanna
12 make sure that no one who has bravely served our
13 country gets left behind. I know I've recognized the
14 members of this Committee and the guests who have
15 joined us, but Council Member Eugene asked to speak
16 before the Administration testifies, so with your
17 indulgence, Commissioner.. [crosstalk]

18 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: Thank you very
19 much, Mr. Chair and I will be very brief. I just
20 want to first and foremost thank and commend you, Mr.
21 Chair for bringing those wonderful legislation [sic]
22 for our hearing and I want to take the opportunity
23 also to thank and commend all the veterans for their
24 service to this nation and I think that we won't be
25 able, regardless of what we do, we won't be able to

1
2 pay you back for what you have done for this nation;
3 you deserve the best the nation can provide, the best
4 that the City can provide and I think that it is very
5 important that all of us from the New York City
6 Council and also from the nation, we should work hard
7 and together to do everything that we can do at least
8 to alleviate the challenges that you are facing,
9 because you made the utmost sacrifice defending our
10 liberty, secured our freedom for us to be able to
11 enjoy the benefit and the privileges that we are
12 enjoying today. It is an honor and a privilege for
13 me to be here and I had the privilege to serve as the
14 Chairman of the Veterans Committee and I commend also
15 the dedication of Chairman Eric for what he's doing
16 and for his efforts to make sure that our veterans be
17 served in the way that we can show respect and
18 gratitude to all of us. To all of you, thank you for
19 what you have done and may God bless you and I want
20 you to know that we appreciate you from this
21 committee, from the City Council, all of us, we owe
22 you a big deed of gratitude. Thank you very much.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you Council
24 Member Eugene and without further ado we're gonna
25 hear from Dr. Loree Sutton, the Commissioner of the

1
2 Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs. I'll ask Eric
3 Bernstein, the Committee Counsel, to administer the
4 oath.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell
6 the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth
7 in your testimony before this Committee and to
8 respond honestly to Council Member questions?

9 DR. LOREE SUTTON: I do. Good afternoon,
10 Chairman Ulrich and members of the Committee on
11 Veterans. My name is Loree Sutton and I serve as the
12 Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans
13 Affairs. I appreciate your leadership and look
14 forward to sharing my perspective about today's
15 topics -- Int. No. 0600, in relation to requiring the
16 reporting of veterans receiving agency services; Int.
17 No. 0611, in relation to membership of the Veterans
18 Advisory Board, and lastly, Int. No. 0619, in
19 relation to meetings of the Veterans Advisory Board.
20 I'll start by discussing Int. Nos. 0611 and 0619,
21 specifically pertaining to the Veterans Advisory
22 Board (VAB).

23 Since its initial Charter in 1987 under
24 Local Law 53, the VAB's role has become increasingly
25 defined as recognized by periodic updates in 2002, to

1
2 increase its membership from 5 to 9 members and in
3 2006, when leadership structure, meeting frequency
4 and annual reporting requirements were adopted.

5 The first VAB Chairman, General Richard
6 Colt, Commanding General of the 77th Regional
7 Readiness Command, was elected in 2007; Vince McGowan
8 succeeded General Colt in 2008 and continues to serve
9 in this position, providing a strong voice and
10 seasoned judgment on all issues affecting New York
11 City veterans. A former Marine, Vietnam combat
12 veteran and Vice County Commander, New York County
13 American Legion, Mr. McGowan founded the United War
14 Veterans Council in 1986 and the following year
15 assumed responsibility for the New York City Veterans
16 Day Parade, which by 2014, featuring nearly 300
17 groups and 24,000 participants, is now the nation's
18 largest.

19 As MOVA Commissioner, I regularly consult
20 with Mr. McGowan and have appreciated each of the VAB
21 member's expertise and recommendations on a variety
22 of key issues concerning New York City veterans and
23 their families. For example, my initial meeting with
24 Mr. McGowan turned into a two-hour riveting account
25 encompassing the history of New York City veterans,

1 starting from the formation of the 77th Infantry
2 Division at Fort Totten in 1917 and the subsequent
3 post World War I Victory Parade, honoring General
4 John J. Pershing in 1919; I might add that planning
5 for the 100th anniversary in 2019 is already in the
6 works, to later events during the 1980s, following
7 the return of Vietnam veterans rightly demanding more
8 representation and better treatment from City Hall
9 and up until the present, chronicling post 9/11
10 historical events and veterans returning from Iraq.

11 This initial journey through history
12 launched a productive working partnership that has
13 continued, resulting in myriad productive discussions
14 addressing such issues as veteran homelessness,
15 business ownership opportunities and predatory
16 lending practices. Thus, I greatly value the VAB's
17 repository of wisdom and experience, all of which
18 continues to inform my perspective at MOVA
19 Commissioner. The VAB 2014 Annual Report and Meeting
20 Minutes are publically available and provide details
21 of its actions and deliberations over the past year.
22 I am especially grateful to the current VAB, for its
23 willingness to continue serving in place through this
24 transition period as a new group of VAB members is
25

1 selected by the Mayor and Speaker. To preserve
2 continuity and institutional knowledge, the VAB voted
3 to approve the chairman and vice chairman remaining
4 as non-voting ex officio participants for a one year
5 term. This will go a long way towards ensuring a
6 strong and vibrant future VAB with enduring
7 importance to MOVA's mission.

8
9 Int. No. 0611 proposes two changes to the
10 VAB: 1. to add two additional members for a total of
11 11 members, 6 appointed by the Mayor and 5 by the
12 Speaker; 2. to create individual electronic mail
13 addresses that would be publicly available and
14 designated exclusively for work related to the VAB.
15 These changes would increase the level of community
16 representation and inclusion in forming VAB
17 deliberations, as well as to make VAB members more
18 accessible to the veterans community.

19 The only change I would offer is to grant
20 a period of 90 days for MOVA to implement the email
21 provision.

22 Int. No. 0619 proposes that the VAB
23 convene at least one public meeting in each of the
24 boroughs on an annual basis, for a minimum of five
25 meetings per year. MOVA would provide at least one

1
2 week of advance notice and distribute this
3 information to veteran organizations throughout the
4 City.

5 Enhancing public engagement with VAB
6 members and access to VAB meetings are important
7 measures that will strengthen the VAB's role,
8 credibility, outreach and impact. Increased
9 representation, engagement transparency and
10 accountability will reinforce essential bonds of
11 trust and collegiality upon which effective
12 consultation, collaboration, coordination and
13 negotiation depends.

14 I look forward to implementing these
15 changes as the VAB starts its new chapter of service,
16 building on the foundation of its past and leaning
17 forward to engage the strengths and needs of current
18 and future New York City veterans and their families.

19 Following the Committee hearing on the
20 VAB last fall, MOVA has been contacted by many
21 qualified individuals who expressed interest in being
22 considered for membership. In keeping with the
23 Mayor's core values and strategic vision, the new VAB
24 promises to represent a diverse range of relevant
25 domains and life experiences, including the public,

1 private and social private sectors, spanning
2 academia, business, arts, health and
3 entrepreneurship. New members will also be selected
4 based upon consideration of service in different
5 conflicts. MOVA has forwarded its recommendations to
6 the Mayor.

7
8 Int. No. 0600 is another important
9 legislative proposal, requiring systematic annual
10 reporting of veterans receiving City agency services
11 with respect to Mitchell-Lama Housing applications,
12 food vending permits, general vending licenses and
13 utilization of HUD-VASH vouchers.

14 Permanent housing and career employment
15 opportunities are vital to the health and well-being
16 of our veterans and their families. We look forward
17 to working with you to identify metrics that best
18 reflect services and benefits provided to veterans.
19 This data will provide a useful view that will inform
20 our actions, as well as provide insights for other
21 organizations whose service, support and advocacy
22 encompass these domains.

23 We recognize the need to improve tools
24 for identifying veterans and tracking needs, services
25 and outcomes. To this end, MOVA is working with

1
2 other City agencies to assess current service
3 delivery models, engagement strategies, community out
4 reach programs, as well as methods for recruiting,
5 hiring and retaining veterans to determine how best
6 practices can be effectively adopted.

7 Leading this effort is the work already
8 well underway to end veteran homelessness. As Mayor
9 de Blasio boldly pledged in last week's State of the
10 City Address, we will ensure that no veterans are
11 living in the streets and that all veterans have
12 access to permanent housing by the end of 2015. This
13 moral obligation to serve those who have served us
14 requires the commitment and creativity of all of us
15 who so proudly claim New York City as our hometown.
16 City leaders, real estate developers, service
17 providers, community advocates, fellow veterans and
18 citizens alike must step up to this challenge and we
19 will; failure is not an option.

20 In October of 2014, as a first step
21 toward the initiative, New York City signed on to the
22 Obama Administration's Mayor's Challenge to end
23 veteran homelessness in 2015. Today we have 1,000
24 homeless veterans in our city. Under the challenge
25 we are working to ensure that there are no homeless

1 veterans left to sleep on our streets and that every
2 veteran sheltered by the City or the VA has an
3 opportunity to move to permanent housing within 90
4 days. Some may have refused to move, but adequate
5 housing resources are in place. We also will have
6 programs in place, such as protection for veterans at
7 risk of eviction to prevent homelessness among our
8 veterans in the future, with guidance from HUD, the
9 VA and advocates for veterans and the homeless, the
10 New York City Continuum of Care, Veterans Task Force
11 and the City will finalize the work of determining
12 the housing needs of every homeless veteran, working
13 with advocates, owners of subsidized, supportive and
14 market rate housing and the City Council. The City
15 will enact and enforce veterans preferences in
16 existing subsidize and public housing and prioritize
17 veterans for a range of housing resources, including
18 HUD-VASH vouchers, Living in Community or the LINC
19 program, and placements in city-financed housing
20 units, including supportive housing. With the real
21 estate industry, the City will encourage landlords to
22 house our veterans with the assistance of these
23 rental subsidy resources and services. Intensive
24 case management and support services vital to the
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1 success of these programs are tailored to meet the
2 individual needs of veterans and their families.
3 With additional SSVF or Supportive Services for
4 Veterans and their Families, funding from the VA, the
5 City worked closely with grantees to develop an
6 initiative at the 30th Street Intake Center to
7 rapidly rehouse and return new and returning veterans
8 who might otherwise enter the shelter system. This
9 program began operating just last month, in January
10 of 2015.
11

12 The initiative will require outreach
13 through the media, as well as veterans groups and
14 other groups to which veterans turn to widely
15 publicize the resources being brought to bear by the
16 City and HUD. Outreach to landlords and real estate
17 organizations also will be necessary to help
18 landlords understand the programs and to publicize
19 positive outcomes related to their efforts. The City
20 will also work with the Continuum of Care and
21 Veterans Task Force to create a centrally managed,
22 coordinated assessment and housing placement system
23 for assessing and prioritizing veterans' needs,
24 organizing and identifying available resources, such
25 as apartments with veterans' preferences, placing

1 tenants in available units, comparing outcomes of
2 different efforts, assuring access to case management
3 and support services and tracking long-term retention
4 and functional outcomes of the veterans placed in
5 permanent housing. This system could then be brought
6 to scale to alleviate the larger issue of chronic
7 homelessness in New York City. Housing resources
8 available for veterans include the preventive
9 resources through the SSVF program and rental
10 assistance in the form of VASH vouchers from the VA,
11 already strictly for veterans, the LINC program, as
12 well as Section 8, existing housing for the most
13 vulnerable veterans. We will need landlords to make
14 units available for veterans with these rental
15 subsidies. The task force will create a housing plan
16 for every veteran in shelter by the end of February
17 2015. Implementation of this initiative has already
18 begun through the work of the Veterans Task Force.
19 Milestones will primarily include the results of
20 regular tracking, review of the utilization of
21 targeted housing resources and the effect on the
22 Veteran Point in Time Homeless Count. The ultimate
23 milestone to be reached through a continual decrease
24 in the number of homeless veterans is the end of
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2 veteran homelessness in New York City, as evidenced
3 in the 2016 Hope Count.

4 New York City's strategy is consistent
5 with best national practices, with a relentless focus
6 on removing barriers to permanent housing,
7 prioritizing chronically homeless veterans with HUD-
8 VASH and supportive housing options, coordinating
9 outreach efforts to locate, identify and engage
10 homeless veterans, targeting rapid rehousing
11 interventions, such as the VA SSVF program,
12 leveraging local housing and services for VA
13 ineligible veterans, increasing early detection and
14 access to preventive services to keep vulnerable
15 veterans and families housed and closely monitoring
16 progress towards the goal of ending veteran
17 homelessness, sustaining gains and applying lessons
18 learned with veterans to the larger homeless
19 population.

20 Clearly our commitment to ending veteran
21 homelessness comprises an essential component of MOVA
22 strategy during this next year. Other strategic
23 lines of effort include working with the First Lady
24 to provide a mental health roadmap for all New
25 Yorkers, including veterans and their families,

1
2 through a public health approach, empowering
3 individuals and championing community-based services
4 that enhance social support, dignity and
5 independence. MOVA will also assume a vital
6 coordination role to ensure that New York City
7 veterans and their families are connected to quality
8 public, private and community social services.

9 We will further our work with the Small
10 Business Services and other partners to fulfill the
11 action recommendations aimed at building increased
12 capacity for assisting veteran business owners in a
13 variety of domains -- networking, mentoring,
14 training, engagement, outreach and leadership to
15 start and grown their own businesses as well as to
16 pursue other career employment opportunities.

17 Finally, we seek to attract and engage
18 returning veterans and their families to choose the
19 City of New York as an ideal community in which they
20 can study, work, live, serve and thrive.

21 During the first three months of my
22 tenure as MOVA commissioner I engaged in over 200
23 public events throughout the five boroughs, getting a
24 chance to connect with and listen to a diverse range
25 of key stakeholders. This experience proved to be

1
2 invaluable, underscoring the enormous passion, care
3 and concern of the greater New York City veteran
4 community. Commencing this endeavor with an open
5 mind, eager to share ideas, pose questions,
6 understand perspectives and build social capital and
7 trust, I remain thankful to all who assisted,
8 invited, hosted or contacted me along the way, yet
9 for all of the activity during this blitz period, I
10 am heartened to know that our interaction will
11 continue, deepen and build upon this foundation.

12 Further, let me take a moment to
13 reinforce a truth known to me from the very beginning
14 of my MOVA journey, that I am one in a long series of
15 MOVA leaders who have put the needs of New York City
16 veterans and their families first, from ensuring
17 indigent, deceased veterans are buried with dignity
18 to counseling and connecting myriad veterans to
19 services and benefits, to intervening to prevent
20 wrongful evictions, power shutoffs and countless
21 other near calamities that come to our attention, to
22 engaging women veteran leaders as an overlooked
23 resource, to representing the Mayor at public events
24 and honoring veterans at every opportunity. MOVA's
25 door has long been open and always will be.

1
2 And now, charged to execute MOVA's
3 strategy in alignment with Mayor de Blasio's guiding
4 vision, I am energized and optimistic about the way
5 ahead. Yes, there is much work to be done, starting
6 with the imperative to make the best use of what we
7 have, paving the way for MOVA to advocate, educate,
8 engage, collaborate, and coordinate for the greater
9 good going forward. As you put it, Mr. Chairman,
10 there is always more we can do; our shared sense of
11 urgency, even impatience is perhaps our greatest
12 ally. Moving forward we will continue to work
13 together, find common ground, disagree without being
14 disagreeable, and make lasting changes on behalf of
15 New York City veterans and their families; there
16 simply is no greater privilege.

17 Thank you again for this opportunity to
18 meet with you today; as always, I look forward to
19 continuing our journey together on behalf of all New
20 York City veterans and their loved ones. At this
21 time I welcome any questions during the discussion
22 period. Again, thank you for your leadership.

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you,
24 Commissioner for your testimony and we're glad to see
25 you're in good health; we know that you couldn't be

1
2 with us at the last hearing, but your office did a
3 phenomenal job of representing the Administration. I
4 wanna thank the Administration as well for working
5 with the Council in a collaborative way to fine-tune
6 these bills [background comment] and this
7 legislation; there were a lot of meetings, not only
8 between the Administration and the Council, but also
9 with the existing members of the Veterans Advisory
10 Board in crafting this legislation, so I don't want
11 anyone to think for a second that the sponsors of
12 these bills proceeded on their own to try to reform
13 the VAB, we really engaged the stakeholders
14 throughout the process and we didn't have the hearing
15 until after we had the chance really to get the very
16 valuable input from the members of the VAB and the
17 advocates who have been very helpful all along, so I
18 wanna thank you.

19 So I know that some of my colleagues have
20 questions; I'd like to defer to them in case they
21 have to run out before I ask my own, so I know
22 Council Member Vallone had a few questions and I
23 don't know if Council Member Cohen had anything.
24 Okay, so we'll start with Council Member Vallone.

25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, Chair
3 Ulrich and good afternoon to our very own Dr. General
4 Commissioner, and [laughter] probably the only one in
5 the city, which I always enjoy that. We're very
6 happy that you've... the statements you made today with
7 support of these bills and your initiatives that you
8 have continued to take since taking office. You had
9 said this is what you were gonna do, you're gonna
10 take some time to evaluate, you were gonna address
11 the needs and do what could be done within the
12 confines of the MOVA, the way it exists and before
13 any changes are made. I think these bills that are
14 put in today, all three of them, are reflective of
15 that, [background comment] you know I think that's
16 proud for the Council to not rush into things and
17 looks at bills that would support and actually create
18 some good measuring sticks and I'm very proud of Int.
19 0600 that we put in, because it's, for me, right, as
20 a first-year Council Member, a lot of the information
21 that we received is based on the data and before you
22 make any changes and so until you get a full road,
23 the attorney side of me wants to see the data and
24 this bill is saying just that; what veterans are we
25 servicing; what are they receiving; what City

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2 agencies are engaging the veterans; how many; how
3 many more can we look at, and that's what Int. 0600
4 was doing and then, [background comment] looking at
5 the Board and how we can make it better are two other
6 good areas.

7 You mentioned three things, amongst
8 others, but things that you wanted to focus on; I
9 don't know if you could maybe elaborate; looked like
10 there was veterans homelessness was the first one,
11 [background comment] the Veterans Continuum of Care
12 and the Task Force, housing resources and small
13 business, which really always be the three things
14 that we're always talking about that the City
15 [background comment] can have a direct link in
16 impacting to our veterans. But the Veterans Task
17 Force; can you explain a little bit more about that
18 and what your vision is and who's on that and...

19 DR. LOREE SUTTON: Sure. The Veterans
20 Task Force was formed actually from the larger
21 Continuum of Care, a longstanding organization that
22 has addressed general issues of homelessness in New
23 York City; it's co-chaired by a member of the VA,
24 Julie Irwin, and a member of DHS, Alyson Zikmund,
25 [background comment] and it has representatives

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2 across the relevant City agencies, as you might
3 imagine -- HPD and HRA and DCA -- you know, the City
4 services and agencies and then it has a whole host of
5 private organizations, many of the not-for-profit,
6 who worked in this space of alleviating homelessness
7 and now targeting their efforts towards veterans in
8 particular; that's why this task force was stood up.
9 I was very fortunate last November, the members of
10 the Veterans Task Force voted to invite me to join
11 the Task Force as a voting member, so since late
12 November I've actually been a member of this task
13 force and will continue in that role. So it's a real
14 privilege; I think as we talked last fall at the
15 hearing, New York City has made a tremendous amount
16 of progress in this area; we know we still have a lot
17 of work to do, not only to take things down the home
18 stretch for these last remaining, the roughly
19 thousand homeless veterans that we know are out
20 there, but we also, we also are working very hard, as
21 I described in my testimony, so that we make sure
22 that we institutionalize these changes and develop
23 ways of sustaining the gains over time.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Is this gonna be
3 an ongoing task force or is there a definitive point
4 that it's gonna reach and then will be disbanded?

5 DR. LOREE SUTTON: You know we'll keep
6 this task force in place as long as it needs to be
7 and that would certainly include over the next 12
8 months, at a minimum.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And we, the
10 Chair and I and all the Council Members part of this,
11 anything we can do to assist and participate, please
12 let us know on that.

13 DR. LOREE SUTTON: Terrific. It's an
14 incredible group of folks; it's a great example of
15 different levels, not only of government getting
16 together, but also embracing all of the vibrant
17 domains across the private and not-for-profit sector
18 here in New York City, it's a great collaborative
19 effort.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And the last
21 thing I wanted to mention was, you know as the
22 Administration is pushing affordable housing, and
23 rightfully so, I've been trying to champion, as we're
24 talking about affordable housing, veterans getting
25 their fair share of that affordable housing. In the

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2 section that you had housing resources, are you
3 comfortable with the resources that are at hand; is
4 there anything that we can expand here? I know the
5 Chair and I are exploring different ideas that would
6 go forward in the future, but your last sentence
7 says, "we will need the landlords to make units
8 available for veterans for some of these rental
9 subsidies and the Task Force will create a housing
10 plan for every veteran in a shelter by the end of
11 2015," so can you expand on that?

12 DR. LOREE SUTTON: Yes. Actually, within
13 this next month we will have a housing plan for each
14 of those 1,000 veterans. So as we go through that
15 process we'll have a much better idea of, you know,
16 which areas we're going to need, for example, one of
17 the things that the Task Force has discussed is, as
18 we've made such an improvement in the numbers of
19 chronically homeless veterans, we're in a position
20 now where we will likely be able to transform some of
21 our transitional housing into permanent housing
22 options, so we know that there are gonna be some
23 flexibilities that will be required as we go forward
24 and we'll keep you posted; we'll have a much better
25 idea in about another month, once we get these

1 housing plans, which are really, they're really
2 tailored to the needs of the individual veterans and
3 their families, so it's an intensive effort and it
4 will require action and commitment from all sectors.

5
6 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: In your stay, I
7 guess, as the Commissioner have you had any feedback
8 from the landlords as to future plans and working
9 with the veterans... [crosstalk]

10 DR. LOREE SUTTON: That's what we're
11 digging into right now; we've certainly had a lot of
12 engagement with landlords getting to this point and
13 now this is gonna double down and really continue our
14 engagement as we look at the individual needs of
15 veterans and determine really what will be the best
16 placements, what will be the best solutions for them.
17 Also, I think it's important to note that we know
18 it's not just about finding permanent housing
19 options; we also know that those support services and
20 the intensive case management is also a critical part
21 of this process, so we're keeping our eyes on all
22 three of those facets of successful, stable,
23 permanent housing.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And you
25 mentioned the term that could probably be a whole

1 subject of another hearing, which is case management
2 of veterans; I think maybe at some point the Chair
3 and I would like to talk about how that... whether we
4 can expand on that, whether we're talking about DFTA
5 or whether we're talking about any agency, there
6 seems to be an overload of handling, the management
7 of the amount of cases coming into the 311 system
8 citywide... [crosstalk]

9
10 DR. LOREE SUTTON: Absolutely.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: and I'm sure
12 it's the same here. So I'd like to thank you and all
13 the advocacy groups and the veterans that came out
14 today on another wintry day here in New York City,
15 and now you can see why Int. 0600 came, because
16 without that data we can't really go forward, so
17 thank you for your testimony.

18 DR. LOREE SUTTON: Thank you, Council
19 Member Vallone.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, I just wanna
21 make an announcement; the next Veterans Committee
22 hearing -- we're not ending; I just wanna make a PSA
23 here -- [background comment, laughter] the next
24 Veterans Committee hearing is the 25th of February;
25 we're actually having two this month and we'll be

1
2 discussing the Veterans Treatment Court, which I know
3 is very near and dear to your heart, [background
4 comment] Commissioner Sutton, so we look forward to
5 that, mark your calendars; we'll put it out there,
6 but we did notice that meeting yesterday I think, so
7 the 25th we'll have another Veterans Committee
8 hearing.

9 Also, on a personal note, I'm very proud
10 to announce that my brother on Friday took the oath
11 of enlistment with the United States Marine Corps,
12 [background comments, applause] so my family could
13 not be prouder; I have two younger brothers; he's the
14 middle child, but he's the first person to serve in
15 the armed forces since -- and my grandfather recently
16 passed away, he was a Navy man and my great
17 grandfather, who I affectionately refer to all the
18 time, who is 93 years old, lives in public housing in
19 Staten Island, is a World War II U.S. Army veteran,
20 so we almost have every branch of the military
21 covered except for the Air Force, so I'm sorry for
22 the air men and women who are here, I'm sorry to let
23 you down, but anyway, let's get back to Veterans
24 Advisory Board.

1
2 Commissioner, we've had discussions on
3 and off the record about really the mission and
4 trying to fine tune what the Veterans Advisory Board
5 should be or how it should [background comment] act
6 or the functions that it should have; what do you
7 envision moving forward, now that these reforms will
8 presumably pass the Council; how do you think we'll
9 be able to achieve and sort of fine tune what we need
10 the Veterans Advisory Board to do?

11 DR. LOREE SUTTON: Well I think the
12 provisions of each of these bills actually will
13 contribute greatly to the future of the Veterans
14 Advisory Board. I think first of all, as I mentioned
15 in my testimony, to be able to build on the
16 foundation that is there, [background comment] I'm
17 very pleased about the one-year term of continuity
18 with the current chair and vice-chair and I think
19 that as we bring in not only a larger and perhaps
20 more inclusive membership that reflect current needs,
21 as testified last fall, I think we'll also be able to
22 benefit greatly from this increased public access.
23 You know as I go around and talk to folks, I mean
24 it's just so important to engage, it's important for
25 the veterans community to know when those meetings

1
2 are to be able to come and to participate or to be
3 able to watch it on streaming video, but to feel
4 connected and so we think that these changes really
5 will help markedly so in that regard and I -- as the
6 Commissioner, I plan to continue my pattern of
7 reliance on the judgment and the wisdom; I don't
8 always agree, but it's always informative and
9 instructive to ask and to get a variety of
10 perspectives; I will continue that going forward.

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We prepared some
12 questions in the lead-up to the hearing and this one
13 was pretty interesting; I think the Committee Counsel
14 helped us do some research on this, but do you think
15 that the Board's work could be enhanced if it had
16 designated funding in the future? We're not talking
17 about now, this is not a budget question, but we're
18 talking about in its ability to sort of carry out its
19 mission; is that something you think that the
20 Administration might look to do or be open to or --
21 I'm not saying let's put a dollar amount on, I'm just
22 saying; do you think that if they had designated
23 funding; maybe it came from MOVA, maybe it didn't go
24 directly to them, but it came to MOVA to carry out
25 it's mission; do you think that might be helpful?

1
2 DR. LOREE SUTTON: I guess the question
3 that comes immediately to mind is funding for what,
4 so we [background comment] would be open at looking
5 at any proposal coming forward, but it will be really
6 a matter of determining what would that funding be
7 for.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I'm presuming that
9 some of the funding might be used for outreach, maybe
10 putting advertisements in local papers about a
11 meeting that might be taking place in advance of the
12 meeting; I don't know, I'm -- you know, I'm just
13 brainstorming off the top of my head. I can't
14 imagine that they would have a lot of expenses
15 because we're presuming that they'll meet in borough
16 halls or public buildings where they don't have to
17 pay for rent or anything... [interpose]

18 DR. LOREE SUTTON: Correct.

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: but in terms of the
20 outreach and informing members of the public about
21 the meetings that are taking place, or maybe even
22 producing the report or printing the report or just,
23 you know, simple things... [interpose]

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Case management.
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: case... case
3 management [background comment, laughter] there we
4 go; that'll be a hearing, I'm sure [background
5 comment]... [crosstalk]

6 DR. LOREE SUTTON: Well...

7 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: but there's a lot of
8 good work. And also, as you know, members of the
9 public will be inclined to bring their issues to the
10 VAB and sometimes they'll get them before you and I
11 might hear about them and [background comment] they
12 might wanna act on them, so that might require money;
13 everything requires money, but at some point it might
14 be a good idea if we were at least open to the
15 possibility of designating funding, but as you
16 suggested, finding out... [crosstalk]

17 DR. LOREE SUTTON: Sure.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: what they need the
19 money for, so I thought that was pretty interesting.

20 On Int. 0600, aside from how -- in the
21 opening remarks we talked about how the data
22 collected would be helpful in terms of identifying
23 problems with how we're serving veterans through
24 certain City agencies; do you think that there's
25 anything else that we can do, aside from this

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2 legislation, to really enhance that? I know that,
3 for instance, we've talked about MOVA acting as a
4 portal for the veterans liaisons in the various
5 agencies, because every agency already has a veterans
6 liaison...

7 DR. LOREE SUTTON: Sure.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: and you talked
9 about, with great passion, that a lot of people don't
10 even know who those folks are in some cases, so I
11 mean how -- maybe you wanna expand on that.

12 DR. LOREE SUTTON: Yeah, thanks for
13 mentioning that; I didn't mention the liaisons in my
14 testimony, but it is certainly a resource that we
15 plan to develop, you know, early in this year to
16 bring them together for training, to be able to gauge
17 what are the kinds of questions that they're
18 fielding, to be able to keep a much closer connection
19 between the agencies through the liaisons as well as
20 through leadership at all levels.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah. So I think
22 that would be particularly helpful in conjunction
23 with Council Member Vallone's bill, is that once we
24 get the data from various agencies, [background
25 comment] whether it's DHS or HRA or whatever

1 [background comment] the agency happens to be, that
2 MOVA and the Administration is in a position to then
3 utilize the liaisons in those agencies; say hey, you
4 know how come we're having this problem in Brooklyn
5 with this agency and not in Queens or in Staten
6 Island and not Manhattan or whatever the case happens
7 to be. So it's not enough to just collect the data;
8 the data's very important, but also to be able to act
9 on it and.. [crosstalk]

11 DR. LOREE SUTTON: Absolutely.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: certainly I know the
13 Administration is looking to do just that.

14 And then lastly, getting back to the VAB,
15 do you think that the Board -- we didn't put this in
16 the legislation, but we had a lot of discussion about
17 this -- do you think the Board should be required to
18 provide specific recommendations to MOVA in the
19 annual report regarding any particular agency or any
20 city function or recommendations for best practices?
21 We didn't do that for a reason; we want to allow for
22 flexibility, but do you think that there is some sort
23 of function or recommendation that they should be
24 required to make in their annual report?

25

1
2 DR. LOREE SUTTON: I would welcome any
3 such formal recommendations.

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. Alright.
5 Well, I can't thank you enough for your testimony,
6 [background comment] the other members have been
7 excused to other hearings and other places, but we
8 look forward to working with you and your staff and
9 we wanna thank you and the Administration for helping
10 us get to this point today. So thank you,
11 [background comment] Dr. Sutton.

12 We're gonna have the first panel up and
13 we're gonna ask several existing members of the VAB
14 to testify; we are joined by the Chairman, Vince
15 McGowan, a member of the American Legion -- he's
16 being very humble -- Fang Wong; he's the former
17 National Commander of the American Legion; thank you
18 for being here and for testifying; Jason Hansman from
19 Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and Kristen
20 Rouse, from the New York City Veterans Alliance.
21 There's another chair, Vince, on your left.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And then we turn
23 the music on.

24

25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Exactly. I'll ask
3 Eric Bernstein, Committee Counsel, to administer the
4 oath.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell
6 the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth
7 in your testimony before this Committee and to
8 respond honestly to Council Member questions?

9 [group affirmation]

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay, you may
11 proceed and why don't we start with ladies first, if
12 that's alright with the three gentlemen. Okay.
13 [background comment] She's also closest to the
14 microphone, so it makes sense. [laughter] Thank
15 you.

16 KRISTEN ROUSE: Okay, am I... can you hear
17 me? [background comment] 'Kay.

18 My name is Kristen Rouse and I represent
19 a newly formed grassroots organization called the New
20 York City Veterans Alliance. I am a veteran of the
21 United States Army and I served in Afghanistan in
22 2006, 2010 and 2012 for a total of 31 months
23 deployed. I personally believe that New York City is
24 the greatest city in the world and there's no place
25 that I've been prouder or happier to come home to

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2 than here. It's been clear to me that New Yorkers
3 truly appreciate military veterans, but our city's
4 government still has a long way to go before we can
5 claim that New York City is truly a veteran-friendly
6 city.

7 One key area we need to improve upon is
8 ensuring that the voices of all veterans, from the
9 distinguished veterans who served us in World War II,
10 Korea and Vietnam to the forgotten veterans who stood
11 at guard posts across the globe during the Cold War,
12 to those who served in Panama, Mogadishu, Desert
13 Shield and Desert Storm, Bosnia; to the men and women
14 like me, who recently came home from the wars in Iraq
15 and Afghanistan, and even those left behind, left out
16 or underserved by bureaucratic snafus and inadequate
17 support when they came home. All of these voices,
18 needs, challenges and blueprints for success must be
19 present in the conversations New York City government
20 is having about its veterans. These hearing have
21 been important in this process and we commend Council
22 Member Ulrich and the Veterans Committee for these
23 vital public discussions and the legislation we hope
24 will result.

1
2 Earlier this month the New York City
3 Veterans Alliance, in partnership with New York Metro
4 Vets, launched a survey asking the New York City
5 veterans community to rate their policy priorities;
6 among other issues we asked respondents to prioritize
7 the reform of the Veterans Advisory Board. The
8 survey is open through the end of February and we
9 still have responses coming in, yet even with these
10 preliminary results, responses thus far from our
11 community have overwhelmingly favored reform. Out of
12 290 respondents thus far, 60 percent say that
13 reforming the VAB is essential, another 28 percent
14 say reform is very important and 9 percent say it is
15 moderately important. This equates to 97 percent of
16 respondents thus far saying that VAB reform is
17 important to them.

18 We fully support proposals to increase
19 the number of appointees to the VAB and make
20 appointee contact information, meeting information
21 and proceedings open to the veterans community. We
22 believe these measures have the potential to make the
23 VAB a more transparent, effective and representative
24 body serving the veterans of New York City. We urge
25 the City Council to take prompt action on these

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2 important reforms and we offer these additional
3 recommendations.

4 VAB meetings should be accessible to
5 veterans who reside across the city; meetings should
6 be planned for all five boroughs and community
7 attendance should be maximized. VAB appointees
8 should not only abide by their terms of appointment,
9 but also be actively engaged in the New York veterans
10 community. VAB appointees should be more fully
11 representative of New York City's diverse veteran
12 population and inclusive of the men and women who
13 served across the spectrum of conflicts, including
14 Afghanistan, as well as from different branches of
15 military, representing both enlisted and officer
16 experiences, as well as diverse areas of engagement
17 within New York City's veterans community. The VAB
18 should produce and make public an annual report of
19 its role advising the Mayor's Office of Veterans
20 Affairs to include summaries of issues raised,
21 recommended actions, inputs from the veterans
22 community at meetings and itemized accounting for any
23 city funds used by the VAB.

24 We have the largest city government in
25 the country and we have one of the largest urban

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2 populations of veterans in the United States, yet to
3 date there has been no coherent tracking, reporting
4 or coordination of the services New York City
5 government is delivering to its veterans. We fully
6 support the intent of Int. 0600 and recommend two
7 changes. First, wording should include all City
8 agencies that may be offering services to veterans,
9 limiting reporting to services related only to
10 housing, vending licenses and HRA-run employment may
11 create a piecemeal approach to City agencies'
12 reporting services to veterans, inadvertently exclude
13 other agencies or services, such as those provided by
14 DOHMH or HHC or otherwise not fully captured data on
15 veterans receiving services. Second, the definition
16 of veteran should be changed to any individual who
17 has served in the military regardless of discharge
18 status. All men and women who answer the call of
19 service to our nation should first be assumed to be
20 veterans and then eligibility for services should be
21 determined thereafter. Including data on city
22 services offered to veterans not having an honorable
23 discharge would offer critical data on veterans who
24 have been underserved or otherwise left behind by the
25 system. It must be noted here that many discharges

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2 characterized as other than honor or dishonorable
3 whether the result of minor offenses related to PTSD
4 or other affects of military service that were either
5 misunderstood or mistreated at the time. Many of
6 those discharged for homosexuality prior to the
7 repeal of don't ask don't tell sill retain an adverse
8 status. The process for upgrading the character of a
9 discharge can be long and problematic and while
10 discharge status is key to eligibility for VA
11 benefits, discharge status should not be a
12 determining factor for tracking of services provided
13 to veterans by New York City agencies.

14 Our survey has shown overwhelming support
15 thus far for all City agencies providing services to
16 veterans to track and report the number of veterans
17 receiving these services; 61 percent of our
18 respondents say that this is essential, 25 percent
19 call it very important, 12 percent call it moderately
20 important, for a total of 98 percent of respondents
21 indicating that this issue is important to them. We
22 urge the City Council to take prompt action
23 accordingly. On behalf of the New York City Veterans
24 Alliance, I thank you for this opportunity to speak
25

1
2 today; pending your questions, this concludes my
3 testimony.

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. We'll
5 save the questions until the panel is completed;
6 we'll hear from Jason now and we'll proceed down the
7 row.

8 JASON HANSMAN: Thank you Chairman Ulrich
9 and distinguished members of the Committee; on behalf
10 of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, I would
11 like to extend our gratitude for being given the
12 opportunity to share with you our views and
13 recommendations regarding New York City's Veterans
14 Advisory Board and the three proposed pieces of
15 legislation before this Committee.

16 Serving our veterans in New York City is
17 a top priority of IAVA and the VAB and these proposed
18 changes to it are critically important to the lives
19 of veterans in this city. With over 200,000 veterans
20 estimated to be living in New York City, 3,500 of
21 those being IAVA members, the role of City
22 government, including the Veterans Advisory Board, is
23 crucial to the implementation and development of
24 benefits and services that will directly improve the
25 lives of veterans and their families. The introduced

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2 City Council legislation 0600, 0611 and 0619 address
3 the many issues that have been brought before this
4 Committee over the years and we applaud the work of
5 this Committee to move these issues into legislation.

6 We are encouraged that this legislation
7 will bring the VAB closer to the veterans that it
8 serves, having VAB meetings held in every borough
9 will bring members into the communities that they are
10 representing and face to face with the veterans that
11 they represent. Additionally, having these meetings
12 open to the public and recorded will increase the
13 level of transparency of this advisory board. These
14 steps will hopefully begin to close the gap between
15 the Veteran Advisory Board and the veterans in this
16 city, an issue that we presented in our testimony on
17 October 27th.

18 The expansion of the VAB that this
19 legislation would mandate is much needed; this
20 advisory board is still missing the chance to engage
21 a number of populations inside of the city, including
22 a sizable student veteran population. IAVA would
23 like to see if this legislation were to pass the
24 addition of student veterans on this advisory board.

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2 Depite the overall positive nature of
3 these three pieces of legislation there are still
4 challenges that the VAB faces; namely, many of the
5 members' terms of the Board have lapsed and there has
6 been no reappointment. We would urge the Mayor and
7 the Speaker to appoint new members or reappoint
8 existing members expeditiously. Having these seats
9 effectively sit empty gives the appearance that this
10 Board is not important to the City of New York. We
11 hope that after passing this legislation the
12 attention will be turned to ensuring that this Board
13 is properly filled and active.

14 There is still a great deal of work that
15 needs to be in this city and having an effective
16 Veteran Advisory Board is critical to ensuring that
17 that work is being done successfully. We look
18 forward to addressing future issues with this
19 Committee, including Veterans Treatment Courts later
20 this month. Again, we appreciate this opportunity to
21 offer our views on this important issue and we look
22 forward to continuing our work with each of you, your
23 staff and this Committee to improve the lives of
24 veterans and their families in New York City. Thank
25 you for your time and attention.

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2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Hear
3 from Mr. Wong, welcome back and thank you for being
4 here.

5 FANG WONG: Good afternoon Mr. Chairman,
6 members of the Veterans Committee; thank you for the
7 opportunity to appear before your hearing today.

8 As you noted, I did serve a few years
9 with the American Legion, maybe around 25, 26 years
10 since my retirement from the U.S. Army; I was a
11 career U.S. Army and I served during the Vietnam time
12 and so technically, based on your latest definition,
13 I have been a veteran for like 45, 46 years, so that
14 could give me some sort of seniority.

15 I'm here to kinda offer a couple of my
16 opinions on the bill and also express some concerns
17 that you might want to take into consideration. In
18 general I totally agree with what General Sutton's
19 saying about Int. 0600, 0611 and 0619; however, with
20 Int. 0600, it was great, for the first time I guess,
21 that we go out and ask for data, so that now we
22 finally have a baseline to grow on so in the future
23 with case management we know where we're at and where
24 to go, so that's a great step forward. The other
25 thing that I was really happy to see is that as a

1 Legion member, we have our definition of what a
2 veteran is and that's based on our charter by
3 Congress. I often wonder you know, what is the
4 definition of veteran in any other elements,
5 especially in New York City; I think I raised the
6 question one time with the Commissioner and I was
7 happy that, for the first time I guess, in bill 0600
8 you actually provide a definition of a veteran; now,
9 whether or not we agree that's the correct way, at
10 least that's a start somewhere; in order for us to
11 move on, we have to sit down and come up with some
12 consensus of what a veteran is so that we know who
13 we're talking about, because different organizations
14 may have different requirements and that is important
15 before we move on that we have a consensus so we know
16 what we're talking about. So those are the two areas
17 that I'm happy and I would suggest that we pay a
18 little bit more attention to and come up with a
19 definition. Int. 0611 and Int. 0619, they're pretty
20 much the same, because we're addressing the same part
21 of the changes on that paragraph and when I first
22 received it in the email I was totally confused; I'm
23 not a politician; I'm not a lawyer, and I was saying,
24 now you're changing from 9 to 11 in 0611 and yet 0619
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2 you're still talking about 9, so what are we doing,
3 we're changing back to 9; then I realized, after
4 several phone calls, I was getting a good education,
5 that now we address only parts of it. So in the
6 future, maybe things can be lumped together, because
7 they're pretty similar, they are just the same issue,
8 just to clarify for dummies like me is easier for me
9 to understand. Now with 0611, it's great that we
10 expand members from 9 to 11; it gives more input; it
11 gives more diverse out there for people to
12 participate, for veterans to participate, however, I
13 believe today is the first time I heard the
14 Commissioner mention the criteria, you know who is
15 eligible to be a member of the Board. I think maybe
16 we should create a profile or a requirement, who
17 should be. One thing that I'm concerned with is in
18 the past the members had been representing
19 individually and they are selected on an individual
20 basis; I may be wrong, but that's my assumption that
21 that's how it goes. I'm not sure whether or not we
22 should spend some time and consider that we as souls
23 or other prominent organization should be
24 represented, because a lot of times the VA souls in
25 another organization, they may have certain

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2 organizational priorities or concerns that are
3 important and if we have individuals participate,
4 we're at the mercy of that individual; he or she may
5 have other ideas and then we lose the part, the input
6 from the organization that are out there, veterans
7 organizations, so that's something that we might want
8 to take a look at. It's great with 0619, that we
9 rotate the meetings to the five boroughs; it gives a
10 lot more visibility, publicity to veterans out there
11 and I don't see how it could hurt us as we go on,
12 because that will create more interest and excitement
13 that they are coming to my area and I need to be
14 there, so in that sense that's good.

15 Having said that, I kinda question the
16 appointment timing of the Board; it appears that we
17 do all 9 or all 11 at the same time; now that's not
18 good for continuity phases and also, with the change
19 of administration, so I don't know if the Council or
20 the Committee will want to consider perhaps maybe we
21 should stack them three at a time over the three
22 years so you always have continuity, even though with
23 a change of administration, 'cause otherwise we'll
24 run into a situation now where all 9 of them would
25 walk away; fortunately I think Vince agreed that

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2 he'll stay one year, but if we have it stacked 3/3/3,
3 then you will have a knowledge base there and for the
4 future, so those are my recommendations, you know if
5 it works out.

6 The last thing I'd like to bring out is,
7 I'm sorry I missed the last meeting all on small
8 business; maybe I find out afterward, however, Mr.
9 Chairman, your opening statement, and also Councilman
10 Eugene's opening statement, I see that you and
11 Councilman Vallone can't do enough for the veterans,
12 so I would like to ask you, please, please that small
13 business set aside is nothing less than show our
14 support to the veterans. Seems to me everybody
15 thinks that's very important; the federal government
16 thinks it's very important, the state government
17 thinks it's important; after I retired from the Army
18 I worked for 22 years with the Defense Industrial as
19 a contractor and I know how important it is that when
20 the veteran small business applied for contracts, how
21 important it is for them that they get that little
22 help, that little advantage to survive and to grow
23 and so you know, New York City, being the greatest
24 city in the world, I can't see we could do any less,
25 so if there's anything, I think we need to stay on

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2 top of it and make sure this issue will be addressed
3 as soon as possible. Thank you for your time and I'm
4 here to ask questions I guess.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, as
6 always. We're gonna reserve the questions for after
7 Vince is done speaking.

8 [background comment]

9 VINCE MCGOWAN: Thanks. We're
10 technologically challenged at our senior age here.
11 Following up -- when the bills first came out -- My
12 name is Vince McGowan and I'm currently serving as
13 the Chairman of the Veterans Advisory Board; I have
14 done so since 2008, or it was 2007; I divert to the
15 Commissioner's notes; it's been so long that I've
16 sort of forgotten how long it's been, but the
17 Veterans Advisory Board, as a group, has really
18 applauded the new fresh approach that the Council and
19 that the Commissioner are taking to restructuring;
20 looking at how we're going to organize as a community
21 going forward. The different intros that have been
22 introduced by our former chairman, Councilman Eugene
23 and our current chairman, Councilman Ulrich and our
24 Committee Member, Council Member Vallone all go; the
25 Board unanimously agrees that these are the beginning

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2 of the right steps and hearing the testimony of the
3 other stakeholders, I can see that we have more in
4 common than we have at risk here and I applaud the
5 past National Commander's intro into the idea of
6 what's really important; how do we pick our members
7 and how do we define what a veteran is. Those are
8 entry level positions that if we get the wrong
9 definition we're gonna find that we're trying to help
10 people apply for benefits that they're not eligible
11 for; we have to be very clear that there are
12 standards that have been at work for many years; I
13 would hope that we would incorporate them into the
14 future; there may have to be changes based the
15 changes that the military have undergone in the last
16 few years, but we have to look at what the
17 regulations say as the eligibility and however that
18 would shake out, it should definitely be include din
19 the legislation so that there's no confusion as to
20 who's eligible for what and it would be a travesty to
21 bring a veteran all the way up to the door of getting
22 a benefit only to find out that they didn't have the
23 required credentials in order to get whatever the
24 benefit is that they were seeking; that would be a
25 double disappointment. The structure of the Veterans

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2 Advisory Board is evenly distributed with the Mayor
3 and the City Council; I think the point about having
4 organizations represented versus individuals should
5 be considered, it's a very strong point to make;
6 individuals who represent one point of view of their
7 own may not bring as much continuity as individuals
8 who represent larger groups who have bought in
9 already to particular philosophies. We're at the
10 edge here now of a new world of veterans advocacy;
11 having been at it from the beginning, it's wonderful
12 to see the interest, it's great to see the new young
13 veterans stepping up; that's what we really need
14 here, the Vietnam veterans have been holding the door
15 open as long as we could; now it's time to put a new
16 door on the hinge and get everybody into the same
17 net. So I congratulate the Committee, I congratulate
18 the Administration for looking to the community to
19 have input in what is to be our future. Thank you
20 very much.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, Mr.
22 McGowan, thank you for your service to our country,
23 but also to the Veterans Advisory Board, I know that
24 we rely very much on your institutional knowledge; I
25 know John Rowan, I don't think he's here today, but

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2 he's also somebody that has been incredibly helpful
3 to me and the Administration since the beginning of
4 the year, since we started and we wanna continue to
5 rely on that, so it's very important. I think that
6 all of your testimony was very helpful, very
7 valuable; you should know that we're not passing the
8 bills out of the Committee today because we wanted to
9 hear what your recommendations were; we also wanted
10 to give people time between the period that we
11 introduced the bills first and today's hearing
12 because people aren't gonna think of everything all
13 at once, sometimes you might think of something after
14 this hearing is over; feel free to email myself or
15 the Commissioner's office so that we can try and
16 incorporate that into the final version of the bill.
17 I would like to vote this out at the beginning of the
18 hearing on the 25th, which is when we're gonna have
19 the oversight hearing on Veterans Treatment Courts,
20 so just to kinda give you a mental timeline, if you
21 think of anything else that you think would be
22 helpful or you come up with any other ideas that
23 really are practical, we would love to incorporate
24 those into the final version of the bill because
25 there's no sense in passing a bill that's incomplete.

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2 I wanna ask you just a few questions and
3 I guess this is somewhat of a follow-up on some of
4 the questions that we asked MOVA before. But do you
5 think the Board in the future should be required --
6 in the annual report that you produce, do you think
7 that the Board should be required to provide any
8 specific recommendations, not only to MOVA, but maybe
9 to the Council for legislation; maybe there's
10 something that other cities are doing that we should
11 be doing; do you think that it should be required,
12 anything should be required in that annual report,
13 'cause right now it's pretty much whatever you want
14 it to be, essentially; flexibility's a good thing,
15 but do you think that in addition to some of the
16 things that you might wanna put in there that there
17 should be stuff that's required in that annual report
18 so that we as legislators or members of an
19 administration or heads of city agencies, you know
20 might look for something in that report or look to
21 act on something in that report?

22 VINCE MCGOWAN: I'll take that...

23 [crosstalk]

24 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Please, yeah.

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2 VINCE MCGOWAN: You know it certainly
3 can't hurt; there's no requirement for it and there's
4 always the rule, be careful what you ask for..

5 [crosstalk]

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Right.

7 VINCE MCGOWAN: you know, we don't have
8 a definition yet that -- in New York City; we have a
9 New York State definition and I think the City has a
10 definition; in some of the material I read it hinted
11 at what the City might consider to be the definition
12 of a veteran, but until those things are clear,
13 recommendations coming out of a board may do more to
14 obfuscate the point than to clarify it. So I think
15 that's the kind of thing that would be built in
16 subsequently; you know, if there's a line in the
17 legislation that would say something like the City
18 Council Committee requires specific recommendations
19 on items, that might be the way you wanna go, but
20 having it in there is not a bad idea.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah, certainly we
22 don't wanna tie the hands of... [crosstalk]

23 VINCE MCGOWAN: Yeah.

24 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: the VAB, we want
25 there to be flexibility; I know that we welcome input

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2 and suggestions that the VAB has, but clearly I
3 think, given their expertise, given their experience
4 in the military and post military service, them
5 providing -- and also your interest in veterans
6 issues; I mean quite frankly, you probably read just
7 as many if not more articles from papers and
8 magazines all over the country online about issues
9 that are facing veterans, so you know, I think what
10 we're looking for and why I asked that question is,
11 that in the past the annual report that's come out of
12 the VAB has been very helpful, but some have argued
13 that it's basically a summarization of the minutes of
14 the meeting that they had, which is very helpful and
15 has been very good, but I think we're looking for a
16 little direction, we're looking for something
17 specific that you either are supporting or advocating
18 for or that you want to see the City Council, the
19 Administration; a particular City agency do and so I
20 don't -- again, I don't feel strongly either way; I'm
21 not saying that we should tie your hands and that you
22 should be required to produce a legislative list of
23 recommendations or a list of recommendations or
24 suggestions or criticisms of an agency or an
25 administration, I'm not advocating for that; what I'm

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2 saying is, we're just looking for a little clarity
3 and direction as to what it is exactly you want us to
4 do or do better. So that's the reason why I asked
5 the VAB and also the Administration that question.
6 Yeah, Jason.

7 JASON HANSMAN: Right. So I would say if
8 the role of the VAB, which my understand is to advise
9 the City; I think absolutely they should be on the
10 hook for some recommendations; I don't think we
11 should tie what those recommendations look like,
12 whether they're legislative, administrative or so on,
13 but I think certainly the Board should be held to
14 actually giving concrete and constructive
15 recommendations to the City; I think that will I
16 think justify in a lot of ways [background comment]
17 their existence.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I just think that
19 we're looking to have a framework, less specifics,
20 but more in terms of what we would like to see, maybe
21 leave it open to say that the annual report shall
22 consist of legislative, administrative, regulatory or
23 other recommendations, something along those lines
24 just so that the Board understands what that report
25 should look like; not what should be in it necessary,

1 we're not looking to dictate exactly what's in it.

2 So that's a conversation we'll have, you know, after
3 the hearing. Kristen; did you wanna add anything?

4 KRISTEN ROUSE: The conversations that
5 we've been having have, I mean basically been along
6 the lines of, there's no shortage of people who say
7 they want to help veterans.. [crosstalk]

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Right.

9 KRISTEN ROUSE: and that's a great thing;
10 what there has been a greater shortage of is people
11 who are actually taking action to advocate for and
12 provide concrete solutions for veterans for specific
13 policies that are going to work and influence the
14 lives of many veterans. So what we would want to see
15 from the Veterans Advisory Board is: a. is the
16 Advisory Board taking input from veterans in the
17 community; b. are recommendations actually being made
18 to MOVA; I have no doubt that recommendations have
19 been made, they just haven't been public in the past,
20 and so we want to see, you know, just sort of
21 quantify what recommendations are being made so that
22 we can then measure whether MOVA is taking those
23 recommendations to heart and acting on them; we want
24 something to measure against to at least see what
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2 work is being done. And in the future, if there's
3 any money involved, then we would like to see a
4 report of that. We realize that the VAB, it's an
5 unpaid position; it's something that you all have
6 been giving of your own personal time to serve us and
7 we appreciate that, but we wanna see, going forward,
8 what exactly is it that's being done for these
9 appointments.

10 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: That's very
11 interesting; you bring up a few points and I know we
12 discussed it earlier, and I know -- also, I wanna get
13 back to Mr. Wong's recommendation; I'm very
14 interested in scattering the appointments; that's
15 something that should be discussed offline as well,
16 because I think there is a need for continuity; I
17 served on a community board, also an unpaid position,
18 prior to being elected and I now have a role in
19 helping recommend members for community board
20 appointments and all 50 are not done every two years,
21 they are in fact scattered and the borough president
22 makes those appointments in each borough, so that's a
23 very good idea, to kind of break it up a little bit
24 and we'll talk with the Administration about that.
25 Also filling or reappointing those positions, that is

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2 a top priority for the Administration; I've had
3 several conversations with them; I don't know when
4 that's going to happen, but I know that it will
5 happen and hopefully that will happen soon. I think
6 that perhaps they were waiting for this bill to be
7 passed so that they knew exactly how many people were
8 gonna be considered or reappointed or whatever, so
9 we're gonna be looking at doing that. And getting
10 back to the budget issue, that was my follow-up
11 question for members of the Board. Do you think,
12 Vince, that the VAB should have a budget; if it did
13 have a budget, how could some of that money be used;
14 I mean, what are your thoughts on that?

15 [background comment]

16 VINCE MCGOWAN: Communication is the
17 answer; we've so many times had this conversation --
18 the Board should have letterhead, the Board should
19 have cards so that when they're out there in their
20 communities that they can represent that they are
21 members of the Board; now that we'll have email, I'm
22 assuming that these intros will pass, great idea, so
23 we'll be able to communicate as a body, not as an
24 individual; I think those things will start shaping
25 it a lot tighter. I would follow the Commissioner's

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2 point; what is it for? If there were a housekeeping
3 budget of a relatively low amount of money to cover,
4 you know the meetings that are held, 'cause the
5 meetings hopefully will be held at every borough now,
6 there may be you know a travel allotment in there for
7 -- 'cause many of the members traveling out from the
8 outer boroughs or, you know, it's spread out New
9 York, depending on where we go; that might be some
10 relief there, but a small amount of money for
11 communication and housekeeping would be a good idea.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So that's very
13 interesting. So a MetroCard for instance..

14 [crosstalk]

15 VINCE MCGOWAN: Right.

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: at the very least..

17 [crosstalk]

18 VINCE MCGOWAN: Right.

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: or being able to get
20 reimbursed for a MetroCard or train ride to the
21 meeting; that might be something that could be
22 included... [crosstalk]

23 VINCE MCGOWAN: Yeah. You now the
24 amount...

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2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: printing of the
3 agenda, if you have 50 people show up in Staten
4 Island, you have to hand out 50 pieces of paper to
5 let everybody know what's going to be discussed and
6 when the meeting starts and when it's over and who
7 can speak and when they can speak, so that -- you
8 know I guess trying to model it after the community
9 board process -- community boards are all volunteers,
10 50; they get a budget [background comment] much
11 larger than this would entail because they have a
12 district manager and they actually have a staff and
13 an office; I'm not saying that the VAB should have
14 that, but there are minor expenses that are incurred
15 and I don't, know that that should come out of MOVA's
16 budget because it takes away from MOVA and the VAB is
17 technically supposed to be a separate independent
18 entity that advises the Administration and the
19 Council and other stakeholders about veterans issues,
20 so that's something in the future; that's not
21 something we're discussing today, we're not putting
22 that in the bill, but in terms of our larger
23 discussion about what the VAB should look like and
24 how it should function and how it can carry out the
25 mission that we're asking it to do, it's something

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2 just to be open to. So I wanna turn it over to
3 Council Member Vallone before we call up the next
4 panel.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you,
6 Chair. Again, thank you panel; you're advice and
7 guidance is -- as you see us feverishly writing as
8 your recommendations are coming, and we can't write
9 fast enough, that's how these things all happen;
10 actually how these bills came were from past hearings
11 when we spoke about this, so the lawyer side of me,
12 as you were saying, is -- you're looking for the
13 lawyer and elected official, well you found one;
14 we're writing down and trying to find out ways we can
15 do that.

16 Kristen, I thank you for your service; I
17 thank you for your perfect testimony and the way you
18 wrote it out and the suggestions that are there; I
19 personally use those to tailor legislation; we went
20 right over and spoke about the two points to see what
21 we could do about the definition and expanding to all
22 agencies, so we'll talk about that. But you also
23 mentioned a survey, which I'm very interested in;
24 could you maybe expand on what was found in the
25 survey besides expanding the VAB?

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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

KRISTEN ROUSE:

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 _____ <INSERT TRANSCRIPTION DATE>