

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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B E F O R E:

ERIC A. ULRICH  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

ALAN N. MAISEL  
ANDREW COHEN  
FERNANDO CABRERA  
PAUL A. VALLONE

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

Loree Sutton  
Commissioner  
Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs

Trish Marsik  
Executive Director  
Mayor's Task Force on Behavioral Health

Cameron Mease  
Trial Attorney  
Brooklyn Defender Services

Kristen Rouse  
Leader  
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Miguel Davis  
Secretary/Veteran  
Blinded Veterans Association

William Siegfried  
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Project Renewal

Charlotte Heyrman  
Intake Advocate  
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Chapter Director  
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Joe Bello  
Veteran/Founder  
NY MetroVets

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[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Here we go. Thank you so much.

LILY ULRICH: Let me do it.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You can do it later. Okay. Good afternoon everyone. I'm Council Member Eric Ulrich, Chair of the Veterans Committee. As service members return from active duty many will suffer from mental health and substance abuse issues that go... that go untreated. These challenges often lead to increase... increased risk of anxiety, homelessness, inability to maintain employment, and for some involvement with the criminal justice system. According to the New York City Criminal Justice Agency in 2014 5,181 individuals under arrest identify themselves as having served in the military. In February the committee joined with the Committees on Courts and Legal Services and Mental Health to hear about veterans treatment court programs in New York City. These important programs which offer veterans an alternative to extend an incarceration by providing them with supervised treatment to address certain individual needs are currently located in every

1  
2 borough except the borough of Manhattan. We heard  
3 from the court's judges, distinguished district  
4 attorneys and advocates from the community about  
5 the successes of veteran treatment courts but many  
6 witnesses also made it clear that the experience of  
7 a veteran in the criminal justice system can differ  
8 depending on where that veteran was arrested or  
9 where they happen to live. This is unacceptable.  
10 Following this hearing I joined my colleague  
11 Council Member Rory Lancman to introduce  
12 legislation which we will hear today Intro 793.  
13 This important bill will bring together the  
14 leadership of several city agencies to study and  
15 make recommendations on how the city can meet the  
16 needs of veterans to both keep them out of the  
17 criminal justice system and ease the transition  
18 into post prison life for those who have been  
19 incarcerated. It will also require the Department  
20 of Corrections to provide us with better data to  
21 better understand the veteran prison population and  
22 to better target our resources to assist these  
23 individuals. I am confident that the report that we  
24 will require with this bill will be an important  
25 step in addressing the needs of veterans and

1  
2 ensuring that they are treated fairly and equitably  
3 by the criminal justice system. I want to thank  
4 Council Member Lancman for co-sponsoring this  
5 important legislation and for his... for his  
6 continued leadership on these issues. I know that  
7 he's actually across the street at the hearing at  
8 the... in the chambers with the speaker. And I'm... I'm  
9 sure that he's going to try to make it over here  
10 but I did want to thank him for his leadership and  
11 for co-sponsoring this bill with me. I'd also like  
12 to acknowledge Council Member Vallone, also a very  
13 active member of this committee and... and a strong  
14 champion for veterans in their families as well as  
15 a doctor Sutton, the Commissioner of the Mayor's  
16 Office of Veterans Affairs for... for all the work  
17 that she does on this important issue particularly  
18 regarding mental health for veterans and their  
19 families. And finally I want to thank the committee  
20 staff Eric Bernstein our committee counsel and John  
21 Russell our Finance Analyst. And before we begin I  
22 was going to ask Council Member Lancman to make a  
23 few remarks. But if we can interrupt the hearing  
24 later on at some point to allow him to do that in  
25 case he has to run back I would appreciate that. So

1  
2 on the first panel is as always our good friend the  
3 Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans  
4 Affairs Loree Sutton as well as Trish Marsik from  
5 the Mayor's Office. And before we ask them to  
6 deliver their testimony. Eric Bernstein with  
7 administer the oath.

8 COMMITTEE CLERK BERNSTEIN: Can you  
9 raise your right hand please? Do you affirm to tell  
10 the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the  
11 truth in your testimony before this committee and  
12 to respond honestly to council member questions?

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you so much  
14 and begin at your leisure. Thank you.

15 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I have to start  
16 out by saying good afternoon Mr. Chairman, members  
17 of the committee. Let me just take a moment to  
18 recognize Madam Lily Ulrich. Thank you so much for  
19 opening the meeting today. Yeah. Great job. Today  
20 is a momentous day. I just have to take another  
21 moment on a celebratory note to note that city hall  
22 tromped the city council a squeaker but 13 to 12  
23 yesterday or the day before earlier this week.  
24 We're very proud of all who took place in that  
25 celebration. And then also again on a... a festive

1  
2 note I want to... I want to just mark today as the  
3 68<sup>th</sup> birthday of our United States Air Force, just  
4 came back from the birthday ceremony and time  
5 square so how about a big round of applause for the  
6 United States Air Force.

7 [applause]

8 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: On a reflective  
9 note I'd like to just take a moment to read to you  
10 the press release, the statement from Mayor de  
11 Blasio earlier today marking our national P.O.W  
12 M.I.A recognition day. P.O.W. M.I.A recognition day  
13 is a time to honor the selfless women and men who  
14 have been missing in action or held as prisoners of  
15 war. It is also a day to celebrate these American  
16 heroes and the brave acts of valor they have  
17 committed in the name of our country. Let us each  
18 take a moment to remember the unwavering of these  
19 brave Americans and to give thanks to the men and  
20 women who continue to wear the uniform as they  
21 tirelessly protect our nation. Today we remind our  
22 missing service members and their families. You are  
23 not forgotten. Good afternoon Chairman Ulrich and  
24 the members of the Committee on Veterans. My name  
25 is Loree Sutton and I proudly serve as the

1  
2 commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans'  
3 Affairs. I greatly appreciate your leadership and  
4 look forward to sharing my perspective about  
5 today's topic; Introduction number 793 in relation  
6 to creating a task force to study veterans in the  
7 criminal justice system. I am joined today by Trish  
8 Marsik, Executive Director of the Mayor's Task  
9 Force on Behavioral Health and the Criminal Justice  
10 System at the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice.  
11 We are also joined today by Carly McLaughlin with  
12 Department of Correction and may I introduce to you  
13 someone who is well known but now in a different  
14 capacity; Katherine La Porte who is now the Deputy  
15 Commissioner for MOVA. Congratulations Catherine.  
16 Let me also start out by thanking the mayor, the  
17 speaker, Chairman Ulrich, committee members, and  
18 veterans advocates, and service organizations for  
19 your enduring support and confidence during this  
20 past year. I am extraordinarily grateful for the  
21 combined investment in New York City veterans  
22 granting the budget authority to increase MOVA's  
23 capacity including veteran outreach specialist and  
24 veteran peer coordinators for the first time in  
25 MOVA's history. Regarding the topic of today's



1 hearing I would also like to recognize my  
2 colleagues at the Mayor's Office of Criminal  
3 Justice, Department of Correction, Department of  
4 Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Probation,  
5 New York Police Department, and the Criminal  
6 Justice Agency for their expertise and engagement  
7 with respect to this important topic. Working  
8 together with community leaders we are committed to  
9 achieving equity and justice for all veterans and  
10 their families. Following the completion of the  
11 behavioral health and criminal justice system task  
12 force report published in December of 2014 MOVA has  
13 been privileged to work with MOCJ [sp?] director  
14 Elizabeth Glazier, Trish Marsik, and their team  
15 responsible for implementing the report  
16 recommendations. I serve on the task force  
17 executive committee as well as the Action Plan  
18 Working Group on veteran related recommendations.  
19 Over 125 representatives from all parts of the  
20 criminal justice system continue to convene  
21 quarterly, to review the work of the task force's  
22 action plan to date, to troubleshoot challenges,  
23 and to plan for the next steps in this process. The  
24 work groups include judges, advocates, service  
25

1  
2 providers, defense attorneys, people with lived  
3 experience in the system, DAs, family members, and  
4 staff from relevant city agencies such as police,  
5 correction, health, etcetera. Their guide has been  
6 pivotal in the success of these initiatives and the  
7 relationships built through this process stand out  
8 as a further means for its continued support.

9 Veterans stand to benefit a great deal from the  
10 work of the behavioral health task force. We know  
11 that involvement with the criminal justice system  
12 for veterans is often related to service connected  
13 and underlying mental health and substance use  
14 issues. These issues may stem from or may have been  
15 exacerbated by experiences in uniform which of  
16 course can include being wounded, ill, or injured  
17 whether or not an individual is engaged in or  
18 exposed to combat operations. A brief review of the  
19 work of the behavioral Health Task Force will  
20 provide an understanding of the work the city has  
21 already undertaken to address the underlying  
22 challenges particularly mental health and co-  
23 occurring substance use issues faced by veterans in  
24 the context of the criminal justice system. In June  
25 2014 Mayor Bill de Blasio called on government and

1  
2 community leaders in public health and public  
3 safety to chart a path forward. The task force on  
4 behavioral health in the criminal justice system  
5 rigorously mat the gaps in our current systems and  
6 developed targeted solutions that look not only at  
7 individual points in the system but how the system  
8 as a whole operates. To address these urgent issues  
9 the administration engaged the best minds and  
10 methods in determining what needed to be done and  
11 deploying solutions without delay. This 130 million  
12 dollar four year investment with 40 million dollars  
13 contributed in asset forfeiture funds from the  
14 district attorney of new York is a key component of  
15 Mayor de Blasio's commitment to reduce unnecessary  
16 arrests and incarceration, direct criminal justice  
17 resources to where they will have the greatest  
18 public safety impact, and make our city's criminal  
19 justice system more fair. Although much research  
20 and experience informed the task force  
21 recommendations the mayor set a very clear and  
22 simple standard to guide immediate and ongoing  
23 actions. What is effective to improve public health  
24 and public safety. Both are essential ingredients  
25 for success. This administration's historic effort

1  
2 to reduce the growing number of inmates with mental  
3 health and substance use problems in New York  
4 City's jails address every stage of the criminal  
5 justice process. From events leading up to an  
6 arrest to arrest and disposition, to jail, to  
7 release, to reintegration of individuals into the  
8 community. Applying a systems perspective... Applying  
9 a systems perspective the task force committed its  
10 efforts to break the revolving door of arrest,  
11 incarceration, and release that has trapped many  
12 troubled individuals in the system. The changes put  
13 in place by the task force fit within the evidence  
14 based system wide approach taken by the de Blasio  
15 administration when working to prevent crime and  
16 increase fairness for all. As Elizabeth Glazier  
17 Director of the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice  
18 and Task Force Co-Chairwoman stated; I think this  
19 is what criminal justice looks like in the 21<sup>st</sup>  
20 century. Preventing crime is about more than the  
21 police and more than about prosecutors and defense  
22 lawyers and courts. In New York the proportion of  
23 individuals with mental ill... illness held in the  
24 city's jails has increased to nearly 40 percent in  
25 recent years even as the overall jail population

1  
2 has shrunk. The task force report identified more  
3 than 400 people who had been jailed at least 18  
4 times in the last five years. Accounting for over  
5 10,000 jail admissions during that period. These  
6 individuals speak to the importance of addressing  
7 mental health in our criminal justice system. 67  
8 percent of these inmates experienced a mental  
9 health need. 21 percent were severely mentally ill  
10 meaning they suffered from diseases like  
11 Schizophrenia or Bipolar disorder. And 99 percent  
12 were diagnosed with a substance use disorder. The  
13 task force recommendations include a plan to  
14 improve mental health screening before arraignment  
15 which has been implemented this year. With  
16 additional staff and updated screening protocols  
17 mental health screenings are now more efficient and  
18 better equipped to identify opportunities to divert  
19 low risk individuals away from jail and to connect  
20 individuals to care. These modifications will  
21 improve health outcomes for defendants with mental  
22 health problems in jail and will connect those  
23 diverted to out of jail health services where  
24 appropriate. Other actions in progress include new  
25 training approaches for police officers working

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2 with individuals suffering from mental illness,  
3 development of community based drop off centers,  
4 expansion of supervised pretrial programs for low  
5 level offenders who might otherwise fail to make  
6 bail, enhanced community services for an additional  
7 4,100 inmates with serious mental illnesses who are  
8 being discharged from jail including transportation  
9 to a residence or shelter and referrals for ongoing  
10 mental health treatment. The behavioral health task  
11 force has also implemented changes to better  
12 address the needs of veterans in the criminal  
13 justice system. Specifically it has directed the  
14 criminal justice agency which currently screens for  
15 veteran status before arraignment to include more  
16 direct questions on veteran status. The question  
17 about military service on the CJA interview form  
18 was also changed to be more inclusive of all  
19 service components including active, national  
20 guard, and the reserves. If a veteran is identified  
21 through this process a notification is sent to a  
22 designated borough liaison from Veterans Affairs.  
23 The VA then coordinates access to appropriate  
24 services including housing and case management  
25 support. Veterans may also be diverted from the

1 regular criminal courts into veteran treatment  
2 courts as a result of this screening process. In  
3 order to enable these connections to services CJA  
4 has signed into action data agreements with the VA  
5 to release the names of criminal justice involved  
6 veterans in Kings, New York, Richmond, the Bronx,  
7 and Queens counties to the veterans administration.  
8 To date CGA... CJA has reported 630 arrests to the  
9 Bronx VA and 136 arrest to New York City Harbor VA  
10 since those respective agreements went into effect  
11 last July. Per the February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015 City Council  
12 hearing on veterans treatment courts New York City  
13 currently has working veteran treatment courts in  
14 three of the five boroughs with plans in progress  
15 to stand up programs in Staten Island and  
16 Manhattan. MOVA strongly supports these actions  
17 knowing that veteran treatment courts have assisted  
18 countless service women and service men struggling  
19 with the psychological, physical, and spiritual  
20 sequelae of deployment experience to turn their  
21 lives around and continue their ethos of service as  
22 leaders within their home communities. The aim of  
23 these courts working in conjunction with Department  
24 of Veterans Affairs Health Care networks, Veterans  
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1 Justice Outreach Specialist, the Veterans Benefits  
2 Administration, State Departments of Veterans  
3 Affairs, peer veteran mentors, and veterans service  
4 and family support community organizations is to  
5 address these underlying issues and connect  
6 veterans to the service and support they need. It  
7 requires a systems perspective to understand and  
8 leverage the complex relationships among  
9 individuals and organizations with widely differing  
10 roles professional specialties, agency and  
11 community affiliations, as well as levels of  
12 government working in cooperation to achieve better  
13 outcomes in serving those who have served us. The  
14 veterans treatment courts strike a balance between  
15 upholding the rule of law and providing treatment  
16 services for these men and women, our veterans, to  
17 whom society remains indebted. In short these  
18 prose... these programs save lives. Moving to the  
19 legislation on today's agenda... Chairman Ulrich I  
20 applaud your leadership on addressing issues facing  
21 veterans in the criminal justice system. This  
22 timely proposal seeks to apply a systems lens to  
23 better understand the needs of veterans in the  
24 criminal justice system including coordinated  
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1 access to housing, employment, legal, and health  
2 services. We support a robust collaboration between  
3 MOVA, the relevant criminal justice agencies and  
4 veterans themselves to identify new ways to  
5 identify new ways to address veteran needs that  
6 prevent entry into the criminal justice system  
7 whenever possible, provide access to needed  
8 services for those involved in the criminal justice  
9 system and assist in successfully transitioning  
10 formerly incarcerated veterans to their home  
11 communities. Because these issues are of great  
12 importance to this administration and the work done  
13 by the Behavioral Health Task Force has focused on  
14 issues that disproportionately affect veterans. We  
15 believe that it makes sense to leverage the  
16 behavioral health task force to identify best  
17 practices, assess the effectiveness of existing  
18 approaches and determine data collection needs  
19 related to veterans in the criminal justice system.  
20 We do not believe that the creation of an  
21 additional task force would help us accomplish our  
22 shared goals. We do believe that MOVA in  
23 partnership with MOCJ can take advantage of the  
24 existing collaboration amongst the necessary  
25

1 participants including the criminal justice  
2 agencies and behavioral health experts to co-lead  
3 an effort that will address many of the important  
4 questions raised in the bill as well as help to  
5 assess what data collection efforts might be both  
6 feasible and actionable. The data collection  
7 outlined in the bill speaks to the importance of  
8 information sharing in this effort. But it does  
9 pose significant operational and fiscal concerns  
10 that we want to discuss further with you and the  
11 council and those in the advocate community. It is  
12 essential that we continue to study best practices  
13 from around the country to identify strategies,  
14 leading strategies for enhancing the work of the  
15 behavioral health task force and veterans courts.  
16 National best practices that we may not already be  
17 implementing in New York City as well as the  
18 information and citywide collaboration needed to  
19 support these practices. The behavioral health task  
20 force will continue to look at best practices as  
21 they relate to veterans and focus on the issues  
22 that most strongly affect veterans as we continue  
23 this important work. We agree with the goals of  
24 this bill and appreciate the council's diligence in  
25

1 assisting veterans in the criminal justice system.  
2 We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the  
3 council and our colleagues in the criminal justice  
4 agencies regarding New York City's approach in  
5 improving the lives of its veterans and their  
6 families. In closing let me just take a moment to  
7 reflect upon the importance of the transformative  
8 changes currently under way at MOVA. MOVA is in the  
9 midst of on-boarding our veteran outreach  
10 specialist to extend our reach and presence within  
11 all five boroughs. We are also delighted to welcome  
12 our new veteran peer coordinators whose shared  
13 military experience ideally equips them to  
14 effectively engage homeless veterans, act as a  
15 resource and guide to navigating agencies and  
16 systems, help participants maintaining individual  
17 health and well being and sustain positive gains in  
18 achieving their life goals within the context of a  
19 supportive community. We will be reaching out to  
20 our New York City veterans community to enlist all  
21 who would like to volunteer their time and talent  
22 to serving our fellow veterans and their families.  
23 There simply is no greater privilege. As your MOVA  
24 commissioner I am excited to participate in this  
25

1  
2 historic endeavor representing the needs of  
3 veterans and their families and applying resilience  
4 informed approaches that empower communities and  
5 individuals across the system. Moving the front  
6 line of intervention for hope and hearing from the  
7 clinic and the hospital to the community and the  
8 kitchen table. Although much has been done our most  
9 critical work lies yet ahead. No challenge is to  
10 great. Working together. Let's keep after it.  
11 Thanks again for your leadership and for this  
12 opportunity to testify this important topic today.  
13 At this time I look forward to your comments and  
14 questions. Thank you very much.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you  
16 Commissioner as always. And before we move on to  
17 the next testimony I just want to recognize for the  
18 record that Council Member Maisel another member of  
19 this committee from Brooklyn has also joined us. So  
20 make sure you take his attendance. Okay. Oh okay,  
21 alright. Oh great. Alright. Terrific. So I have  
22 just a few questions but before I do I know there  
23 are other hearings and things going on so I  
24 normally defer to my colleagues in case they have  
25 to run to one of the other hearings that are taking

1  
2 place. These are going to community developments  
3 and he's leaving he's hello and goodbye. And  
4 Council Member Vallone do you have a few questions  
5 before...

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Sure. Afternoon  
7 Commissioner. How are you?

8 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Great thank you  
9 Council Member Vallone.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well this is a  
11 great follow-up to our chair's previous hearing we  
12 had almost a year ago. And I think we were kind of  
13 exploring and I was learning for the first time  
14 some of the services that are at the court system.  
15 So... At... At the courthouse. So if... If someone's  
16 identified to be a veteran and they're coming  
17 forward for the hearing. Who is present there that  
18 can help that veteran?

19 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So when that  
20 veteran is identified that's when the call the  
21 contact is made with the VA the VA veteran outreach  
22 coordinators then connect with that veteran and  
23 work with that veteran within the context of his or  
24 her progression within the system.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So even prior  
3 to the actual arraignment of the hearing. So I'd  
4 just like to step through that process so I know  
5 what... [cross-talk]

6 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I'll ask my  
7 colleague Trish Marsik to provide... [cross-talk]

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you.

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: ...additional detail  
10 but yeah both of the VA hospitals have justice  
11 coordinators. So they're responsible for tracking  
12 the cases once they get flagged for them. And so  
13 they're going to... [cross-talk]

14 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Who flags them?

15 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: CJA flags them,  
16 the criminal justice agency. And that is an agency  
17 that's in contract with the city to provide a  
18 screening risk of... Risk of flight training for  
19 every single person who comes through the criminal  
20 justice system.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And has that  
22 information provided uniformly to all the district  
23 attorneys or is that on request spaces or...

24 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No that... That  
25 information goes to everybody uniformly. CJA

1  
2 doesn't do every single person who comes through  
3 the criminal justice system. For instance they want  
4 to do DATs, they want to do desk appearance  
5 tickets. But for the majority of the arrests that  
6 come through the system CJA provides that initial  
7 screen.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: But for  
9 veterans yes?

10 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: But for veterans  
11 yes.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: That's... My  
13 question... [cross-talk]

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I'm sorry I didn't  
15 understand the denominator.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: No no no. I'm  
17 just for veteran that is... Has been arrested that  
18 information's provided to the district attorney?

19 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes yes.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Okay so now  
21 depending on the type of the arrest whether it's  
22 criminal or someone's facing an eviction... Landlord  
23 tenant or there's a civil type of case are the  
24 services the same, are the persons in attendance at  
25 the courthouse the same?

1  
2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: I'm not aware of  
3 the services when it's a civil case because my... My  
4 purview is only within the criminal justice system.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Okay so let's...  
6 Let's go with the criminal arraignment. So who  
7 would be at that...

8 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: The justice... The  
9 VA's justice coordinator would be engaging with the  
10 person and the defense attorney because they have  
11 to... The person has to consent to have... Having the  
12 help of the VA. And then that coordinator would be  
13 working with the defense attorney and with that  
14 person on whether... Whatever aspects of the case  
15 they can be helpful with whether it's helping to  
16 make sure they're diverted to a veterans court,  
17 whether it's connecting them to other services,  
18 whether it's... You know this person is in the  
19 community and we'd like to connect them with  
20 veterans services that they haven't had before.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Now the  
22 diversions of the veterans court is that a  
23 individual determination via the judge, via the  
24 attorneys, or the veteran himself.



1  
2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Believe that the  
3 person has to consent to that initially going in.  
4 And then...

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Wasn't that one  
6 of the areas we were going to kind of look at to  
7 see if we could expand that?

8 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah I... Since I  
9 wasn't part of the initial hearing I'm not sure  
10 about that but... [cross-talk]

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I think that's  
12 one of the things.

13 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: ...we can certainly  
14 look into that.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: ...the advocates  
16 had brought up. I... I think... I thought it would be a  
17 good way to...

18 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And in the problem  
19 solving courts usually because veterans courts,  
20 mental health courts, drug courts, all of the  
21 parties, all of the court parties generally have to  
22 agree to it.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Okay. The  
24 veterans courts... Is that uniform throughout the  
25 five counties?

1  
2 TRISH: So the veterans courts... We  
3 currently have three working veterans treatment  
4 courts in the Bronx, Queens, and in Brooklyn. The  
5 leadership in both Staten Island and Manhattan have  
6 committed to standing up veteran treatment courts.  
7 And I trust that they will keep their word on that  
8 commitment and we will look forward to when we have  
9 veteran treatment courts in all five boroughs.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Okay.

11 TRISH: But further details will have to  
12 be addressed through those respective boroughs.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I think that...  
14 That was something we all spoke about and that  
15 would be exciting to... To get that moving forward  
16 so...

17 TRISH: Absolutely, thank you.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I'll defer back  
19 to my chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you Council  
21 Member Vallone. I will open it. I'm sorry I'm  
22 juggling two hats today. But the most important job  
23 I have is being a good dad... Being a good parent. So  
24 it's the most important job we all have. It's okay.  
25 So that... Council Member Vallone brought up a very

1  
2 good point about the veteran treatment courts in...  
3 In Richmond County for instance it's not for lack  
4 of desire or effort it's that they were actually  
5 building a new court house and they physically  
6 didn't have the space. And I'm... I'm almost certain  
7 that the... The court house is supposed to open by  
8 the end of the year. And I know that they're having  
9 an election for a new district attorney but both of  
10 the candidates who are running for DA have  
11 expressed that they will work with the  
12 administrative judge in that county to set up the  
13 veteran treatment court and they support veterans.  
14 And it's very important and they want it there.  
15 They just couldn't have it there for logistical  
16 purposes. In Manhattan I think Cy Vance has  
17 recently expressed publicly that he wants to set up  
18 a veterans treatment court. And I know he's working  
19 with his colleagues at the state level to do just  
20 that. So I am looking forward to that day as are  
21 you that we have veteran treatment courts  
22 throughout the five boroughs because it really  
23 shouldn't matter what borough a veteran is arrested  
24 in or happens to commit a crime in even for low  
25 level crimes like you know jumping the turnstile or

1  
2 having possession of small amounts of marijuana on  
3 them I think it's important that they get access to  
4 the same services and treatment that is available  
5 to all veterans. I think that's something that we  
6 all support. The... The goal of this bill though I  
7 think was two fold and... And I'm... I'm sorry that  
8 Council Member Lancman can't be here but he his  
9 across the street at his own hearing because he's  
10 also an attorney and he happens to know a lot about  
11 this particular topic is that we wanted to number  
12 one collect better data because I think the data  
13 varies depending on you know what part of the city  
14 they're arrested in. I am glad that we have changed  
15 the intake form though. That was a big  
16 accomplishment.

17 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: It's a big one.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And I know that  
19 that Commissioner was done with your help because  
20 that came out of the last hearing we did have a  
21 year ago and that was important. But are we... First  
22 of all are we relying solely upon the person who  
23 was arrested to self identify themselves as... As a  
24 veteran or someone who served in the military or is  
25 there any other mechanism for identifying people

1  
2 who are arrested but perhaps you know they don't  
3 fill out the form correctly because they might be  
4 intoxicated or they might be... You know just not in  
5 the right frame of mind so...

6 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Certainly if an  
7 individual were intoxicated or otherwise impaired  
8 I'm sure that the personnel working at... Within the...  
9 The criminal justice agency would work with them to  
10 assure that they're getting accurate information.  
11 But with respect to the specific question on  
12 identifying veterans we do rely on veterans to  
13 respond as they wish to the revised question which  
14 is have you ever served in the US Military,  
15 National Guard, or Reserves. Now we do know and  
16 we've corroborated with our colleagues in various  
17 jurisdictions across the country. And we know this  
18 from talking to veterans themselves that there is a  
19 fear factor among a number of veterans as they  
20 enter the criminal justice system that if they  
21 divulge that they are a veteran that perhaps that  
22 may put their VA benefits at risk. So this is an  
23 area that I think we need to look at very  
24 carefully, very deliberated, and ensure that all  
25 individuals working within our criminal justice

1  
2 system as well as beyond all of the different  
3 agencies and... And organizations that we mentioned  
4 who are part of this very complex system. We need  
5 to make sure that everyone has accurate information  
6 and that we don't do anything ever that would  
7 betray the trust of our veterans and their  
8 families.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I'm glad... I'm glad  
10 you brought that up. That is an important part and  
11 we certainly don't want to jeopardize any benefits  
12 that help veterans get services that they need  
13 through the VA be... Simply because we're in the  
14 process of trying to collect this data. I'd like  
15 if... If... If we can to focus more on the role of the  
16 Mayor's Office of... The... I'm sorry the Mayor's Task  
17 Force on Behavioral Health and what specifically  
18 they are doing to identify the veterans population  
19 that is involved in the Criminal Justice System.  
20 Like what... Can you just run me through that again?  
21 I know that the commissioner mentioned a lot of  
22 that in her testimony but just give me like a walk-  
23 through someone... Someone is arrested. They happen  
24 to be... [background comments] I am. I am. Some...  
25 Someone is arrested. They happen to be a veteran.

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They self-identify as a veteran. At what point do you start getting access to that information and what do you do with that information?

COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So the... The folks when they get arrested they do go through the screening that I was mentioning to Council Member Vallone. They... Everyone goes through the screens for risk of flight. So there's a number of questions that gets asked of people. Do they have an address. Do they... What are their connections to the community. And then the courts use that document to make determinations about setting bail. One of the questions now on that document is the question that the commissioner articulated... Have you served previously in the armed forces, the... And you know it better than I... [background comments] Yes.

TRISH: [off mic] And this came out of our experience both locally within the Workforce 1 Centers within the Department of Small Business Services as well as again our colleagues around the country that when you simply ask the question are you a veteran you're never going to get close to the actual reality of who is a veteran. And this...

1  
2 That's for a number of reasons. Some of us will  
3 assume that because we... We didn't have a combat  
4 arms role in the military that we're not a veteran  
5 or we didn't deploy to war that we're not a  
6 veteran. Women we're the worst at this.

7 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: In... And answer in  
8 a way that does not get to the inclusive question.  
9 Because as you know Mr. Chair and members of the  
10 Committee Council Member Vallone here in New York  
11 City we are very inclusive. Anyone who has ever  
12 raised their right hand and said here I am, send  
13 me, who has ever signed that... That blank check  
14 payable to the United States government up into and  
15 including one's life, they are our veterans and  
16 their family served too. That's... That's what this  
17 is all about. So we... We... We find that this more  
18 inclusive way really gets to it that you know have  
19 you ever served in the US Armed Forces, National  
20 Guard, or Reserves that then becomes a much more  
21 accurate complete inclusive way of identifying  
22 veterans and helping them self identify. Also  
23 another... I would say Mr. Chairman you know another  
24 recent development since our last hearing is... Is  
25 the... The launch of our veteran designator for the



1  
2 city IDNYC card. And we're... Yeah isn't that great  
3 Council Member Vallone, I know you've been such a  
4 champion of that. We're so excited. I mean we...  
5 We've heard from veterans and their families around  
6 the city. They're so excited to have something  
7 that... That demonstrates not only their service but  
8 our pride in the city to recognize their service.  
9 And we just started as you know you know the things  
10 in addition to the over 30 cultural institutions  
11 that you know the Bedrock New Yorker IDNYC card  
12 will give you a free year membership for our  
13 veterans. We started out with free year membership  
14 thanks to the Intrepid. We've also in Queens we've  
15 worked with the Chamber of Commerce. We're going to  
16 be working with all of the boroughs to get those  
17 business incentives and services for our veterans.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Do we have any  
19 early data on that like to have... [cross-talk]

20 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Not yet. Not... Not...  
21 Not yet.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Excited to hear  
23 that, yeah.

24 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No it's going to  
25 be really exciting to get that. And then of course

1  
2 on the private sector side veterans advantage, a  
3 discount on their cooperate discounts that they've  
4 negotiated across the country. So this is just the  
5 start but we think it really is a drum beat. We  
6 were the first city under Mayor de Blasio's  
7 leadership and the strong support of the city  
8 council, first city in the country to have a  
9 veteran's designation on the municipal ID card. I  
10 think that's something we can all celebrate and be  
11 very proud of.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: We fought  
13 really hard for that. [cross-talk]

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I want to recognize  
15 Council Member Cabrera from the Bronx, also a  
16 mental health expert not because he's on the city  
17 council but because he... He happens to be a social  
18 worker and a pastor in his church so I know he... He  
19 is very keen on a lot of these issues as well.  
20 Getting back to the... The... The bill though... With the  
21 collection of data when we do... When... When we do  
22 collect this data and we have this information  
23 about veterans who are... People who have served in  
24 the military who have been arrested. What do we do  
25 with that data? Is it segregated in any way and

1  
2 analyzed in a special way? Are we looking at how  
3 many of those veterans by percentage or by raw  
4 number do go through the... The VTCs, the veteran  
5 treatment courts as opposed to do not and for what  
6 reasons. I mean you know for instance in, in, in,  
7 in certain counties what we found from the hearing  
8 that we had on Veteran Treatment Courts is certain  
9 individuals who are facing charges for certain  
10 crimes are not eligible to go to a veterans  
11 treatment court even if they happen to be a  
12 veteran. So you know that is a lot of the data that  
13 I think we're looking for. Is... Are... Is something  
14 falling through the cracks because something is not  
15 available or even when it is available are we not...  
16 Is there something that we're not doing to make  
17 sure they get access...

18 TRISH: So if I could take that Mr.  
19 Chairman. The first order of analysis was to ensure  
20 that we were much... Much better at identifying  
21 veterans up front in the system and now we're at  
22 the point really at the threshold where the second  
23 order... Second and third orders of analysis really  
24 come into play. And that's the work of ongoing both  
25 within the... The Committee on Recommendations as

1  
2 well as the larger task force as a whole. So we  
3 look forward to getting that data. At this point we  
4 don't yet have the systems in place that  
5 disaggregate in the way that you described.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Is... Does the  
7 Mayor's task force review that data on an annual  
8 basis, a semi-annual basis, a... I don't know how  
9 they... How they do that.

10 TRISH: So there's a lot of data  
11 collection that...

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Right.

13 TRISH: ...happens unless there's 24  
14 interlocking recommendations that are... That are  
15 moving forward as a part of this. The... We are in  
16 the process of collecting data mostly on... On  
17 process at this point how many people hit this  
18 point in the system. And moving swiftly we hope to...  
19 Did our... Did our interventions actually make any  
20 difference? You know have peoples' lives changed  
21 for what we've done? So as the commissioner pointed  
22 out those are the next phases of our analysis. The  
23 task force... The work groups that meet as part of  
24 the task force, and we have 20 meetings over the  
25 course of a year with these... With the various work

1  
2 groups that are part of the task force. They are  
3 looking at this data. They are... Are checking our  
4 work as we move along but also helping us to  
5 reflect upon the context in which that data sits  
6 because we all know that you know numbers are  
7 numbers. But understanding where they come from,  
8 why they might be the way are is critical. The  
9 other thing I would say is that although CJA has  
10 been giving data to the Bronx VA for you know  
11 several months now that as... As the testimony  
12 indicated they've only been giving it to the Harbor  
13 VA since July. And so we're anxious to see what the  
14 impact of that connection will be. That was a... That  
15 was a... An agreement that had not been forged until  
16 we sat down with them and said you know this needs  
17 to happen moving forward.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay thank you. I'm  
19 going to step out for two seconds to take care of  
20 daddy duty and Council Member Vallone has a few  
21 questions. I think Council Member Cabrera has a few  
22 questions. So hopefully they have enough questions  
23 to fill up the amount of time it takes to change a  
24 diaper. But otherwise...

25 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No worries.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: ...I will be right  
3 back. So Council Member Vallone will...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: How are you. So  
5 good to see you both. And... And indeed it's good  
6 news that we finally have a designation and New  
7 York City I.D. I wanted to ask if you'd talk to me  
8 a little bit about the alternative programs so we  
9 could have veterans not going through  
10 incarceration. You talked a little bit about that.  
11 Where are we, what programs we have available.  
12 Let's start there.

13 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yeah well the  
14 alternative programs... Be the veteran treatment  
15 court certainly are the first and you may not have  
16 been here for our discussion of this Council Member  
17 Cabrera. It's awfully good to see you again since  
18 we last spoke and I remember you and I had an  
19 exchange on this very... Very point. Plans are moving  
20 forward. Both in Staten Island where they've had  
21 both facility issues, renovation as well as  
22 leadership changes and then Manhattan where the  
23 district attorney has clearly publicly indicate...  
24 Indicated that these plans are in progress to stand  
25 up veteran treatment courts. Of course in the Bronx

1  
2 and Queens and Brooklyn those are already  
3 established and going well. And as we come fully  
4 on-board with veteran treatment courts in all five  
5 of our boroughs that then is going to be our  
6 platform for them building on even further not just  
7 the... The veteran treatment courts themselves but  
8 for example the veteran peer mentor program... Is one  
9 of the veteran peer mentors in the Bronx. We know  
10 what a difference that makes and I think that's  
11 just the beginning. So this is very exciting for us  
12 at this threshold to work together on these kinds  
13 of innovative and really life respecting and life  
14 saving interventions.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: I'm glad to  
16 here. Like can you share what... How many have gone  
17 through alternative program, what's the capacity,  
18 what will be the future capacity?

19 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: You know I don't  
20 have... I don't have those numbers at this point but  
21 certainly those... That's exactly where we're... That's  
22 exactly where we're headed. So I look forward the  
23 next time we talk about this we'll have even... You  
24 know we'll have much better data going forward  
25 particularly as we're able to at the very onset

1  
2 much more inclusively identify who is a veteran in  
3 our system.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: What are the  
5 wrap around services for those alternative  
6 programs?

7 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No you know it's  
8 interesting. At... At our very first committee  
9 meeting... This is the committee that's been  
10 specifically focused on the... The veteran related  
11 actions, the recommendations out of the task force  
12 action plan from last December. And so from the  
13 very beginning we've had you know obviously CJA has  
14 been there and... And the... The veteran justice  
15 outreach specialist in a whole working group across  
16 the mayor's office. And one of the things the VA  
17 came forward with... They were just in the process  
18 themselves of joining the New York City... The NYC  
19 Serves [sp?] network, this is a coordinated service  
20 network. New York City is... Is the lead city in the  
21 country right now with this and the VA is one of  
22 the network providers. In the city we have small  
23 business services who has been the lead provider.  
24 But what's important about this network is that it  
25 coordinates services across... About 40 service



1  
2 providers that cover virtually everything a veteran  
3 could need from legal services to health services,  
4 mental health services. CUNY is the academic back  
5 bode. The VA is a member of this network. That's a  
6 huge thing. The city as I mentioned, SBS. So this  
7 is something that's continuing to grow and develop.  
8 It's housed on a very robust technology platform  
9 that's provided by a veteran owned business called  
10 unite us. And so this is really an innovation that  
11 just within these last few months veterans coming  
12 through the criminal justice system and wherever  
13 they may be in the community. I mean that's the  
14 other beauty is that they can get connected as they  
15 come through the criminal justice system and then  
16 when they return to their homes they're still  
17 connected. So we're very excited.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: How did housing  
19 plays into that?

20 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And housing is  
21 part of that as well.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Okay how did...  
23 Do you have any details how... How that transition  
24 takes place. They say they go through a criminal  
25

1  
2 system when they get out. What's a waiting for  
3 them? What's potentially available for them?

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: You know I'll dig  
5 into that. I don't have that day... Data right at  
6 hand but... [cross-talk]

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Okay.

8 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: ...I am very pleased  
9 to tell you Council Member Cabrera that as a result  
10 of the Mayor's Commitment to... To New York City  
11 veterans was last June in the budget cycle and I  
12 would say the combined investment with the city  
13 council and specifically with the advocacy of this  
14 committee. But as part of that increased budget  
15 capacity for MOVA we have just recently brought on  
16 Nicole Branca who previously served as the  
17 executive director of the Supportive Housing  
18 Network of New York. She's one of the country's  
19 leading experts in supportive housing. She's  
20 recently come on board as our assistant  
21 commissioner and senior adviser for strategic  
22 initiatives. And you will be so pleased... Right now  
23 she's just scurrying every which way but loose  
24 connecting with folks and getting veterans placed  
25 and you know I will definitely be bringing her into

1  
2 the task force deliberations as one of our subject  
3 matter expertise, experts so that she can really  
4 apply her expertise and look at this process, get  
5 the kind of data all of us are interested in  
6 tracking and making sure as Trish said that our  
7 interventions are having the desired positive  
8 impact.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Do you happen  
10 to have the numbers of... Of veterans who are  
11 homeless right now, and updated?

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Let's see. The  
13 last we... We have regular meetings on this topic at  
14 all levels. We happen to have a veterans task force  
15 meeting just this last week. And the numbers have  
16 gone down to i believe... I have to get the specific  
17 number but they dropped considerably over this  
18 last... This last few days and we expect that to  
19 continue. We've got some new strategies in place  
20 including the new resources that are now coming on  
21 board, the veteran peer coordinators, the policy  
22 analyst folks, the increased... The social workers.  
23 And I think you're going to see a continued you  
24 know incremental and unrelenting progress on this  
25 issue not only as we head towards the end of this

1  
2 year but also as we role into the new year and  
3 sustain these gains.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: The... The... The  
5 last number I think I heard at the general welfare  
6 which I was taken aback and had a meeting with DHS  
7 the other day. I think it was 50. So you're saying  
8 it's even below that now or...

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Are you talking...  
10 Let me be very clear.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Yes.

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: There... Okay in  
13 terms of chronic veterans... Chronic... Chronic  
14 homeless veterans...

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Right.

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: ...that is less than  
17 50 now.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Okay.

19 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So that's a huge  
20 huge step forward in terms of street homeless  
21 veterans that's less than 20. We know who they are.  
22 We've invited them into the system. We maintain  
23 ongoing relationships. Our peers are deploying to...  
24 To be their battle buddies and at any time that  
25

1  
2 they're ready to come back into the system we are  
3 ready to place them.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: And how many of  
5 those went through the justice system out of those  
6 20?

7 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: You know I... That's  
8 a great question Council Member Cabrera. We're  
9 going... You know those are exactly the kind of  
10 lenses we... We now are at this threshold to move to  
11 the second and third orders of analysis. Those are  
12 exactly the kinds of data that we'd like to... We'd  
13 like to get and we'll certainly share them with  
14 you.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you. I  
16 really appreciate that. And my last question is  
17 what do you see... Where you see us five years from  
18 now in terms of dealing with justice system and  
19 veterans?

20 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Wow, that's a  
21 great question Council Member Cabrera. I see New  
22 York City playing a major leadership role doing  
23 good things, innovative things, humane things to  
24 restore dignity and respect and pride and  
25 opportunity and redemption frankly with respect to

1  
2 veterans and all who for whatever reason enter the  
3 criminal justice system. And I think you know we've  
4 got the right leadership in place both from the  
5 mayor to... Mayor's office leadership across the  
6 organization in terms of the city agencies looking  
7 across the street here at the city council and of  
8 course across this... Our greatest city, New York. I  
9 think that there's no limit to what we can design  
10 and implement here in New York City that will  
11 really be deserving of the bold legacy and history  
12 that New York City has of inclusiveness, of  
13 justice, of equity, of growth yes, and of, of  
14 compassion. So I think we'll fill in the details in  
15 terms of what those actual actions will include but  
16 I am confident that we truly are poised to serve as  
17 a model for the nation and a model for the world  
18 with respect to veterans, specifically as well as  
19 any individuals and their families who enter our  
20 criminal justice system.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you so  
22 much Commissioner. Looking forward for that vision  
23 of becoming a reality. Thank you.

24 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And together we'll  
25 work after it. Thanks so much Council Member.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Indeed. Thank  
3 you.

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Council Member  
5 Cabrera thank you. Thank you for your patience too  
6 today. Getting back to the... The bill I... I know that  
7 again Council Member Lancman can't be here, he's  
8 across the street. But I know that he would be  
9 curious to know if there's anything particularly in  
10 the legislation or the bill that the administration  
11 is uncomfortable with, anything that the... Anything  
12 that's you know specifically in the bill that... That  
13 the administration might think is duplicative,  
14 something that we're already doing perhaps or  
15 something that they're not comfortable with in  
16 terms of what role of the Mayor's Office of... The  
17 task force I should say, on behavioral health might  
18 play in this process. So I... We're just trying to  
19 get a better understanding from a legal standpoint  
20 what the administration doesn't like that's in the  
21 bill that they're not comfortable with that they  
22 think that we're already doing so that we might be  
23 able to correct it or modify the bill or take  
24 another look at it?

1  
2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well what we think  
3 we're already doing is we already have a task force  
4 that's set up. And the mechanism's well in place  
5 with... With those over 125 individuals as I  
6 described in the testimony. It's not that the  
7 administration is uncomfortable with anything. We...  
8 We... As I said in my testimony we share these goals,  
9 we applaud them. We are eagerly and... And... And you  
10 know as we've described we are pursuing them in an  
11 ongoing basis. The conversation that we will look  
12 forward to having with the council going forward  
13 will be specifically looking at the data collection  
14 elements. And I don't think that's something that  
15 we'll go into in detail today. I think that's  
16 something that we need to get around a table and  
17 really dig into and... And determine really what's  
18 both feasible as well as actionable.

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. Alright. So  
20 any other questions? Council Member Cabrera, Lily  
21 any other questions? No I'm just kidding. Anyway.  
22 She drew all over your testimony. This was not me,  
23 it was her. Just... Just for the record if you happen  
24 to come up here later and see this on my desk you  
25 won't think that I was crossing this out. But thank



1  
2 you as always commissioner and thank you again to  
3 the mayor's office for your testimony. We have a  
4 few of the advocates who are here to testify as  
5 well on the bill. We're going to start in the order  
6 that they signed up. Cameron Mease from the  
7 Brooklyn Defender Services, Kristin Rouse from New  
8 York City Veterans Alliance, Miguel Douse I want to  
9 say, is that correct, Davis, I apologize sir  
10 please, I apologize, Davis, Blinded Veterans and  
11 Veterans Involved with Criminal Justice System, and  
12 William Siegfried from Project Renewal as well. If  
13 you can come up. Thank you. We will have four  
14 minutes for each speaker. That time will be  
15 displayed on the clock. The Sergeant at Arms will  
16 control that. If you need a few more seconds to  
17 wrap up we're pretty generous but not too generous  
18 so... I'll ask our... Eric Bernstein to swear in the  
19 panel and then we'll start with Kristin and work  
20 our way down.

21 COMMITTEE CLERK BERNSTEIN: Can you all  
22 raise your right hand please? Do you affirm to tell  
23 the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the  
24 truth in your testimony before this committee and  
25 to respond honestly to council member questions?

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You may begin.

KRISTEN ROUSE: Good afternoon everyone.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Kristen Rouse and I am speaking on behalf of the New York City Veterans Alliance. I am a veteran of the United States Army. I served three tours of duty in Afghanistan and I have lived in Brooklyn since leaving active duty in 2007. The New York City veterans alliance testified in February in support of establishing a veterans treatment court in Manhattan and more broadly the need to ensure that all veterans across the city experience the same measure of justice and access to treatment no matter which borough. In the final results of the survey of the New York City veterans community we conducted last spring of the 412 respondents to our question about how important it was to establish a veterans treatment court in Manhattan 398 respondents, nearly 97 percent of those who answered the question said that it was important to them. 86 percent identified this as either essential or very important. Yet as of today still only Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx have functional veterans treatment courts. New York City

1 veterans have been assured the government intends  
2 to establish veteran treatment courts in Staten  
3 Island and Manhattan but today we're still waiting.  
4 This has been addressed. The commissioner has  
5 addressed it but I would like to request on behalf  
6 of our community a formal or a more formal or more  
7 firm time line for the establishment of those  
8 courts and for them to be up and running in  
9 Manhattan and Staten Island. Veterans treatment  
10 courts are a vital steps toward ensuring veterans  
11 involved in the criminal justice system have access  
12 to the services and support they've earned and that  
13 can help get them back on the right track. But this  
14 is also just one piece of a much larger and complex  
15 criminal justice system that can and must work  
16 better for veterans. This is why we strongly  
17 support Introduction 793 and urge that this  
18 committee and the council pass it as soon as  
19 possible and that the mayor sign it into law with...  
20 Without delay. The task force report mandated by  
21 this piece of legislation has the potential to  
22 produce comprehensive and meaningful data to guide  
23 New York City in its understanding and treatment of  
24 veterans in the criminal justice system. Having  
25

1  
2 this report posted on the city's website will  
3 further allow organizations serving New York City  
4 veterans to better understand and tailor services  
5 and resources based on what we hope will be  
6 thoroughly researched and accurate data. Particular  
7 emphasis must be on studying and reporting on the  
8 needs and resources available to support veterans  
9 released from incarceration helping them to yet  
10 again reintegrate into their homes and  
11 neighborhoods. Coming home from deployment or  
12 active service is challenging the first time. And a  
13 veteran coming home from a period of incarceration  
14 faces even greater challenges. It is especially  
15 important to have wrap around services to support  
16 and support to ensure these veterans returning from  
17 incarceration have the opportunity to find safe and  
18 reasonable housing, adequate health and dental  
19 care, a decent way to earn a living, and ways to  
20 regain a sense of purpose and community in their  
21 lives. Successful reintegration is key to ensuring  
22 these veterans remain on the right track and do not  
23 reenter the criminal justice system. Another point  
24 of significance should be reporting on incarcerated  
25 veterans and their loss of VA benefits because of

1  
2 the degree of crime committed or the duration of  
3 their incarceration. Incarcerated veterans may  
4 avoid disclosing their veteran status because of  
5 the loss of VA payments to them or their family  
6 members. And the task force report should include  
7 the impacts of this loss of income on the  
8 incarcerated veterans households as well as their  
9 ability to reintegrate back home successfully upon  
10 release. The report should also include the loss of  
11 access to VA health care while incarcerated and  
12 impacts that may have on veterans. The intersection  
13 of veterans involved in the criminal justice system  
14 and the VA's veteran justice outreach or VJO  
15 program should be included in the study and assess  
16 whether more... More VA... VJO coordinators are needed  
17 to assist veterans at Rikers and other detention  
18 facilities across the five boroughs. In closing we  
19 voice our strong support for any effort the city  
20 can make to collect most thoroughly researched and  
21 most accurate data possible on New York City's  
22 veterans. Veterans involved in the criminal justice  
23 system are those who have lost their personal  
24 battles to reintegrate back home following their  
25 military service or rather those who we as a city

1  
2 and as a society have most grievously failed to  
3 welcome back home. It is essential that we strive  
4 to understand and calibrate our government and  
5 community resources for these individuals as  
6 accurately and equitably, at, as equitably as  
7 possible so we do not fail them yet again. For  
8 these reasons we strongly urge the immediate  
9 passage of Introduction 79... 793 into law. On behalf  
10 of the New York City Veterans Alliance I thank you  
11 for this opportunity to speak today. Pending your  
12 questions this concludes my testimony.

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you Christian  
14 [sp?] We'll hear... We will hear all the testimony if  
15 we can and then we'll have questions. I know  
16 Council Member Cabrera and I might have some so  
17 we'll... Alright thank you. Kristin thank you, next.

18 CAMERON MEASE: Good afternoon. My name  
19 is Cameron Mease and I am the Veterans Coordinator  
20 with Brooklyn Defender Services. Our organization  
21 provides criminal defense, family defense,  
22 immigration, civil legal services, social work  
23 support to more than 40,000... Brooklyn residents  
24 every year. I thank the New York City Council  
25 Committee on Veterans and in particular Eric Ulrich

1  
2 for the opportunity to testify in support of Intro  
3 793 to create, create a task force to study  
4 veterans in the criminal justice system. Many... Many  
5 of the veterans I see in my practice have mental  
6 health or addiction issues that were caused by  
7 active duty, the most prevalent and pernicious  
8 diagnosis involve PTSD and traumatic brain injury.  
9 Individuals with such diagnosis often suffer from  
10 depression... And a lack of self control leading to  
11 situations and behaviors that can result in arrest.  
12 My veteran clients are also very vulnerable to  
13 substance abuse issues which can also lead to  
14 criminal charges. The criminal justice system in  
15 general and our jails and prisons in particular are  
16 neither designed or equipped to address our veteran  
17 clients' needs. I appreciate that Intro 793  
18 stipulates that the task force study veterans entry  
19 into the criminal justice system with an emphasis  
20 on how to limit their involvement with the system  
21 all together and help those who are criminal  
22 justice involved to transition out of that system.  
23 I also appreciate that the proposed task force  
24 would include at least one representative of an  
25 organization providing legal representation to

1 veterans. Though this provision could be narrowed  
2 to specify that the member be affiliated with a  
3 criminal defense organization that serves veterans.  
4 My colleagues and I on the defense bar have a  
5 unique understanding of how the system treats and  
6 mistreats our clients. Briefly regarding jail...  
7 Ample research as well as BDS's direct experience  
8 has... Has demonstrated that people with mental  
9 illness do not fair well in jails or prisons.  
10 Veterans with PTSD or TBI experience severe trauma  
11 due to the fact that the jail environment is likely  
12 to trigger those symptoms and greatly exacerbate  
13 their mental health. It is our strong belief that  
14 special consideration of veterans' experiences must  
15 be integrated into any court proceedings in order  
16 to preclude or minimize their incarceration. A  
17 strong alternative to jail is a client's  
18 involvement with the veterans treatment court. A  
19 systemic response to the needs of veterans in New  
20 York City's criminal justice system is the recent  
21 proliferation of veterans treatment courts which  
22 are currently operating in Brooklyn, Queens, and  
23 the Bronx. Brooklyn's veterans treatment court for  
24 felonies opened in 2009 and has been expanding its  
25



1  
2 services and incorporating more and more veterans  
3 into its eligible pool of participants ever since  
4 2009. Additionally i've been working with a judge,  
5 the Brooklyn DA's Office and accompanying agencies  
6 and programs on the creation of the Brooklyn  
7 misdemeanor, misdemeanor veterans treatment court.  
8 This will open next Wednesday. Trying to gain  
9 access to these courts for my clients is a large  
10 part of what I do. In my experience the... The  
11 veterans treatment court is far more likely to  
12 provide critical avenues for healing and recovery  
13 to individuals who deserve non-jail evidence based  
14 treatment interventions. All that said veterans  
15 courts only hear cases on certain charges and more  
16 consequently district attorneys who effectively  
17 serve as gate keepers can keep a large share of  
18 eligible cases in traditional courts. For example  
19 my client who served two tours in Iraq, has no  
20 criminal record, is charged with a possession of a  
21 firearm, a firearm that he bought legally in another  
22 state while still in the service. Two weeks after  
23 moving to NYC he... He is stopped with that firearm,  
24 pursuant to a stop and frisk. And then the district  
25 attorney's office is asking for three and a half

1  
2 years jail, actually much more time than he... He  
3 spent in the service. Does my client have  
4 copability? Yes. Should he do years of jail for  
5 this crime? Definitely not, in my opinion. I  
6 continue the uphill battle with him in getting him  
7 into a veterans treatment court. So while Brooklyn  
8 has been great expanding the scope of our... Our  
9 veteran treatment courts there's room for  
10 improvement of growth. But basic... On my experience  
11 for those who do gain access to... The specialized  
12 courts are critical to reducing the long term... Long  
13 term collateral consequence of a conviction such as  
14 limited employment, loss of housing, deportation,  
15 loss of familial relationships. Another essential  
16 function of the Brooklyn veterans treatment court  
17 is that it is a hub of resources for our veteran  
18 clients as... As mentioned before the VJO, Veterans  
19 Justice Outreach is... Is just great in this regard.  
20 The... The coordinators are... Are great. This... Mr.  
21 Garner who's actually here in... In the room help me...  
22 Has been helping me just a ton on this case that I  
23 mentioned before. And it's great and I don't know  
24 what I would do without him. In conclusion on this  
25 topic veterans treatment courts are an essential

1  
2 alternative to incarceration and can be an  
3 incredible resource for our veteran defendants.  
4 They should be further researched and further  
5 developed. And I can skip over my section on  
6 reentry because you covered it pretty well. And in  
7 conclusion I'll just say that... That I'm very  
8 grateful for the opportunity to speak to you all.  
9 And I look forward to continuing to support this  
10 venture.

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you so much.  
12 And again we will follow-up with some questions  
13 after the testimonies are completed. Thank you  
14 again.

15 WILLIAM SIEGFRIED: Good afternoon  
16 everyone. Good afternoon. My name is Bill  
17 Siegfried. I'm the veteran outreach specialist at  
18 Project Renewal. I'll be brief. My particular niche  
19 is employment for homeless veterans. And I do  
20 employment for veterans who have housing too but  
21 mostly it's homeless veterans. I... I came today  
22 because when I got the email from... From Kristin  
23 about veterans in the criminal justice system. I  
24 get calls from guys who say I have a CDL. I... I have  
25 this qualification, I have that, I have a pending

1 court case. And we have conferences every week.  
2 We're... We're... Small or... Well he's got this, he's  
3 got that, he's employable, he's... He's got a pending  
4 court case. We will not send him on a job  
5 interview. And there are people, these are  
6 veterans. That's all I deal with now. They go  
7 themselves, guy's good, he's motivated, he's got  
8 this, he's got that, he's got the qualifications,  
9 he's got a pending court case. The employer said  
10 no. Come back when your court case is settled. But  
11 it's pending. I think it's... It's going to turn out  
12 alright, I'm not going to go to jail. It would  
13 really help if I'm working also. And I've been to  
14 Phoenix house. They're residentialled you know. And  
15 I've talked with the counsellors there. Said it  
16 would really help if this guy's working you know  
17 because he's got six months more in this pending  
18 court case. He's not going to go to jail but can  
19 you help him out. Yeah I can enroll him but we will  
20 not send in... I don't have the say... They won't send  
21 him on a job because he's got a pending court case.  
22 I understand it's kind of out of the area of this  
23 act... Well whatever but I'm kicking it out here  
24 because that's what I run into all the time;

1  
2 pending court case. They won't send him on a job. I  
3 don't know what can be done about it but I'm going  
4 to speak about it because I run into it all the  
5 time, all the time. These guys want to work, they  
6 can work, they're qualified, they're motivated.  
7 They call me up, can you help me out, no I can't.  
8 So I'm done. Thank you all.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Okay. And I'm sure  
10 that the commissioner or someone from her office  
11 would like to speak to you offline about that  
12 experience that you keep going through. And we're  
13 big fans of project renewal. We fund them, the  
14 council, the mayor's office, we... We think you do  
15 great work for veterans, particularly homeless  
16 veterans and we want to help you and support you in  
17 doing just that. So we'll... We'll be happy to  
18 follow-up with you. Sir?

19 MIGUEL DAVIS: Yes. My name is Miguel  
20 Davis. I was a seal and I am a USA Force veteran,  
21 Vietnam.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Happy Birthday.

23 MIGUEL DAVIS: Yes sir, thank you. This  
24 is why I... I didn't even know it until this morning.  
25 Thanks. I... I'm here thanks to an email I got from

1  
2 my coordinator doing gathers from the Bronx veteran  
3 treatment court where I'm a mentor. On reading the  
4 email I immediately thought the one thing that I  
5 would like to help contribute in coming... I wasn't  
6 really prepared to speak but after coming and ask  
7 whether or not I would I thought I should is to  
8 help identify blinded vets in the system. And it's  
9 a... We seldom think about veterans being blinded for  
10 all kinds of reasons TBI for example. I just came  
11 back from Louisville, Kentucky. We did the 70<sup>th</sup>  
12 Blinded Vets Association Convention. Gotcha, thank  
13 you. Just got back from Louisville Blinded Vet  
14 Convention, my first. And I was blown away,  
15 impressed with the work and particularly that the  
16 guard so to speak is being changed. Many of the  
17 organization now is being mostly composed of older  
18 guys now like myself, Vietnam vets and the young  
19 guys coming back. And again the question has always  
20 been what is happening for the blinded vets. How  
21 are we getting ourselves out into the community,  
22 how are we being known, recognized, those kinds of  
23 things. So for me it... It... It's just a... An example I  
24 have... I'm legally blinded vet. And for a long time  
25 I appreciate much of what I've heard today about

1  
2 how it is that sometimes we don't identify, self-  
3 identify for all kinds of reasons. The way I became  
4 blind was not something I wanted to talk about  
5 being an MSD survivor. I wasn't a veteran for a  
6 very very long time. I was a homeless vet in New  
7 York City working with money in my pocket you know.  
8 But I was one of those vets who was not a vet who  
9 was not ever going to go into a VA hospital for no  
10 reason. But things changed thanks to a community of  
11 friends and relations and people who helped me to  
12 sort of understand that I didn't know that I didn't  
13 know that I didn't know you know what was happening  
14 for me. So I am a person in recovery for over 30  
15 years. So I am very privileged to be part of the  
16 Bronx veteran mentor program. And the way that it  
17 came about and the fact that it was honoring  
18 veteran services was again something that blew me  
19 away, it's like oh my god. Is that really possible.  
20 And so being able to see that and help be a part of  
21 that is something that I cannot tell you enough  
22 with words how special that has been for me in my  
23 own life you know. So the only big piece that i  
24 wish to bring forward is that there is a blinded  
25 vet population that needs to be looked at, heard

1  
2 from, and be made part of this entire process going  
3 forward. And this is pretty much all I wanted to  
4 say. Thank you all.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you so much.  
6 First of all thank you for your... For your service  
7 to our country and to all our veterans thank you.  
8 And for your inspiring story. We love to hear from  
9 veterans and their family members like yourself who  
10 have been through the system so to speak and have  
11 their own experiences and hopefully that will shed  
12 some light on how we can improve, what we do on our  
13 end to make it easier for veterans who have to go  
14 through the same experiences that you have  
15 experienced. I... I wonder and I'd... I'd like to  
16 follow-up and I know that the... The commissioner  
17 probably will as well what accommodations we make  
18 for veterans and people with disabilities who go  
19 through the system. That's probably an area focus  
20 for the task force. But it's something particularly  
21 with veterans, so many of whom are vietnam era  
22 veterans who suffer from so many health side  
23 effects related to not only PTSD issues but agent  
24 orange quite frankly and what accommodations we make  
25 for them in a criminal justice system. Are their



1  
2 any special considerations that are made for them?  
3 That's something that I think we should probably  
4 follow-up on and talk about because that's... That's  
5 something that's really important and probably  
6 something that we forget quite frankly or that  
7 we're not always mindful of. So thank you for that.  
8 And hearing your story I have to tell you... I mean  
9 there's so many wonderful mentors. And I want to  
10 commend you and all of the volunteers throughout  
11 the city who volunteer their time, don't get paid a  
12 nickle or a dime, to mentor veterans who are part  
13 of the veterans treatment courts. Without them the  
14 courts would not exist. And we have a judge, we  
15 have a DA, we have you know defendants and people  
16 who represent veterans who are involved with the  
17 criminal justice system but without the mentors  
18 that rate of recidivism would not be as... You know  
19 would not be as... As low as it is. And we... We need  
20 you and we thank you and we encourage always other  
21 people to volunteer because it's a wonderful  
22 program. We want to see it in all five boroughs. I  
23 think that's something that we all heard today come  
24 out of this hearing. And Kristin to your point as  
25 soon as that court is open you know you can rest

1  
2 assured I'll be on the phone with the DA and the  
3 judges in richmond county and in... And in New York  
4 county we're going to follow-up. I... I honeslty  
5 don't know what the timeline is for what Cy Vance  
6 wants to do but that's something that I'll get an  
7 answer and I know the commissioner'll get an answer  
8 as well. But these hearings I think sometimes  
9 people think that it's an opportunity for the  
10 council and the administration to sort of state  
11 their position and... And... And we move on from there.  
12 It really isn't... It really is a chance to hear from  
13 the people in the trenches who are work... Who are  
14 veterans, who are working with veterans and telling  
15 us hey this works or this doesn't work and here's  
16 why. And it is not a waste of your time. It is not  
17 a waste of my time. What you say at these hearings  
18 we take note, we listen, and we try to act within  
19 the law when we're able to. There are some  
20 instances where our hands are tied by state law for  
21 instance or... Or federal regulations or the VA, it  
22 doesn't allow us to do certain things or sometimes  
23 it's even counterproductive and that's something  
24 that we don't want to do. We don't want to... In our  
25 quest to help veterans have them disqualified from

1  
2 getting 100 percent disability and then not having  
3 a way to pay for getting mental health counselling,  
4 or treatment, or medication or whatever it is that  
5 they need. So we have to be mindful of that too.  
6 But like I always say we can do more and we can  
7 always do better. The council, the administration...  
8 And we want to hear that from you. You know we... We  
9 do not want anything sugarcoated. We always want  
10 people to be as honest and respectful but as honest  
11 and frank as possible so that what we need to do we  
12 will do better. And if you leave with just that  
13 today I hope that it was worth your time. That's  
14 basically all I wanted to say. But Council Member  
15 Cabrera had some questions.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you so  
17 much Mr. Chair. Thank you for the panelist for  
18 being here. I want to ask you a specific, a couple  
19 of specific questions. What... You know I have a  
20 philosophy, a couple philosophy that says you can't  
21 make good decisions with bad information and number  
22 two what you don't know can actually hurt you. So  
23 what is it that we don't know? What kind of data do  
24 we need that you will see beneficial coming out...  
25 Potentially out of this taskforce to study veterans

1  
2 in the criminal justice system? What are we  
3 missing? So for example do we have the rate of  
4 recidivism for veterans entering the judicial court  
5 system. What kind of data do we need nowadays in  
6 order to make better decisions right here in the  
7 council, for the administration, for the non-profit  
8 organizations?

9 KRISTEN ROUSE: Councilman what we're  
10 looking for is... I mean there's like... You know we  
11 could talk about the Donald Rumsfeld you know the  
12 known knowns, the known unknown, the unknown... You  
13 know that's... So there's... I mean I'm... I am not an  
14 expert. I... I may not know you know as much as the  
15 folks sitting on this panel right now. But when we...  
16 When we have another hearing perhaps in the future  
17 to discuss the report that comes out I... My hope as  
18 an advocate is that we're not talking about that it  
19 was you know outsourced to a group of consultants  
20 that... That was not taken with a scope of work that  
21 really got them to dig in deep into the community  
22 and... And consulting with the experts... The people  
23 who are, as you mentioned, in the trenches doing  
24 the work and getting at the nuance and the  
25 surprises and the... You know the surprising

1  
2 information. I... The... You know what's... What's laid  
3 out in... In... In the bill, in the introduction is... Is...  
4 Is very comprehensive as a start. And you know but  
5 we're hoping to... You know to see the report really  
6 dig into the weeds of like what... What are the  
7 things that we don't know right now going into it  
8 I...

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: But what are  
10 those variables? What are... What are those areas  
11 that you feel that we're lacking now in terms of  
12 information or data?

13 KRISTEN ROUSE: I think... [cross-talk]  
14 is... is... the... the... the look over time for also like  
15 our... you know the recidivism rate. And then also  
16 like how... how are these veterans doing after... upon  
17 their return. Are they reintegrating because  
18 veteran reintegration is a big issue right now for  
19 troops returning home, for you know even older  
20 generations of veterans who never reintegrated back  
21 home and are still struggling and that's why  
22 they've... they build habits as homeless folks or  
23 panhandlers and it's tough to get them to... to get  
24 on a different track right. And so you know the...  
25 it's a reintegration issue. And so reintegration at

1  
2 following incarceration major issue for... at least  
3 for you know in terms of an advocate's point of  
4 you. It's... you know it's... we talked. I don't know...  
5 I don't know if that helps to answer your question...  
6 [cross-talk]

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: ...very much...  
8 Anybody else would like to...

9 CAMERON MEASE: [off mic] Yeah there's  
10 a... there's a Queens stakeholders meeting...

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Push... push the  
12 button if you can sir. I'm sorry.

13 CAMERON MEASE: There's a Queens  
14 stakeholder meeting in two weeks. and it's every  
15 five or six months about veterans alternative to  
16 incarceration meeting a court. Now there may be  
17 other stakeholder... [cross-talk]

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Is that the meeting  
19 with Judge Hersh [sp?]

20 CAMERON MEASE: Yes.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yes. That's...

22 CAMERON MEASE: That's the one. And they  
23 may have that data. I've gone to the... for the past  
24 three years I've gone to almost all of them. They  
25 may have those meetings in other boroughs but I've

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never heard of them. But they seem to be the most connected ones. They may have that data. I don't know. That's all I know about what you might be looking for.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Okay.

CAMERON MEASE: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: May... maybe in the Bronx Council Member Cabrera we could put you in touch with the... the judge and the veterans treatment court.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: That would be great.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We could see if we can get some information... [cross-talk]

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: That'd be awesome.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I don't know if they have... I'm sure they do but I... I don't know when or... or how often they have a stakeholders meeting in the Bronx...

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: ...but I'm sure they do so...

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Beautiful. Yes  
3 sir?

4 MIGUEL DAVIS: I... I think to answer your  
5 question it... I've been an advocate now for a long  
6 time and I realize that there are veterans that  
7 don't come to the VA. And so I've become an  
8 advocate for those who are not there. Those numbers  
9 are huge for all kinds of reasons. So it's a kind  
10 of need for having insurance against not having the  
11 right kind of insurance you know when you're  
12 dealing with people like myself who at one time...  
13 I'm... I'm living with difficult you know histories  
14 but I'm not coming because I didn't trust the  
15 system. Those numbers are huge. How do you get to  
16 that? It's only I think by one cased by case basis.

17 When I'm able to talk to family members and/or  
18 friends who know me that in that way I've seen  
19 positions soften by veterans and their families  
20 about being able to allow themself to trust and  
21 come in you know and maybe get the kind of help  
22 that they either had bad experiences with. Not to  
23 mention just the systems or other agencies around.  
24 Employment is a big thing of course. For example I  
25 got my Section 8 as a result of my homelessness



1  
2 some decades now. I'm still dealing with home...  
3 housing issues because of landlords, changes of  
4 landlords who want you out because they want you  
5 out. They take you to court. You know things get  
6 fixed. As far as the actual payment I went to human  
7 resource. I... and still every month I get a bill  
8 saying I owe tens of thousands of dollars because  
9 this particular landlord lawyer insist that even  
10 though the judge did not order it he wants to get  
11 lawyer's fees, tens of thousands of dollars. And  
12 I've asked him nicely again and again and again I  
13 don't owe you a nickle. I don't like getting a  
14 billed every month. It upsets me that it says I owe  
15 you 10,000 dollars when you've gotten that money  
16 from... paid for. So it is those kinds of... and it's  
17 not just only happening to me. The problem though  
18 is that even if I go to the VA they say well you  
19 gotten your Section 8 through the... program. You no  
20 longer sort of qualify to get any kind of further  
21 help from the VA who is responsible to helping me  
22 get my Section 8 with this piece of nuisance that  
23 is over my head constantly. Because I'm a vietnam  
24 vet and the time... I'm outside of the time that the  
25 VA can legally help me. Though the initially I was

1  
2 in a certain period of time five or six or 10  
3 years... that... time has come and gone. So you are no  
4 longer in sort of the system to be helped, yeah.

5 You're not homeless so I guess I would have to  
6 become homeless you know in order to get these  
7 people to clean up my... you know clean up their act...

8 So there... there's things like this. The other thing  
9 of course is blinded vets. there's all kinds of

10 blindness you know or ways people are... I'm dealing  
11 with not only not having vision in one eye

12 completely but your other eye comes and goes and it  
13 has its own life. There's a thing called circadian

14 rhythm between 2:00 in the morning and 7:00 at  
15 night. You know I'm... I'm... I'm up you know with... you

16 know because of these kinds of things. I'm not  
17 unique in this you know. But how do we become... how

18 do we begin to be a part of that conversation  
19 that's going to give us the data that's going to

20 give us the health, that's going to give us the  
21 confidence to believe and trust that we can live

22 and... and own our lives you know on a different  
23 basis today then. Because everything is seemingly  
24 trying to tempt you, to... to... to be off you know.

25 But for me I think it's... it's... in a nutshell it...

1  
2 it's... it's... I... I think one of the things that we  
3 can do here is to get more collaboration for  
4 example with the Blind Veterans Association. I  
5 think it's a changing organization. They've been  
6 around forever. And so that's one of the goals I  
7 have to help facilitate that conversation as a  
8 direct ambassador using my own life example going  
9 forward.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you I... I  
11 have one last question Mr. Chairman. And this is  
12 addressed to the Brooklyn Defender Services  
13 Testimony, Mr. Mease. At the very... you had pretty  
14 extensive written testimony. I really appreciate  
15 the work that you put into this. But you mention  
16 something real interesting here. You... you stated we  
17 should also visit the restricted housing unit  
18 punitive segregation sales for people, mental  
19 illness, a form of solitary confinement at Rikers.  
20 Can you explain a little bit more as to why... I've  
21 been to Rikers a couple of times... committee which  
22 directly deals with our prison system. Can you  
23 share as to exactly why you're recommending we do  
24 that.

1  
2 CAMERON MEASE: Honestly it sounds like  
3 it's not necessary at all for you. I think our  
4 policy team is always trying to think of creative  
5 ways that we can engage people that don't have as  
6 much of an understanding or appreciation. But...  
7 [cross-talk]

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: But let... let me  
9 take this back. I... let me qualify what I... I... I  
10 haven't been to the restrictive housing units  
11 section as I recall. Can you share why? I mean we...  
12 we been to quite a bit places but I don't recall  
13 going there. Why in particular there?

14 CAMERON MEASE: And so I... I... at risk of  
15 repetition so that I think is... is a piece that...  
16 that my policy team has been trying to come up  
17 with. Just anything that... trips to Rikers are great  
18 for people who haven't been. And then you know even  
19 if you have the sections on Rikers that kind of  
20 might evoke a bit more emotion or about what the...  
21 the human condition is there we're always trying  
22 to... to push for that for... for greater appreciation...  
23 [cross-talk]

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Is there  
25 anything in particular you're concerned about that

1  
2 we should... that should be a flag for us to... so when  
3 we visit you know we go with a certain level of  
4 consciousness awareness?

5 CAMERON MEASE: Sure I'm... I mean I think  
6 we're just always trying to... you know solitary  
7 confinement is something that we're just constantly  
8 trying to fight at Brooklyn Defender Services. So  
9 you know again as I...

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Gotcha.

11 CAMERON MEASE: ...said. Any... any greater  
12 appreciation of... of how terrible that can be I  
13 think is helpful for... especially amongst yourselves  
14 who are making policy.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you.

16 CAMERON MEASE: And then just... [cross-  
17 talk]

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Sure.

19 CAMERON MEASE: ...one... just to answer  
20 your previous question and to... to dovetail on his  
21 words just a bit at risk of repetition but I'll  
22 keep it brief I think that amongst my clients one  
23 of the biggest things I'm doing is connecting them  
24 with services that they didn't even know they were  
25 eligible for. And again there's a lot of reasons

1  
2 why you know maybe a veteran got stop lost. They  
3 went over for an extra tour and they came back and  
4 they're angry at that... you know the country or... or  
5 the service or they just are... are... didn't know they  
6 got certain services or were eligible for them. And  
7 then they can help so much for the... for the case  
8 but then... they can also might have prevented the...  
9 the veteran from getting into that legal situation  
10 in the first place. So figuring out how many  
11 veterans are at... that are not connected with  
12 services of course would be a great step towards  
13 getting them those services.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Beautiful.  
15 Thank you so much. Mr. Chair.

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you Council  
17 Member Cabrera. Thank you again all of you for your  
18 testimony. Lots of interesting information,  
19 questions. But we're going to move on to the final  
20 panel so that we can wrap up today's hearing. We  
21 have Charlotte Heyrman... did I pronounce that  
22 correctly? Charlotte? Is she here still? Okay. Joe  
23 Bello. And I believe this is Fay Radding Mascioli,  
24 is that correct? There we go. My Italian is better  
25 than my English so... from the Soldiers Project. And

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that... that is... those are the only three that have signed up for testimony so that will be... this will be our last panel. I will ask Eric Bernstein to administer the oath and then we will have four minutes on the clock for each speaker. Thank you.

CHARLOTTE HEYRMAN: Hello.

COMMITTEE CLERK BERNSTEIN: Raise your right hand please.

CHARLOTTE HEYRMAN: Oh sorry.

COMMITTEE CLERK BERNSTEIN: Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this committee and to respond honestly to Council Member questions?

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We can start with Charlotte and then we'll... Thank you.

CHARLOTTE HEYRMAN: Good afternoon Council Member Ulrich, members of the committee, and members of the Committee on Veterans. My name is Charlotte Heyrman and I'm the intake advocate at the Veterans Advocacy Project at the Urban Justice Center that provides free legal services for low income veterans with a focus on those living with PTS, substance abuse issues, and traumatic brain

1  
2 injury. I am testifying in place of Coco Culhane,  
3 Director of the Veteran Advocacy Project. Thank you  
4 for the opportunity to speak today. I would like to  
5 express my support for bill 793 calling for the  
6 creation of a task force to study veterans  
7 interactions with the criminal justice system.

8 Every day at the veteran advocacy project we see  
9 the negative impacts of the criminal justice system  
10 on the lives of our clients. And we look forward to  
11 the recommendations the task force will present  
12 towards lessening these effects. That being said  
13 there is much more that can be done for veterans to  
14 prevent their initial involvement in the criminal  
15 justice system by connecting veterans with the  
16 benefits they are uniquely entitled to including  
17 access to discharge upgrades. Far too many veterans  
18 never see the program... programs that Commissioner  
19 Sutton spoke earlier about this afternoon. And many  
20 are not eligible. In my work with the Veteran  
21 Advocacy Project I witness... witness the threat of  
22 the criminal justice system in the lives of my  
23 clients every day especially when they are unable  
24 to access the benefits they need. In a meeting last  
25 week a veteran awaiting a HUD vash... voucher showed



1  
2 me photos of the room and three quarters house he  
3 shares with two others. The images on his small  
4 phone screen show three beds squeezed into a narrow  
5 room. Socks hung on a makeshift clothesline, a  
6 bookshelf sagging and bending under the weight of  
7 belongings and a television perched on the edge of  
8 a dresser. My client pointed out his bunk, the  
9 lower one. Around it hung sheets tucked under his  
10 bunk mate's mattress and a microwave in the corner.  
11 Why are those hung up, I asked him. Because of my  
12 roommate he said. He yells and tries to pick fights  
13 with me at night and I worry that... what I could do  
14 to him if I let it get to me. He had tried to build  
15 a wall. At the city we should not be in this  
16 situation. We should not relegate our city's  
17 veterans to conditions that some... where someone has  
18 to build a wall to protect themselves from an  
19 outburst of annoyance, frustration, or anger that  
20 could lead to their entrance into the criminal  
21 justice system. Through a more proactive counseling  
22 efforts, better housing initiatives and timely  
23 benefits this scene can be avoided. I cannot count  
24 how many times I have sat across the table from  
25 someone who served in the armed forces and have

1  
2 been asked is my service not enough. It could be a  
3 veteran with a less than fully honorable discharge  
4 due to substance use or a mental health diagnose or  
5 a peace time veteran of the national guard. By  
6 failing to recognize the services of all veterans  
7 despite service era, discharge status, or period of  
8 service we are culpable in the answer to this  
9 question. This task force has the great opportunity  
10 to study the consequences of these rejections and  
11 the role they play in making a veteran more likely  
12 to make mistakes that may involve them ultimately  
13 in the criminal justice system. Every week thick  
14 letters arrive in my mailbox from prisons upstate  
15 from Fort Leavenworth and from Rikers. Almost all  
16 of them ask what services are available to formerly  
17 incarcerated veterans when they return to the city.  
18 This task force has the ability to answer this  
19 question by identifying the existing resources in  
20 New York, programs that could assist incarcerated  
21 veterans to return, reenter, and succeed in our  
22 city as well as supporting their families while  
23 they are incarcerated. we must acknowledge that the  
24 impact of the criminal justice system does not end  
25 the day a veteran boards the bus departing from

1  
2 Marcy, Bedford Hills, or Collins Correctional  
3 Facility. We applaud the potential this initiative  
4 presents and encourage the task force to study what  
5 keeps veterans out of the criminal justice system  
6 completely and programs that assist formerly  
7 incarcerated, the formerly incarcerated rejoin and  
8 rebuild their lives in this great city. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. I have a  
10 few questions but again I'll wait 'till the end and  
11 then we'll...

12 FAY RADDING MASCIOLI: Hi city council.  
13 So such an honor to be here. I'm Fay Raddy Mascioli  
14 the Chapter Director of the New York City Chapter  
15 of the Soldiers Project which is a national  
16 organization that provides free confidential  
17 unlimited psychological services for post 9-11  
18 veterans and any of their loved ones through a  
19 network of volunteer psychotherapists. And I'm  
20 really here in support of the bill 793. The  
21 soldier's project therapist see any veteran  
22 regardless of discharge status. And we have... we  
23 were formed to be a safety net for these types of  
24 veterans but we certainly serve anyone who would  
25 like to be seen outside the VA system. And I'm... I'm

1  
2 really here to be in support of keeping veterans  
3 out of the criminal justice system whenever  
4 possible. So I just wanted to be here in support of  
5 that and thank you for your time.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Thank  
7 you very much. Joe Bello. Last word.

8 JOE BELLO: Yes. Thank you. Councilman  
9 Ulrich, members of the Veterans Committee thank you  
10 for giving me the opportunity to speak. I come  
11 before you to voice... to also voice my support for  
12 Intro 793, the creation of a veterans legal task  
13 force. As was stated back in May there are  
14 thousands of veterans who get tangled up in the  
15 justice system in New York City and unfortunately  
16 there is a disparity to how veterans are treated  
17 based upon what borough they live in or what they  
18 happen to be arrested for. This bill would require  
19 the city to convene agency officials as well as the  
20 veterans community to study why veterans enter the  
21 criminal justice system and to recommend ways to  
22 limit their interactions with it. We'd also examine  
23 how the courts are operating and what each one is  
24 doing differently which would help to streamline  
25 what each does within their respective veterans

1  
2 treatment courts. As Chairman Ulrich stated in May  
3 certain claims are able to be heard in the Bronx  
4 but can't be heard in Brooklyn. Certain services  
5 are not available. If you get pulled over in Queens  
6 you're going to go to veterans treatment court in  
7 Queens but if you commit the same crime in  
8 Manhattan you're going to go through the same  
9 system as everybody else and you're not going to  
10 get the services that are tailored to help  
11 veterans. This is our current problem. And we all  
12 saw this play out last February with the death of  
13 Jerome Murdough, a Marine Corps veteran who was  
14 found dead inside his cell at Rikers Island eight  
15 days after he was arrested for trespassing in the  
16 stairwell of a city housing project to escape the  
17 cold. Had Manhattan had a veterans court this  
18 tragedy could have been averted. Therefore I am  
19 once again voicing my support for Intro 793. I look  
20 forward to seeing the work on this task force being  
21 created and its results. Thank you once again  
22 Councilman Ulrich, the committee, and Councilman  
23 Lancman and his committee for their leadership.

24 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you Joe. And  
25 thank you to the three of you. I have two quick

1  
2 questions and then she's dying to bang the gavel so  
3 we got to... we have just got to get this thing  
4 wrapped up. But anyway getting back to your point  
5 with the... the work of the Urban Justice Center.  
6 They do great work. There's no taking away from  
7 that. And we... we certainly want to leverage the  
8 existing benefits and services that are available  
9 some of which a lot of people don't know about  
10 right? I mean that's one of the problems. Maybe  
11 that's something that you would like to work on  
12 with MOVA though. Because MOVA is a place where  
13 they sort of concentrate a lot of the services and  
14 programs that are available for veterans. And if  
15 you're getting these letters from people who are  
16 leaving prison or jail soon and going on probation  
17 or being released maybe there's something that  
18 through the Mayor's task force they can put  
19 together, package of information with phone numbers  
20 and resources and... and do it in conjunction with  
21 your organization as I'm sure they're not opposed  
22 to that. I'm not speaking for them but... If there's  
23 so many programs and services that are available we  
24 need to connect them with veterans. We shouldn't be  
25 doing it three or four different ways. We should

1  
2 find the best way to do it and then do it together  
3 you know. So that's part of the problem. But the  
4 question I had for you was regarding the discharge  
5 upgrades. This is something I'm very much  
6 interested in. I'm... I'm curious to find out how you  
7 think capturing either data or information from  
8 people who are involved with the criminal justice  
9 system could potentially lead to helping people  
10 with their discharge situations and... and... How do  
11 you think that would happen? How could it happen  
12 potentially? Other than people just going directly  
13 to you I'm saying.

14 CHARLOTTE HEYRMAN: Yes. So I think that  
15 we more often see the consequence of a... a less than  
16 fully honorable discharge appearing as an  
17 engagement with the criminal justice system because  
18 someone isn't able to access the mental health  
19 treatment that they need, perhaps housing stipend,  
20 all the things that are available to veterans with  
21 fully honorable discharges and... and general  
22 discharges. But down the line our office already  
23 does receive referrals sometimes from the Brooklyn  
24 Defender Services as well as other public... [cross-  
25 talk]

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2

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You get the...

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[cross-talk]

4

CHARLOTTE HEYRMAN: ...groups... [cross-

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talk]

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CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: You get referrals

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from the veteran treatment courts? Do you attend

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the stakeholders meetings that they hold? I mean

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like that... that's probably a great place to go to

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get access to those people who need that type of

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help.

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CHARLOTTE HEYRMAN: Yes we do.

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CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah.

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CHARLOTTE HEYRMAN: And we also... But...

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but down the line sort of beginning the process of...

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of an application for the... a discharge upgrade or a

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request of documents and the beginning of the

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construction of a case even as someone's beginning

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to reenter society can not only provide sort of

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hope for the future that... that... this sort of

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progress is possible but also recognize and provide

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support for... that someone is engaging in their

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rehabilitation actively.

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CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I... I've been to the

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veterans treatment court in Queens. Judge Hersh



1  
2 runs a phenomenal program. I think everybody agrees  
3 with that. It really is a robust holistic approach  
4 to reform and rehabilitation that... It's a program  
5 they have to graduate from. And when they graduate  
6 they get a certificate. It really is a great  
7 program but I... I know that if there were... Yes  
8 honey? Okay one second. I know that if part of that  
9 process the judge was able to assign Urban Justice  
10 Center, NYLAG, whomever to work on discharge  
11 upgrade I know that that takes a very long time but  
12 if that's part of the... the process or the program  
13 that would be a big help because when they do  
14 become eligible for VA benefits that will open up  
15 many more doors for treatment and... and services  
16 that they're not currently getting. But... so that we  
17 can... so that we can prevent them from going back  
18 into that courtroom unless they're going back to  
19 mentor, to become a mentor. [cross-talk]

20 CHARLOTTE HEYRMAN: Definitely. [cross-  
21 talk] But it's also anticipating someone before  
22 they enter...

23 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Right.

24 CHARLOTTE HEYRMAN: ...the criminal  
25 justice system...

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CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Oh I agree.

2

3

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: ...right?

4

CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I agree, yeah.

5

CHARLOTTE HEYRMAN: So... so if you can...

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you can prevent the initial application as well as

7

if someone is eligible for benefits and then does

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engage with the criminal justice system... [cross-

9

talk]

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CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: No doubt about it.

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CHARLOTTE HEYRMAN: ...then their family

12

is able to... would be able to receive those if they

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were educated about the... these... the processes.

14

JOE BELLO: Yeah because usually if they

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have a dishonorable discharge or anything less than

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honorable they... they likely will be termed as

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hidden clients. So really you don't see from them

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until they're already sliding into something and

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then they've presented themselves some place for

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services. And on the flip side what was discussed

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and I appreciate it was the fact that back in the

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day I used to go with that Daniels [sp?] in the

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incarcerated veteran consortium. So we used to go

24

into Rikers. And that was one of the biggest

25

problems we had doing resources that none of them

1  
2 would ever present themselves. And basically that's  
3 what the corrections officers used to tell us was  
4 that they were very fearful that they would lose  
5 any benefits that they had particularly if those  
6 benefits were the only things being used to support  
7 family members or their children or things like  
8 that. So you know it... it does present some unique  
9 challenges to try to gauge all that together.  
10 That's why I look... I think the test will also be  
11 good to collect that kind of data to see where the  
12 need is.

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: The... the task force  
14 that is a... that's precisely one of the goals of the  
15 task force and... and why we think it's important to  
16 have a veterans only task force is so that we can  
17 focus on these very specific issues that don't  
18 affect other people who... who have mental health  
19 issues or substance abuse issues that are engaged  
20 in the criminal justice system. If... in... in the  
21 absence of a task force if for whatever reason  
22 we're not able to establish one I would hope that  
23 the city or one of our partners on the community  
24 side would look to do a study, a very comprehensive  
25 study and collect a lot of the data that is

1  
2 publicly available to look at some of these issues  
3 and then report back to us. And nothing prevents  
4 the Urban Justice Center and NYLAG or anybody else  
5 from going out and doing that study right now even  
6 though we don't have a task force. So if these  
7 issues are... are that important, and they really are  
8 important, and the city you know is debating what  
9 is the best way to go about trying to you know  
10 solve some of these issues the government is not  
11 going to solve all the problems. I always look to  
12 the private sector and to our partners in the non  
13 for profit sector who are able to help us get this  
14 information. I think a task force is a great idea.  
15 I think it's the best way. But if you have a better  
16 way and you want to do it on your own I'm all for  
17 that too.

18                   JOE BELLO: Well I... I would add in just  
19 as a... as a... to quickly finish here. But I would add  
20 in that what we're seeing from the advocacy side of  
21 the house is there's a lot of veterans now  
22 beginning to access housing and family court. And  
23 so there's going to be a need somewhere down the  
24 road for somebody to take a look at that as well.

25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Part of the other  
3 problem too is Council Member Vallone and.. and  
4 Lancman allude to quite often is that the court  
5 system in New York City is somewhat segregated even  
6 though it's part of the unified court system.  
7 Queens does their own thing. Brooklyn does their  
8 own thing. You know Kings County, Bronx County,  
9 Manhattan County. There is no really New York City  
10 court system other than the family.. you know the  
11 family court and the.. the criminal courts the  
12 judges are appointed by the mayor. But even that..  
13 after that they sort of like reporting to their  
14 administrative judge in their respective county.  
15 They.. they used to operate in that way because  
16 across the state that's how they.. that's how they  
17 operate, on a county by county basis. But New York  
18 is technically five counties and one city and we  
19 don't all do things the same way. That's part of  
20 the problem. So I think there's a lot of good stuff  
21 that came out of today's hearing. And I want to  
22 thank you for testifying. And again it's not a  
23 waste of your time, it's not a waste of my time. We  
24 hope to get very good ideas, improve legislation,  
25 get ideas for new legislation, work with the

1  
2 administration to deliver the services and programs  
3 that already exist for veterans, and also come up  
4 with new ones that we think can be beneficial. So I  
5 appreciate you being here today to all the  
6 advocates, to the administration as always thank  
7 you for staying for the duration of the hearing.  
8 And now we are going to gavel out the hearing. Are  
9 you ready? You going to hit it? Go ahead.

10 [gavel]

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Good job. The  
12 hearing is adjourned. Good job. Thank you.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date September 25, 2015