

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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September 30, 2016

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HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Fernando Cabrera
Alan M. Maisel
Paul A. Vallone
Joseph C. Borelli

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

Jeff Roth, First Deputy Commissioner
NYC Department of Veteran Services

Assistant Commission Jamal Othman
NYC Department of Veteran Services

Kristen Rouse, Veteran
New York City Veteran's Alliance

Peter Kempner, Director
Veteran's Justice Project

Elana Duffy, Veteran and CEO
Pathfinder Labs

Joe Bello

2 [sound check, pause]

3 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Good afternoon. I
4 am Council Member Eric Ulrich, Chair of the City
5 Council Committee on Veterans. Last year with the
6 landmark passage of Local Law 113, the City Council
7 took a crucial step in serving our city's more than
8 200,000 veterans and their families by establishing
9 the New York City Department of Veteran Services. In
10 doing so, we tasked the department with being the
11 place where veterans throughout the five boroughs
12 could go to access information about services and
13 benefits available to them based—based on their
14 service to our country. Information about how to
15 qualify and apply for these resources is often
16 difficult to understand, and veterans must access
17 numerous websites, flyers, pamphlets, et cetera to
18 get the information that they need. Many veterans
19 are also unaware of the rights and privileges given
20 to them under federal, state and local laws. The
21 other resource guide offered by the City currently
22 through Small Business Services, Workforce 1, and our
23 program hasn't been updated in more than three years.
24 Today, the Committee will hear proposed Intro 828-A,
25 which will require the Department of Veteran Services

2 to create a centralized comprehensive resource guide
3 that will be available both electronically on the
4 Internet and in the printed form. The guide would
5 contain information all in one place about the
6 eligibility and processes of applying for federal,
7 state and city Veterans benefit, special rights
8 accorded to veterans under the law, health programs
9 and services, legal and housing counseling and other
10 available resources, employment opportunities, et
11 cetera. The Guide would be updated periodically so
12 that veterans and their families are given up to date
13 information, and we must ensure that no one who has
14 served our country falls through the cracks when it
15 comes to entitlements or benefits that could save
16 their lives or help them on this.

17 I want to acknowledge the members of the
18 Veterans Committee who have joined us Council Member
19 Borelli of Staten Island is here and Council Members
20 Vallone, Maisel and Cabrera are on the way. There
21 are two other hearings going on simultaneously. I'd
22 also like to thank the Committee state Art Bernstein,
23 Committee Counsel, Michael Kertz (sp?), our Policy
24 Analyst and Jayden Subudhi our Financial Analyst, and
25 I'd like to thank and welcome Commissioner-Deputy

2 Commission Roth for his work on behalf of our City's
3 veterans, and I would invite him to testify after the
4 oath is administered by the committee counsel.

5 LEGAL COUNSEL: Can you raise your right
6 hand, please. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
7 whole truth and nothing but the truth in your
8 testimony before the committee today, and to respond
9 honestly to council member questions?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: Yes.

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: If you could just
12 hit the button on the microphone if it's not on. It
13 should be on. Okay, and please begin when you're
14 ready.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: Good
16 afternoon, Chair Ulrich, and members of the Committee
17 on Veterans. My name is Jeff Roth, and I am honored
18 to serve as the First Deputy Commissioner of the New
19 York City Department of Veteran Services. I'm joined
20 today by our Assistant Commission Jamal Othman.
21 Thank you for the opportunity to meet, and hear our
22 testimony on Introduction 828-A, which would require
23 the department to create and periodically update a
24 Veteran Resource Guide made available on our website
25 and in pint. I want to start by updating you on how

2 far this agency has come. Not even one year ago
3 historic legislation was passed by the City Council,
4 and signed by Mayor de Blasio in a bold statement to
5 New York City veterans and their families of this
6 city's tireless commitment to their wellbeing. As an
7 agency in transition, we are currently focused on
8 growing our team with top talent to establish the
9 strongest foundation possible for supporting this
10 agency's mission. Since the signing of Local Law
11 113, the Department of Veteran Services has
12 diligently worked to onboard a talented and diverse
13 group of professionals to staff this new agency.
14 Since April, we have grown this agency to over 20
15 people, and we'll reach maximum staffing capacity in
16 our three lines of action by the end of the calendar
17 year when we will have 34 DBS staff members. We have
18 on-boarded the leadership of the remaining two lines
19 of action, education, employment and entrepreneurship
20 or E-3 with Jamal Othman, integrative health and
21 community resilience with Darlene Brown-Williams.
22 They have joined Nicole Bracco, who heads our
23 existing line of action, Housing and Support
24 Services. We have hired or Chief Information Officer
25 Vincat Macapalli (sp?), Senior Advisor of

2 Communications and Press Secretary, Alexis Wichowski,
3 and Senior Advisor of Public and Private Partnership
4 Jason Mangione. We're also pending hire of our
5 Director of Intergovernmental Affairs and Director of
6 Administration. We've also identified candidates for
7 key positions within each of our lines of action, and
8 look forward to reaching full operating capacity by
9 the end of calendar year 2016. Also, since April,
10 the Veteran Advisory Board has met twice, once in
11 Staten Island in June and in the Bronx in September,
12 and we continue to raise awareness of the Veteran
13 Designator on the IDNYC, which has seen 5,650 IDs
14 issued about trends to date. Already we have come a
15 long way towards realizing our mission to honor and
16 serve veterans and their families, and to fulfill our
17 mission, which is the Department of Veteran Services
18 is dedicated to improving the lives of all New York
19 City veterans and their families. Martialing the
20 collective resources of the City of New York, the
21 department will achieve the following the objectives:

22 Ensure that all veterans have permanent
23 affordable housing and access to the support services
24 needed to find and maintain their home.

2 Implement the Vets Thrive NYC integrative
3 health program to foster the physical, mental and
4 spiritual wellbeing of veterans and their families.

5 Expand education and career opportunities
6 for veterans through a rapidly growing network of
7 city, public, private and non-profit partners.

8 Provide the human and technological
9 infrastructure for veterans and their families to
10 gain citywide access to benefits, resources and care
11 through a leading coordinated service network. As we
12 build our capacity to establish a strong and diverse
13 foundation of professionals to best enable our
14 programs and initiatives, let me provide a brief
15 summary of the key elements that we are continuing to
16 address. Effectively ending veteran homelessness in
17 New York City and sustaining the gains through
18 developing systems and apply resources to ensure that
19 all veterans who become homeless are rapid rehoused
20 in permanent affordable housing with the services
21 they have earned and deserve. Specifically, DVS will
22 continue to work with its city, state, federal and
23 community partners focusing on meeting functional
24 zero, ending homelessness for veterans currently in
25 shelter and developing a rapid rehousing system for

2 housing new veterans with 90 days of entry.
3 Mitigating recidivism by bolstering after care
4 services through a dedicated coordinator who will
5 driver assessment priorities and fully leverage the
6 vital veteran peer coordinator role. This
7 coordinator Angela Guyton Seral (sp?) is now on staff
8 with DVS. Leading efforts to systematize the
9 assessment and housing placement of homeless veterans
10 across systems and resources and scale the system to
11 benefit all homeless New Yorkers.

12 Working with the First Lady's Thrive NYC
13 Mental Health Road Map through implementing the Core
14 Four Integrative Health Model to address the full
15 impact of war, mind, body and spirit for our veterans
16 and their families by applying a peer based community
17 approach that increases engagement and lowers stigma
18 and cost. This work includes working with service
19 providers to participate in implement the Core Four
20 Integrative Health Model, which leads with trained
21 peer intervention and integrates education, culture
22 and the arts with holistic services and clinical care
23 for veterans and their families. Conducting citywide
24 outreach and family engagement to better connect
25 veterans and family members with a comprehensive

2 range of resources specifically tailored to their
3 needs and strengths. Accessing holistic services in
4 non-clinical settings, and engaging in the Thrive NYC
5 Education Campaign to erode stigma and foster
6 engagement.

7 Executing DVS' strategy for recruiting
8 and connecting veterans and their families to city
9 career services and resources through a phase action
10 plan aimed at upgrading the DVS website for direct
11 access to city job opportunities; collaborating with
12 DCAS citywide recruitment Workforce 1 and the public-
13 private sectors to identify HR best practices for
14 citywide agency dissemination and application;
15 standardizing citywide intake forms to foster self-
16 identification of veterans and families; and
17 establishing New York City Veteran Business
18 Leadership Consortium designed to enhance business
19 and procurement opportunities for veteran business
20 owners.

21 Launching Vet Connect NYC, a digital
22 platform and portal and coordinated service network
23 connecting veterans and their families with
24 comprehensive referrals, counseling, benefit support
25 across a growing constellation of services providers.

2 Currently, we're drafting a scope of work and look
3 forward to presenting a draft contract for negotiated
4 acquisition in the coming months.

5 Building upon the Task Force on Behavior
6 Health and the Criminal Justice system and its
7 progress to date, we're applying the system's lens to
8 fully assess veteran needs in the criminal justice
9 system including coordinate access to housing,
10 employment, legal and health services. Improving
11 access to veteran benefits by training a team of
12 outreach workers and establishing a satellite office
13 in each of the boroughs to provide assistance direct
14 to the veterans in the community. Collaborating with
15 the Mayor's Fund to advance New York to establish and
16 maintain strategic partnerships with private
17 entities, non-profit organizations, and foundations
18 to generate support, and foster bold investment
19 designed to plug gaps in service, test, pilot and
20 scale innovative new programs, and leverage the
21 flexibility of the private sector to support our
22 public initiatives, all aimed at empowering New York
23 City veterans and families of all generations.
24 Developing and implementing a digital transmedia plan
25 including launching a new website platform to

2 facilitate interaction and access to resources;
3 engage in strategic media outlets to amplify DVS key
4 messages and activities; expanding the interactive
5 universe of veterans connecting with DVS by setting
6 and meeting social media targets for maximum
7 awareness engagement and activity. Continuing DVS
8 collaboration with the Mayor's Office of Special
9 Projects and Community Events, the Mayor's Office of
10 Citywide Event Coordination and Management in veteran
11 service organization partners to assist and organize
12 major veterans commemorative ceremonies and special
13 events that honor service. Working as a team we have
14 achieved so much, and yet I know you will agree that
15 our most important work is still in front of us.

16 In regard to Introduction 828-A, which
17 would add a new section to the Administrative Code to
18 require the Department of Veteran Services to
19 maintain and periodically update a resource guide for
20 veterans, we concur that finding ways of connecting
21 New York City veterans to the resources and benefits
22 they have earned is a chief aim of DVS. Indeed, it's
23 the main reason for the creation of this very agency.
24 However, DVS is opposed to this bill for the simple
25 reason that a guide is not more effective for

2 supporting our veterans, and helping them navigate
3 the many resources and benefits available to them,
4 are the methods we currently employ. In fact, a
5 resource guide would be a less innovative approach
6 than those we have already implemented and planned to
7 implement as we transition to an agency to reach
8 veterans. To this end, in addition to the projects I
9 have mentioned, we intend to leverage many other
10 methods for sharing resources with veterans and their
11 families beyond a simple list of resources.

12 Currently, we are upgrading our new DDS website, the
13 first phase, which we expect to go live any day now.
14 It will be structure by which we make multiple more
15 significant content upgrades occurring between now
16 and the end of the calendar year. These upgrades to
17 our website will include a comprehensive list of
18 local, state, and federal resources that are
19 available to veterans and their families. It is
20 something that we will maintain, and upgrade on a
21 regular and recurring basis, and as we learn as new
22 resources and benefits, we will use this form to
23 share those updates as well.

24 We will also leverage social media to
25 include Facebook, Twitter, Linked In and other

digital media platforms to highlight new and changing resources to ensure that as many veterans and their families are made aware as quickly as possible. We will continue to leverage the networks of our partner veteran service organizations, not-for-profits and other organizations to further push the information to as many veterans as possible. Additionally, we head New York City Serves NYC, which is currently available by phone and which connects veterans and their families to services through a coordination center of trained staff. This staff is familiar with the various service providers and the network of public, private, and not-for-profit partners who provide service to veterans, and can readily assist veterans in accessing the many benefits they have earned. As I mentioned previously, this service, which will be rebranded as Vet Connect NYC, is currently available and has served nearly 2,000 veterans during its pilot phase, a number that we will actively work to increase in the coming calendar year. For the veterans who did not have ready access to a computer or social media for accessing this information, they can also call 311 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, and receive

2 information on access and benefits. And even better,
3 we are placing community outreach specialists to
4 serve as a direct link between the community in each
5 borough and DVS by providing the human element of
6 one-on-one support. Community outreach specialists
7 are trained to connect veterans and their families to
8 trusted resources available to them from the city,
9 state, and federal governments including employment
10 resources through the Federal and State Department of
11 Labor, city Workforce 1 centers, and employment
12 opportunities with the city in partnership with the
13 Department of Citywide Administrative Services.

14 These employment resources include communication of
15 available positions, job placement, resume building
16 and developing interview skills to name just a few.
17 Additionally, our outreach specialists are trained to
18 identify and guide veterans and their families with
19 education and vocational services through the U.S.
20 Department of Veterans Affairs or VA, and New York
21 State, including the Post 9/11 GI Bill Vocational
22 Rehabilitation and New York State Tuition Assistance
23 Program. Likewise, our specialists work closely with
24 our Veteran Peer Coordinators who work for DVS and
25 assist with access to housing and homelessness

1 programs. Deployed to the five boroughs, our
2 specialists are creating a citywide presence and
3 taking information on programs and services to
4 veterans in their communities through collaborative
5 partnerships with host sites. These host sites, or
6 satellite offices, are particularly critical for
7 veterans who have difficulty traveling outside the
8 borough or are reluctant to visit the offices of a
9 larger institution such as the VA, or our own offices
10 here in Lower Manhattan. To date, we have active
11 offices and collaborations with the Queens Borough
12 President's office, and CUNY's College of Staten
13 Island. We're actively discussing with host sites in
14 the Bronx, Northern Manhattan and Brooklyn to follow
15 as we bring on board the staff to work in those
16 communities. Additionally, our specialists receive
17 professional training in specific areas and are
18 working on developing cross-trainings with Human
19 Resources Administration staff on SNAP benefits, and
20 Department of Finance on their benefits for veterans
21 as examples. Lastly, our specialists have undergone
22 classroom and practical trainings with the New York
23 State Department of Veterans Affairs under whose
24 sponsorship our staff are pursuing their BA
25

2 accreditation as service officers, which will allow
3 them to assist veterans and their families with apply
4 for disability and compensation benefits through the
5 VA.

6 Finally, with our upgraded website we
7 will be releasing our resource guide that our
8 outreach coordinates have used internally for
9 supporting veterans. We are currently updating this
10 guide, and we will release it on our website for
11 veterans. We will also send this to veterans and
12 support organizations, and are happy to provide them
13 a hard copy any time requested.

14 Regarding the proposed amendment to
15 Section 1, Title 31, we know that connecting New York
16 City veterans and their families to timely resources
17 and services is central to the purpose for which the
18 New York City Department of Veteran Services was
19 established. Ensuring such is one of our top
20 priorities. To this end, DVS requires maximum
21 flexibility for determining the best methods for
22 achieving our mission because, as we say, we will
23 stop at nothing to do as much as we can for the
24 veterans we serve. At this time, I'm pleased to

2 address your comments and questions. Thank you very
3 much.

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you,
5 Commissioner for your testimony. We have also been
6 joined by my very good friends and colleagues on the
7 committee, Dr. Fernando Cabrera of the Bronx, Alan
8 Maisel, Council Member Maisel of Brooklyn, and Paul
9 Vallone also from Queens. Before I ask my questions,
10 I know there are other committees that are meeting so
11 I'll defer to my colleagues if they have any
12 questions. I know Council Member Borelli has a few.
13 Okay, and then we'll hear from Council Member
14 Vallone. So I'll turn it over and then we'll come
15 back to me. [off mic] So, take it. (sic)

16 [background comments]

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: [coughs] Thank
18 you very much, Deputy Commissioner. I have a group
19 in my district called the Veterans of the Battle of
20 the Bulge. A rough estimate do you have any idea how
21 old the guys are in that club?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: If they were
23 fighting in World War II between the years of '40 to
24 '45 at 20 years of age so add 60 so they're in their-

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: [interposing] 90
3 years old.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: --close to the
5 90s, right?

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OTHMAN: January
7 1, 1945 was the Battle of the Bulge. So these guys
8 at youngest are 89, and this group maintains a
9 monument in my district. It's, you know, called the
10 Monument to the Battle of the Bulge, and it's a
11 beautiful thing. It's in a park. It's about 15
12 years old, and it's in disrepair, and they need some
13 money to fix it, and I'm helping them with that, and
14 it's wonderful. Unfortunately, I have to get them to
15 use a computer to get the grant. Have you ever seen
16 a guy who drove a Sherman tank in his lifetime use a
17 Safari Internet browser?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: Not yet.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: It is not--it's
20 not pretty. It's not pretty and I--and I say it as a
21 joke and, you know, the guys in this group are--are
22 great friends. I'm sure they don't mind me poking a
23 little fun at their age. Frankly, we're lucky to
24 have them still. But the point I'm trying to make is

25

2 not everyone is able to use a computer. Is there a
3 reason why we—we can't just print things in a guide?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: We absolutely
5 can print things in guide. I think our preferred
6 method is to do things more one-on-one. So rather
7 than just giving a list of here are places where you
8 can turn to, we want to help walk them through that.
9 Number one, that allows us to do some quality
10 assurance to make sure they're getting the benefits
11 and resources they need. But also, no matter who
12 they call on that resource guide, at some point they
13 are going to have to fill out a form, complete some
14 paperwork, access a computer in some way. By using
15 our outreach coordinators, they can walk them through
16 that, help them fill and file the paperwork that's
17 required, and make sure that there's feedback loops
18 so that we know who has submitted it.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: [interposing]
20 But in—in your testimony, you said that you've
21 already on the website, already have amassed some—
22 some form of data and some form of—of resources
23 available for veterans on the website. Do those
24 resources do they not have like a link? Like in
25 other words, if you're a veteran who is in need of

2 sort of medical care, maybe there's a link for a
3 doctor in that area? So-so already that's one
4 example where the person just needs the information.
5 They may not need the one-on-one service. I mean is
6 that not true?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: That's true
8 and so we do have those listed on the website for
9 those that prefer to do the self-care that way, those
10 resources are available.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: [interposing]
12 But one is a Catch 22 where--where we see the need for
13 the information that doesn't require one-on-one
14 service, but yet we don't want to do the--the guide.
15 And I--I brought some--I mean the--the city literally
16 prints guides by the tons. We have guides--the--the
17 police roster. If you want to know who the district
18 attorney's office squad leader it's Captain Deluca
19 and here's his fax number. We have property taxes.
20 Each Council Member gets a guide for what DDC is
21 doing in their district. Just one city agency makes
22 51 different guides to tell you what's going on. So
23 if you wanted to know, you know, what's going on in
24 the Tote Hill sewer project, you can look it up.
25 This is all stuff that's available through the City's

2 Open Data Portal and other things, but we're making
3 it in a format that's easier for people to use. NYP-
4 I mean I can go through the list. I won't. Why are
5 these things more important to put in a guide form
6 than the resources that are available on your
7 website?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: We have heard
9 overwhelmingly from the veterans that we service that
10 navigation is the primary, and chief challenge that
11 they have in accessing benefits, and that's the
12 reason that we're using this outreach coordinator
13 method. So that we can work one-on-one with them.
14 Where they don't want to receive assistance one-on-
15 one, we'll certainly provide them with a list of
16 places that they can turn, but rather than creating a
17 static booklet that's outdated the minute we print it,
18 we would rather access and provide a list of the
19 things that are eligible for by understanding their-
20 their particular need. By giving them a list of all
21 those things, it's a complicated rule in terms of
22 veteran resources. There's multi areas of
23 government.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: [interposing]

25 But I know if we outdated the problem because this is

2 a 2015 and if I call the Property Clerk Division Oil
3 Pound System, maybe I won't speak to Captain Luzette
4 Scarfuto, but I'm sure that in the phone number is
5 still the same for-for that [coughs] and if I have a
6 car impounded I'm sure I could still get somebody at
7 that number. So I mean is the fear that we can't get
8 things so up to date the reason why we're not
9 printing it as a guide?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: No, and as I
11 mentioned like we're more than happy to print it. I
12 think our fear about putting out a guide is that
13 because it's complicated and because there's
14 difficulty in navigating these things, by putting out
15 a guide, it's just one more place where people turn
16 and don't necessarily get the-the help that they
17 need. Additionally, if we printed a guide with all
18 of the resources available, it's hard for us to do
19 feedback on that, and know if they're receiving the
20 quality of care that they're supposed to. It can be
21 seen as an endorsement of particular organizations or
22 service providers if the city is listing this in a
23 guide. And again, we want to have data on what the
24 needs and demands are of our veterans. We went to be
25 able to walk them through these things so that we can

2 help them navigate because we have heard over and
3 over again. But again, we will print and provide
4 them a list of resources any time they ask for it.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: So—so how do we
6 get feedback or how do we get feedback from the web
7 list, and how does the web list not an endorsement of
8 the proofs that you're listing.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: If—if someone
10 went to the website themselves and found a link and
11 contacted that particular agency that we linked to or
12 called them if we provided a number, we wouldn't have
13 a way of knowing if they interacted with that agency
14 or not. By working with our outreach coordinators
15 then we can capture what the feedback is. We know
16 who they contacted. We can help them complete their
17 forms. We can see where there's particular difficult
18 issues with navigating the system, and we can collect
19 those data and know what demands and needs our
20 veterans have. So, we think that's a better and a
21 preferred method for interacting, and working with
22 our veterans to navigate those systems.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: Well, the last
24 question then. You guys are opening up and I think—I
25 think you're doing a great job. I—I really don't

2 want my comments and--and questions to indicate that
3 I think you're doing a bad job, but-- So when you're
4 opening these offices in different boroughs and a
5 veteran goes in there and he's got his American
6 Legion hat on or she does, and--and the jacket, and
7 they're sitting waiting to meet with that
8 coordinator. What's on the table next to the chair
9 in the waiting room?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: There's--
11 there's pamphlets to a number of programs, and--and
12 benefits that are available to them.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: Right. I'm sure.
14 So I mean I--I guess you could you could see my point
15 that I'm--I'm just bewildered why as--as you said,
16 you're happy to print something. I'm just bewildered
17 why the--the de Blasio Administration would--would even
18 have any inclination that this is not something we
19 could just add to the things that are printed. I
20 mean on the back of this, you could see it's--it's
21 used with--in conjunction with You Tube, Instagram,
22 Twitter, Facebook. I mean, I--I just don't know why
23 the multi-media approach that works for nearly every
24 other agency is--is not done here. I--I think, you
25 know, rubber stamps in government are--are not

2 something we should often use, but when it's a simple
3 a question like should we—should we just print out
4 the list on our website and put it in the fancy thing
5 so that veterans who are in the—their 90s, could
6 access. I think it's just a—a simple thing to
7 accomplish, and I hope you guys reconsider. Thanks.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, Council
9 Member Borelli. We have a few questions from Council
10 Member Vallone and then Maisel and then I will wrap
11 up the questions for the Administration.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, Chair
13 and welcome, Deputy Commissioner.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: Thank you.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: We're very
16 excited to see the staffing and the growth of the
17 department, Chair Ulrich and the members of this
18 committee for—valiantly for your creation. So we're—
19 we're happy to see you and your staff here continuing
20 the charge for our veterans, the best veterans in the
21 world right here in the city so--

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: I'm honored to
23 be here. Thank you.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, I—I have
25 to agree with Council Member Borelli, though. I—I

2 mean most of the veterans we're working with are
3 seniors, advanced seniors. Very hard to even get to
4 our office, and when I'm usually with them, it's at
5 one of their annual events or addressing or at their
6 chapter or, of course, that the parades, which our
7 district has many because we have probably some of
8 the most veterans in the city. I would hope the
9 answer would be yes. Simply just—it shouldn't really
10 be a—not an argument, but a dialogue whether it's
11 necessary. It's completely necessary because of the
12 generational concerns and gaps that we have between
13 our new veterans and our older veterans. And our
14 older veterans even from the Vietnam past now are—are
15 just—even me at 49 with my kids sometimes it seems
16 like I'm 100 years old compared to what they can
17 handle versus what I can handle. I think the answer
18 is yes we'll get a guide We're not going to present—
19 print 8-1/2 million for every citizen in—in New York,
20 but they're ready, they're available. We'll get them
21 to our veterans. We'll have them at their office,
22 but our preferred way would be online with everything
23 else. I mean I'm hoping that's where you're going
24 with this at the end of this hearing.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: Yeah, I-I
3 think we completely agree with the spirit of
4 providing as much information to veterans as
5 possible. What we see in this legislation is it's a
6 floor. It's a minimum. We should do at least this,
7 and it's pretty prescribed in terms of what the
8 chapter should be, and how it should be outlaid.
9 What we're looking for is maximum flexibility to
10 provide the information, in as innovative means and
11 methods as possible in—in as many ways as possible.
12 That includes a printed guide. That's something
13 certainly we will do if that's things that our
14 veterans request. So we're not opposed to providing
15 information. We just want flexibility in
16 determining the methods for doing that.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, I don't
18 think anyone here especially our chair is going to
19 limit your abilities to provide information. I think
20 we're just trying to start it at the basics, and
21 always say for more information please see--

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: [interposing]
23 Sure.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --your veteran
25 office. If you—you have a website then the

2 department, but I—I think there's some critical
3 information that we could have, and we can update on
4 an annual basis as—even as your department grows. I
5 mean we're going to have more resources available as
6 we fight for budgetary increases as Chair Ulrich and
7 I will—will do every year to make sure that you guys
8 get increased funding, staffing and services for our
9 veterans.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: Uh-huh.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Just—but my last
12 question will be as you see the department growing,
13 what would you see in—as—that we can assist you with
14 this year's budget that you would like to see the
15 increase within your own department?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: Well, no
17 assessment yet on the budget as we're staffing up.
18 We've got 20 of our 34, which will be our full
19 operational capacity. We should all 34 on staff by
20 the end of the calendar year. I think one way that
21 the City Council and this committee can support us is
22 by working closely with our community outreach
23 specialists in each of the boroughs. Pull them into
24 events that you might have, have them come out and
25 meet with any of your constituents who happen to be

2 veterans, and use them as resources to help get them
3 into the communities to—to support our veterans.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, we'd like
5 to—we'd like to see more of that. You know, the
6 Council Members especially in Queens have a difficult
7 time getting folks out past—beyond Borough Hall. We
8 want to see them out where the veterans are where we
9 can get them assistance. So, and--

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: [interposing]
11 Absolutely.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --and getting
13 that up to speed as quickly as possible, we
14 appreciate it.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: Great. Thank
16 you.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you chair.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, Council
19 Member Vallone, and just as a commercial we will
20 have—it's required by law a finance hearing during
21 the budget process next year to discuss the finer
22 details of the department and be able to ask
23 questions about the budget, and the staffing there.
24 Council Member Maisel is next. [pause]

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Good afternoon.
3 Thank you for being here. A quick question. Have
4 you thought of using the libraries as a resource
5 center? There are libraries all over the place, and
6 the libraries would be a great place to have the kind
7 of information that people can access without having
8 to go on the computer, although there are computers
9 there? So have you?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: Yeah,
11 absolutely, and I'll let Jamal Othman, our AC for
12 Educational Entrepreneurship and Employment discuss a
13 little bit about what we're doing to set up our
14 satellite offices in each of the boroughs.

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OTHMAN: Yes.
16 Thank you for that question, Council Member.
17 Absolutely, we have. With regard to the question
18 about libraries, we actually collaborate with—with
19 many libraries out in the communities to—to try to
20 really connect the best with the constituents, the
21 veterans associations to those neighborhoods, and
22 those communities whether it's collaborating on
23 benefit fairs or resource fairs to really get
24 information out. With work in the satellite offices,
25 you know, as-as-as we mentioned in our testimony, we

2 have two of our offices active and running, and—and
3 we get them all established in all the five boroughs,
4 we really see these as, you know, forward operating
5 bases of—of DVS, and extensions of the—the host sites
6 that will be hosting our resources as well to really
7 connect best with the unique needs of those
8 particular communities. One of the—one of the
9 critical aspects to the satellite offices that our
10 resources, our outreach specialists are going to be
11 deployed out into the community working with the
12 local stakeholders who in turn can have a synergetic
13 relationship to really identify what the needs are,
14 where are the places that we need to have our—our
15 resources best situated. And how we can best assist
16 our veteran constituents.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: I mean what I was
18 thinking was that there should be—we should have like
19 a veterans corner, you know, with the appropriate
20 materials and a guide or whatever, pamphlets, places
21 to call, a poster, a sign, something so that the
22 veterans know. And I'm sure that most veterans don't
23 know that we have a department, that we don't have a
24 commissioner and a first deputy that you're staffing
25 up. Most veterans particularly the older ones

2 probably don't have a clue about what's going on at
3 all--

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: [interposing]
5 Uh-huh.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: --but many do go
7 to the library. Many of them use--utilize the
8 libraries. The libraries are a great resource, and I
9 think you should think about using the libraries a
10 lot more.

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OTHMAN: I think--I
12 think that's a really good point, Council Member, and
13 I think that's something we'll explore to see if we
14 could work more closely with the libraries, and maybe
15 get some shelf space, so to speak, to get some more
16 materials out there. I think that's a really good
17 recommendation.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you. Also
19 questions from Council Member Cabrera.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you so
21 much. I just have two quick questions. I don't know
22 if this was mentioned earlier. What would be the
23 estimated costs of the creation of a resource guide?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: I haven't
25 estimated any costs on the resource guide.

2 Currently, there—we do have the information on the
3 website. That's something that we're upgrading. If
4 we were to look into that I could provide an
5 estimation on printing the guide in mass quantity.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Is—is—has that
7 come into as available in your decision making
8 whether, you know, it's going to be a cost?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: No, I—I don't
10 know that the cost could be particularly prohibitive.
11 Again, I—I think when you read this introduction it
12 was really we saw this as a bare minimum that the
13 agency should be doing, and stuff we're doing anyway
14 already. So the need to legislate. We thought
15 minimize our flexibility to look at innovative and
16 new approaches.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: When the
18 community outreach people do outreach, what do they
19 use as a—as a tool to give out to veterans.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: They—they use
21 a variety of things. If there's a particular program
22 or an initiative that they're eligible for we'll
23 provide them with pamphlets or information
24 particularly to that. But what we're trying to train
25 our staff to do, and we're not completely staffed up

2 yet, so we're building this team out. But what we're
3 trying to do is enable and equip them to be able to
4 do much more than that. So, help them navigate the
5 system, help them complete the form, help them file
6 the forms, help them overcome hurdles and road blocks
7 any time they encounter those when they are applying
8 to particular benefits. And as we bring that staff
9 on board and train them in those areas, and get the
10 state accreditation, those are the things that we're
11 trying to do.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: You know why I
13 ask? Because in just about in any arena where you're
14 trying to do marketing, and you're trying to reach
15 out to people whether it's people in the streets
16 trying to sell you something, or the religious
17 community, they always have something to give out.
18 I-I would think that it would be a good pretext to
19 start a conversation with veterans. It's something
20 that it doesn't seem as intimidating as it is- As
21 Council Member Vallone was mentioning earlier, what
22 we found out and, in fact, I had a staff meeting
23 about this earlier today, you know, the older
24 population they tend to stay away from the Internet
25 or they may have, you know, other challenges. But it

2 would be a good pretext to say hey, we—we have
3 something new here then they begin to go oh what is
4 it? You know, you just sparked conversation. So
5 that would be something to look at. And—and my last
6 question real quick here. I don't know if I heard
7 you—if I heard correctly. So, you're open now to the
8 idea of—I—I thought I heard you say that with Council
9 Vallone to doing the resource guide.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: What we do—so
11 we do a number of things to reach out. We've printed
12 information. We've got information on the website.
13 I think where we get nervous is if we did a static
14 guide that's really large, these programs change all
15 the time. Again, we've heard from veterans that
16 navigation is the critical piece. So we want to make
17 sure our outreach coordinators are specifically
18 trained to help—

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: That's when you
20 said then. [laughs] Then you gave us--five minutes
21 ago you said you'd be completely open toward creating
22 the possibility of a guide for our veterans.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: That's what I
24 thought I heard.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: That's what we
3 heard. So he's not saying that now?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: That's what I
5 wanted to double confirm that I heard, or did you
6 mean something else?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: We printed
8 things for veterans and it's particular to them. I
9 think our nervousness is if it's a really large
10 guard-guide that's explicitly addressed in the
11 introduction. It's very particular on the chapters
12 that are in there, and the information that it has to
13 contain. A lot of this information changes all the
14 time. What we would rather do is simple pamphlets,
15 particular to a program or an issue that we're trying
16 to focus on or that we've heard is complex. We want
17 them to connect with our outreach coordinators. We
18 want to give them information that's specific to the
19 benefits and things that they're eligible for because
20 veterans come from different eras, and there's
21 different benefits that they're eligible for. If we
22 printed one large guide for all veterans, that would
23 be very complex, and-

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing]
25 Well, how much do you think this will be? I mean I

2 wouldn't-- I know you wouldn't like this. I don't-I
3 don't think it would be this large. I mean what-what
4 are we talking about?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: Well, based on
6 the information in the there, I think it could be
7 rather-

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OTHMAN:
9 [interposing] Surprisingly, yes, Council Member. It
10 would be--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing]
12 This is thick?

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OTHMAN: --if-if
14 you think of an exhaustive--there's been a prolif-
15 proliferation of organizations that have really
16 established itself, many of them great organizations
17 over the last 10 or 15 years. Many here in New York
18 State and New York City, and have an exhaustive list
19 especially when you're posting veteran benefits,
20 which could be really complex and sort of identify
21 with the criteria that's in many cases always
22 changing, is-is a--perhaps not the best value I think
23 for the--for the veterans themselves.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: What about an
25 abridged version? [laughs]

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: Which would be
3 on our website. We do list various references,
4 resources--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing]
6 Well, we—we know about the website.

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: --and--and what
8 else do we have? If someone requests it, we will
9 absolutely print that out, and we've also made
10 pamphlets on things particular to our—our single
11 resource or program in city government. It's
12 something that we're aware of. We are going to more
13 and more events. Part of that is we will be out and
14 more visible in the communities as we build this
15 team.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Okay, I will
17 close with this, and I'll turn it back to the Chair.
18 Mr. Chairman, thank you so much for bringing--

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] Thank
20 you.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: --this up, but
22 what--what I wanted to close with that this is an easy
23 ask. It's not--to me it's not like a big ask, and it
24 could only help. I don't see how we could be
25 detrimental in any way. I think it--it would only

2 help, and anything that will only help is a good
3 thing at least from where I'm sitting. Thank you so
4 much, and thank you for all you do.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, Council
7 Member Cabrera, and the other members of the
8 committee. I know that there are several other
9 hearings going on simultaneously. So if you have to
10 excuse yourself, you don't need my permission. You
11 just leave whenever you feel like it, but, okay. So
12 getting back to the central question, the position of
13 the Administration at this point is that they're open
14 to printing various materials, but they don't want to
15 compile one single guide. They don't want to be
16 compelled by law to be required to print an annual or
17 bi-annual veterans resource guides because of the
18 number of groups that might be included, the amount
19 of information, the cost. What is at the heart of
20 like we don't want to do this? What is the--?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: I-I think
22 because we've heard from our veterans over and over
23 again that navigating these things is the real
24 challenge. By putting out one more resource guide
25 that is particularly challenging in navigating

2 doesn't really address the problem that veterans have
3 with connecting to the resources they are eligible
4 for.

5 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: So, getting back to
6 the connecting part, what services are probably the
7 most frequently requested by veterans that call or
8 email the department? What-what makes up the bulk of
9 your constituent calls?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: Sure we—we
11 receive a number of calls, and in our pilot program
12 with the coordinate—with NYC Serves New York City.
13 We've found that surprisingly most of them are about
14 housing. That tends to be the largest of the 2,000
15 veterans that we have served through that pilot
16 program. Each has been on—served on average 1.4
17 times. So that is what we're seeing, and we're also
18 surprised to see that 32% of those callers are
19 actively serving either on active duty or in the
20 National Guard or Reserves.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Do you have any
22 statistics today on—the average age or the
23 demographics? Where they're calling from, what
24 boroughs, what era did they serve in?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: We can
3 absolutely--

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] And
5 any other breakdown.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: --provide that.
7 Absolutely, get the breakdown.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yeah, or you can
9 follow up with that. We don't necessarily need all
10 of that today, but we were just trying to get a sense
11 of it. My--the point of the question I'm asking is
12 that perhaps if you know that the bulk of your phone
13 calls are about employment, housing and mental
14 health, you know, information to mental health
15 services for veterans and their family members. And
16 perhaps you could tailor at least for this guide
17 that, you know, lists of two or three of the top
18 providers or the--or the ones that the City currently
19 funds. I mean it's just an idea. I don't--I don't
20 think the--the goal of the legislation is to take away
21 your flexibility in drafting and crafting and making
22 this up, but the Committee Counsel just showed me a--a
23 resource guide that DFTA puts out for senior citizens
24 in senior centers, and I think it would be helpful to
25 have one place, even just with your phone number and

2 your information, and your email and your website.
3 Actually print that on a piece of paper that can be
4 made available at senior centers, libraries and other
5 non-for-not-for-profits, homeless shelters, other
6 places where veterans are going to be because not all
7 of them are online, and not all of them even know
8 that we have a new department. So, I think that is
9 the intent of the law, and if there's specific
10 changes, I'd like to hear what they might be, not
11 necessarily today, but in the next few weeks perhaps
12 you can send over some suggestions. But this seems
13 like something that other agencies are already doing,
14 and even though you're a new agency. I think the
15 Council or the position of the--the sponsors of the
16 bill and myself is that at some point we would like
17 to see something printed with a welcome message from
18 Commissioner Sutton, and some helpful information ,
19 phone numbers and links to a website that people can
20 access. So--

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ROTH: [interposing]
22 Absolutely, we would welcome an opportunity to look
23 at the language.

24 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: We're going to
25 continue the dialogue. Thank you for your testimony.

2 We're going to hear from the first panel now. Thank
3 you. Kristen Rouse, New York City Veteran's
4 Alliance; Peter Kempner, Legal Services NYC; Elana
5 Duffy, Pathfinder Labs, the New York City Veterans
6 Alliance; and Joe Bello representing himself. [door
7 slams, pause] Are we missing one? I just—oh, she's
8 coming. Okay. [pause] Why don't we start with
9 Kristin and—and work our way down, if we can. Thank
10 you. [pause]

11 KRISTEN ROUSE: Good afternoon. It's
12 good to see all of you again. My name is Kristen
13 Rouse. I'm a veteran of the United States Army and I
14 served three tours of duty in Afghanistan. I am
15 testifying on behalf of the Board and more than 200
16 dues paying members of the New York City Veterans
17 Alliance. We agree that key role of DVS is
18 maintaining an up-to-date listing of resources in New
19 York City and beyond that can assist veterans,
20 military members and their families. This was, in
21 fact, one of the recommendations that our team of
22 veteran service providers and experts made in the
23 policy paper we released last year. We further agree
24 that it is the role of government to ensure that
25 veterans, military members and their families are

2 able to access the services, benefits, resources and
3 opportunities afforded to them through city, state,
4 federal and non-profit programs. We also agree that
5 access must be made available to members of—to all
6 members of the veterans community regardless of their
7 age or ability to use the Internet or electronic
8 devices. For these reasons, we do support amending
9 the city's Administrative Code to spell out what
10 resources veterans should be able to learn about and
11 access through DVS. However, we also strongly advise
12 this committee to revise this bill to ensure that it
13 is a long-term benefit to our community rather than a
14 costly duplication of what community based
15 organizations have already created, or worse,
16 [banging door] a dead—a source of dead-end referrals
17 to overburden social service organizations that
18 cannot always help. Resource guides for veterans are
19 not—not at all hard to come by. The VA gives out
20 printed guides and maintains an online and localized
21 national resource directory. The New York State
22 Division of Veterans Affairs has an app anyone with a
23 Smart Phone can download. It isn't hard to find
24 phone numbers or facilities or any number of job and
25 resource fairs handing out pamphlets and flyers

2 promoting resources to veterans. Yet, far too many
3 veterans and families in our community still need
4 help. Last year, a veteran told me she went in
5 person to the then Office-Mayor's Office of Veterans
6 Affairs for help, and all anyone there could give her
7 was a printed resource guide that gave her a list of
8 agencies names and phone numbers to call for help.
9 MOVA was even included in the listing. It was like a
10 bad joke she said, and she never went back. We hear
11 frequently from veterans who call and email
12 government-government and non-profit agencies, but
13 they get inaccurate or confusing information, or they
14 can't get appointments for weeks or months. Or, they
15 get what feels to them like a runaround. We don't—we
16 don't hear veterans saying I couldn't find a resource
17 guide or I couldn't get a referral. What we do hear
18 is I can't get a lawyer, or I can't get a decent job,
19 or I can't get help with paying rent. New York City
20 veterans don't really need more phone numbers to call
21 well-web addresses to email or offices to visit.
22 What we do need is accurate accessible information,
23 high quality coordinated and available resources, and
24 meaningful follow up from people who care. DVS has
25 made tremendous progress in building a trained and

2 resourced team of veteran outreach coordinators, and
3 this we believe is more important and beneficial than
4 any online or printed resource guide. The more
5 experienced and skilled this team becomes with
6 providing clear and accurate information connecting
7 veterans with available resources, and following up
8 to ensure success, the more our community will grow
9 to trust DVS as a worthwhile resource. Meanwhile,
10 community based organizations and innovators have
11 already moved beyond resource guides. NY Serves has
12 developed as a digital hub connecting veterans online
13 and by phone with resources and based on eligibility
14 and needs. The VA operates a help line where
15 licensed social workers connect veterans of all eras
16 with benefits and—and resources. Numerous VSOs and
17 direct service organizations likewise provide
18 individualized referrals. Because of the web of
19 resources—because the web of resources for veterans
20 is often too complex and confusing without the help
21 of an experienced professional who knows the ropes.
22 Moving on even from referrals, Pathfinder, who will
23 speak in a moment, has created an extensive online
24 listing of resources that uses reviews to show where
25 veterans are actually getting help. A resource guide

2 can be a good thing, but it will only be a wasted
3 effort and expense if it fails to keep abreast of
4 what community-based organizations are already doing
5 or even harmful if it only leads to confusion,
6 runarounds and dead-end referrals to resources that
7 can't actually help veterans and their families. We
8 strongly recommend that this committee revise this
9 bill to ensure that a resource listing maintained by
10 DVS works in conjunction with what's already been
11 built by the-by community-based organizations, and
12 that no New York City veteran military member or
13 family member finds more dead ends without
14 information as a result. This concludes my
15 testimony. Thank you for the opportunity. [pause]

16 PETER KEMPNER: [coughs] Good afternoon,
17 Mr. Chair, Mr. Vallone. My name is Peter Kempner.
18 I'm the Director of the Veteran's Justice Project at
19 Brooklyn Legal Services, a part of Legal Services
20 NYC. Legal Services NYC is the largest provider of
21 free civil legal services in the nation. We serve
22 over 70,000 New Yorkers annually. The Veterans
23 Justice Project represents low-income veterans,
24 active duty service members and their families who
25 are in need of civil legal services in the areas of

2 housing law, family law, public benefits eligibility,
3 and other essential needs. We're delighted that New
4 York City Council's Veteran Committee is holding this
5 hearing and invited us to testify in support of this
6 bill that would mandate the creation and maintenance
7 of a resource guide for New York City's veterans.

8 With the creation of the New York City Division of

9 Veteran Services, our city is in the midst of

10 transforming how services are delivered to our

11 veterans. There are dozens, if not hundreds of

12 organizations responding to the needs of New York

13 City's veteran population, and we must ensure that

14 the City effectively provides veterans with

15 information on where and how they could receive

16 services. Now that DVS is an independent agency and

17 has greatly expanded in scale and scope, it-it's the

18 proper agency for hosting a centralized clearing

19 house of information on the various veteran service

20 providers throughout the city, and providing

21 referrals to those providers as well. While it's

22 true that other resource guides for veterans exist in

23 one form or the other, the mandates of this bill

24 would result in the creation of a comprehensive

25 living document that is maintained and updated

2 regularly by DVS, and as part of its mission, DVS
3 should be the main resource for veterans' related
4 information in New York City. Centralization of
5 veteran related information will streamline the
6 services that we all provide to veterans, and make it
7 easier for veterans to navigate where they need to go
8 to find help. If this bill is enacted, I urge the
9 city and DVS to be as specific as possible in the
10 drafting of the resources guide. For example, New
11 York City has many free legal service providers for
12 veterans. However, each of these legal service
13 providers have different criteria for accepting
14 cases. It may handle on criminal cases or civil
15 cases, sometimes both. It's important, therefore,
16 that veterans are not forced to call multiple
17 providers to find appropriate legal services,
18 providers in the—in the proper place to assist them.
19 Our office—our office often receives calls from
20 veterans seeking legal assistance in areas of the law
21 that we don't handle. Fortunately, we're able to
22 provide referrals to other agencies, where they could
23 be helped, but it's often disconcerting to make a
24 veteran call elsewhere, which leads to further delays
25 in them providing legal services. It's not enough to

2 just have a list of legal services providers. It has
3 to say what they do, what their eligibility criteria
4 is and so on. So we ask the city to work closely
5 with the providers in drafting the descriptions of
6 resources, have regular contact with providers to
7 make sure the information in the resource guide is
8 current and comprehensive. Beyond the list of the
9 services available to New York City veterans, the
10 bill also ambitiously calls for creating a guide to
11 veterans benefits and preferences available on the
12 federal, state and local levels. The proposed
13 Section 31-106(b)1 through 2 is a monumental
14 undertaking, which could greatly benefit our city's
15 veterans, but the benefits for veterans are
16 complicated. They hinge on numerous factors
17 including, but not limited to discharge status,
18 periods of service, length of service, active duty
19 service versus reservist service, disability type,
20 the cause of the disability, and many other factors.
21 We recommend a guide that provides the basic
22 eligibility criteria for various benefits and
23 information on where and how to apply for the
24 benefits. This would greatly serve the community
25 since state and local benefits and preferences are-

2 are often obscure, and less well known than the
3 benefits under federal law. I've been providing
4 legal services to veterans for years, and I'm still
5 grappling with which state and local law benefits
6 veterans. Again, I would urge the drafters of the
7 guide to work closely with the agencies who
8 administer the veteran's benefits, and preferences
9 and with advocates who assist veterans in obtaining
10 these benefits preferences on drafting the resource
11 guide. Just to add to the chorus of the concerns
12 about an online only resource, it's not just elderly
13 veterans who would be prejudiced by something that
14 would be limited to an online draft form. Very low-
15 income veterans, the veterans that we work with often
16 don't have access to technology. They don't have
17 either computers at home, they don't have Internet
18 access at home, and—and they would be limited also
19 in—in something that was web-based only. And there
20 are also veterans with disabilities that prevent them
21 from using technology, and so I think we want to be
22 as expansive as possible to be able to accommodate
23 everybody, all veterans of all ages and stripes, and—
24 and disabilities in—in making sure that everybody
25 gets access to benefits and services in the city. We

2 thank the committee and the Council for holding this
3 important hearing introducing this important piece of
4 legislation, and we work—look forward to working with
5 you, and the administration to ensure that New York
6 City is able to provide the best services to our
7 veterans as possible. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Before we continue,
9 I normally save the questions to the end. Can you
10 elaborate a little bit on your point with regard to
11 centralization? You mentioned that in—in the
12 beginning of your testimony. I thought that was an
13 important point.

14 PETER KEMPNER: Yes. You, know, I look
15 at legal services, and—and often times, you know, we
16 will find some providers who are listed in one guide,
17 other providers are listed in another guide, but
18 they're all always comprehensive. If there is a—a
19 single agency that is responsible for this to be
20 comprehensive, and that is their job, then they'll do
21 a better job at it.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And I also realize
23 and I hope you'll agree there are wonderful lay
24 providers of services for veterans in New York City.
25 They are all—there are also some really bad providers

2 or non-providers I should say that raise money,
3 parade around as these wonderful organizations, but
4 in reality they don't very much to help veterans.
5 And that could be the department would be required to
6 endorse one group over another. But certainly they
7 could weed out the bad actors so that people aren't
8 wasting their time--

9 PETER KEMPNER: [interposing] Absolutely,
10 and--

11 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: --calling back--
12 calling the fax numbers I think.

13 PETER KEMPNER: --Kristen and I just had
14 a--an encounter a week or two ago about--about one of
15 these bad actors--

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] Yes.

17 PETER KEMPNER: --and it was great that
18 we were in communication because, you know, not
19 everybody knew, and--and I say this- So I think
20 that's a--a very valid point as well.

21 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And--and in your work
22 at Legal Services, how difficult is it for you even
23 to navigate several different not-for-profits or
24 providers or agencies to get, you know, access to
25 mental health, or--or housing, court answer or

2 whatever it is that you're looking to provide. I
3 mean--

4 PETER KEMPNER: I would love a book on my
5 desk that I could just flip open—a green day (sic),
6 here it is.

7 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Right.

8 PETER KEMPNER: Or—or—or, you know,
9 having a stack of them in my office because I will
10 often say okay, you need this. Let me go to their
11 website, and printing it up instead of saying here's
12 the guide, here's a Post-It Note where it is. Tape
13 this up here.

14 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: I—I think in
15 retrospect now I mean the bill has not obviously been
16 finalized, and it's certainly not ready for passage
17 yet, but who said that there has to be one book? You
18 know if the—if the three-pronged mission of DVS is
19 entrepreneurship, education and what is the third?
20 Empowerment.

21 MALE SPEAKER: [off mic] Employment.

22 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Employment. I'm
23 sorry. Employment then perhaps they produced three
24 very comprehensive detailed resource guides, one for
25 veteran employment and one for veteran education and

2 one for veteran entrepreneurship. So, at the very
3 least I think they could do a very good job of—of
4 doing that, but a lot of people don't even know that—
5 that they exist, or what they do, and they do a very
6 good everyday. They have some really talented staff
7 some of whom were just hired, some of them have been
8 with them for a while. All of them very caring and
9 dedicated people, but a lot of folks in the city they
10 don't know that they can go to Borough Hall to talk
11 to a benefits counselor about their particular issue
12 or that might need help applying for a property tax
13 exemption, or they might have questions about
14 something they saw in the news that relates to
15 benefits for veterans, but they're not sure if they
16 themselves are eligible. We have nothing to hand
17 them with anybody's name or phone number on it, and I
18 think that that is—that's a problem. So I'm sure
19 what it would look like or how big it would be or how
20 many there might even be, but the fact that we have
21 nothing now and we just rely on the VA and a couple
22 of not-for-profits to print a few pamphlets this is
23 not sufficient and it's not—it's not particularly
24 helpful. So, but I have a few questions. We'll

2 continue in the—and I—I don't want to be rude to the
3 other folks who are here to testify.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: You're stuck
5 with us anyway. So you have to. [laughs]

6 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: That's right.

7 ELANA DUFFY: We're already at the table.
8 Good afternoon. As an Army combat veteran, please
9 allow me to first say thank you for your continued
10 service. My name is Elana Duffy. I served in the
11 U.S. Army from 2003 to 2012 and was medically retired
12 after a roadside bomb in Iraq. I am one of only
13 approximately 300 female Purple Heart recipients. So
14 I use many veteran resources. I know what it is like
15 to search for services, have them—that fits with
16 those resources, and refer others based on my
17 experience. I have since created the
18 www.pathfinder.vet an online platform of verified and
19 reviewed veteran and family support resources. We
20 use customer impact data to better understand
21 interactions between the better—the greater veteran
22 community and those surrounding populations, as well
23 as provide a tool for veterans to find and connect
24 with local resources. We have already built the data
25 base proposed in Introduction 828-A using input from

2 the Veteran community on what would be most useful to
3 them, and a—and a dynamic tool instead of a static
4 (sic) database. We, therefore, recommend revisions
5 to the proposed mission. There are approximately 22
6 million living veterans with 216,000 living in New
7 York City; 250,000 service members exit the service
8 each year. With this continuous population, new
9 resources are created often. Nationwide there are
10 over one million organizations and programs offering
11 assistance applicable to veterans. A static city
12 database simply cannot stay current. Our system
13 allows veterans to tell others about even the
14 smallest effective service. The veteran community
15 has additional challenges. For years we could not
16 quit, nor choose assignments. So many select where o
17 transition based upon a single factor such as family
18 or school, not combined resources as it feels too
19 complex. For our time on active duty, we are taken
20 care of. We received three hots and a cot, plus
21 we're monitored on healthcare, finances and dental—
22 dentist appointments. We do not have to make many
23 choices not even what to wear each day. We have a
24 built-in support network that we lose upon
25 transition. These are critical when considering

2 tools offered, and where other tools already fail.
3 Department of Defense Transition Assistance Programs
4 provide resource information similar to this
5 pamphlet, but it is incomplete and local to the base
6 whereas-while a significant number of veterans
7 relocate. Veterans in need of support do not know
8 where to look in a new location. A locality based
9 resource platform deployed nationally can assist in
10 planning a smooth transition. Our research also
11 suggests that with the ability to choose between so
12 many resources overwhelmed veterans and families may
13 rush selection leading to a poor fit. Many veterans
14 who have a poor experience with a resource are
15 reluctant to try another option. This is in
16 particular with a lot of the older veterans. For
17 instance, a poor experience with one mental health
18 professional may result in discontinuing care. A
19 tool simply cannot simply give veterans options it
20 must empower better choices. The database proposed
21 is jut not enough. Long-term a dynamic platform
22 inclusive of reviews and working in tandem with other
23 resources as we are, including the VA and others who
24 are nationally and locally deployed can also move our
25 community forward. For example, services veterans

need are similar to those used for presumably with
recidivism and reintegrating those recovering after a
long-term illness. City resources and provide
verified referrals. Donors and investors can gain
perspective on the impact of their dollar when used
for social good. New York City can lead in the Smart
Cities Movement, increasing the connectivity between
city resources and those at state and national
levels. The proposed data base in its format cannot
do such things, not without reinventing what our
community has already created. And naturally, any
database that is created online can be printed
comprehensively. As the CEO of Pathfinder Labs and a
member of the New York City Veteran Alliance, we do
support the concepts of Introduction 828-A, but
recommend a revision that the city partner with
existing platforms to create a more dynamic and
relevant tool. Using the platforms already in the
community would support veterans and small business
initiatives, be more cost-effective for the city and
be far more versatile option than the database
proposed. And as side note, we also filter through
between discharge status and other concerns that

2 would be very difficult to provide in a static
3 resource guide. Thank you very much and-

4 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you for your
5 service and your testimony. We'll get back to you in
6 a minute. Just get the last person here today who is
7 Joe Bono. (sic)

8 JOE BELLO: Okay, alright, Chairman
9 Ulrich, Council Member Vallone, members of the
10 Veterans Committee, thank you for giving the
11 opportunity to speak today. I'm here to voice my
12 support for Intro 828, which is the creation and
13 maintaining of the Veterans Resource Guide by DVS.
14 As stated, the bill would require the new York City
15 Department of Veteran Services to maintain and to
16 periodically update a resource guide for veterans.
17 This guide would be available on the DVS website in a
18 written format if requested. There are several
19 reason for this guide, many of which the three-
20 [laughs] right next to me have been kind of been
21 talking about. But one of the challenges, and this
22 one stated as well, is we have a predominantly older
23 veterans population. As such, while many have
24 Facebook or know how to check on it now, many others
25 do not and don't even know how to use the computer,

2 and, therefore, finding online resources often comes
3 through word of mouth. As a result of this, the
4 Bronx Borough President in conjunction with his—his
5 advisory board this year created a Bronx Veterans
6 Resource Guide, which is both online and in print to
7 help find—veterans find the resources in the Bronx
8 with some in the city. This is a direct services
9 resource guide only, and so I would recommend that
10 any resource guide created by DVS only touches upon
11 direct service to veterans. We've seen that many
12 veterans even local—even returning veterans usually
13 reach out to the local elected official or their
14 local community board first before they even hear
15 word of mouth. Thus, they are usually the first line
16 of defense in pointing the veteran or family member
17 in the right direction. And this leads to my next
18 point. As we've seen over the years, multiple
19 amounts of information correct or incorrect is out
20 there and this has been stated. Having DVS create or
21 build upon what they currently have, and could vet,
22 would allow for this information to be streamlined
23 and collated at one site and one place where veterans
24 having hearing from the grapevine or Internet savvy
25 or having to research multiple websites. Another

2 would be for the ability for DVS as a city agency to
3 track and keep pace with what organizations are here,
4 are new to the space, or has left the space. As
5 we've been seeing in the community, the philanthropy
6 money is beginning to leave the space. Several not-
7 for-profits no longer have dedicated veteran
8 services. Therefore, it's important to keep track of
9 who's here today and gone tomorrow. And the last
10 thing I would say is that if we do—if a database or a
11 resource guide is created that it should start with
12 the local elected officials and the community board.
13 Therefore, I once again voice my support to Intro 828
14 and look forward to seeing the intro move forward.
15 Thank you for your time.

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you all for
17 your testimony and for your service for those of you
18 who have served and continue to serve. Your service
19 never ends, and we are the beneficiaries of that.
20 What I would really like to do at some point is find
21 out how much this is actually going to cost. That's
22 a good idea because not only are we going to have to
23 print a lot of comprehensive information, we're
24 probably going to have to put it in many languages
25 because not all veterans prefer to speak English as

2 their primary language, and they have every right to
3 speak whatever language they choose. So the cost
4 fact I think is significant. What it looks like is
5 also—is the most important thing, but how much is
6 this going to cost and—and who it's going to be
7 provided to. I do think that there's something to be
8 said about integration of dissemination of
9 information, which currently doesn't exist. A lot of
10 folks don't know that the Department of Veteran
11 Services is on Twitter, and they everyday post very
12 helpful information, great articles, you know,
13 stories about New York City veterans that are doing
14 extraordinary things. They don't have a lot of
15 Twitter followers. A lot of people don't know
16 they're on Twitter, or they're on Facebook. I'm sure
17 they're posting a lot of the same photos, and
18 information and important dates and events and things
19 that they're hosting. Every time the Council Member
20 or your local borough president or—or Council Member
21 sends out a mailing, you'll always see, you know, the
22 Twitter bird, the Facebook, the Lined In, the social
23 media links and information and how to access them
24 because we're constantly providing updates and
25 information and—and things that are very pertinent to

2 our constituents. I think that a resource guide
3 would be able to boost their presence on social media
4 in a way that a mailing or a pamphlet that would,
5 that an elected official sends out also does for us.
6 The fact that all of these things are sort of going
7 on independently in these sort of silos and that—that
8 they're not coordinated or all in one place to
9 literally hand somebody I think is significant. So
10 hopefully as the discussion moves forward we can have
11 a conversation with them on what the resource guide
12 could look like, how much it would cost, how often it
13 could be printed, and what information they think is
14 absolutely necessary. The last thing we want to do
15 is print something that is unnecessary but it's just
16 a—a director of phone numbers and emails of every
17 not-for-profit that, you know, is under the sun.
18 Your point about the direct services is well taken,
19 and I think that they are—they are—they have not
20 announced yet, but I heard through the grapevine that
21 there is an announcement coming in the near future
22 regarding an online platform, which is really going
23 to take it to next level. We're excited about that,
24 but there are a lot of veterans who are not online
25 who are in shelters, who are low-income, who need

2 access to information. And they don't know where to
3 get it. They can't go to the library and get it.
4 It's not there. They can't come to my office. I
5 have nothing to hand them. They are not even aware
6 that DVS has employees in each borough. So I think
7 that a piece of paper, although it might cost a lot
8 of money—I don't even know how much it might cost—
9 would actually do a lot of good, and a lot of people
10 know that they're there. So, Council Member Vallone
11 had a few questions, and then we'll wrap up the
12 hearing.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, Chair
14 Ulrich. Thank you to all of your groups. You're
15 always teaching us to be better Council Members and
16 we appreciate that. On a personal note, Elana, to
17 you and every veteran that has served and sacrificed
18 you always see me stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.
19 That's the least we can do for what you sacrificed.
20 I'm always touched when I come to these hearing and
21 hear and see the passion in what everyone does
22 whether it's volunteer for the veterans and as the
23 city is trying to ramp up and get where they should
24 have always been. We're getting there, and I think
25 as a peer—as a lawyer, I can't tell you how many

2 phone calls I get that have nothing to do with my law
3 firm or my father's firm, and we spend 50% of the
4 time directing them to where they're supposed to be
5 at the Queens County Bar Association, but I still
6 wouldn't want them to call. So I think we're all
7 kind of saying the same thing, and it's probably a
8 good idea if it's done correctly. And I think this
9 is a great opportunity since we just created DVS. We
10 know about it, but the really—even the average
11 citizen doesn't know about it let alone the veterans.
12 So, even though it may be hard and it may be costly,
13 I still believe like you said, having that book on my
14 desk. Having something that I can refer that that I
15 know is going to be outdate the minute it's created.
16 Well, we know that. So it's our job to be on top of
17 it, and update it, and put amendments to it, and—and
18 exhibits in the back of it, and continue to grow it.
19 I still firmly believe in in the idea there's—this
20 bill the Chairman put forward, and I think we should
21 try to tackle it. I think we should coordinate and
22 make sure we don't duplicate. I think there's some
23 great points Kristen and everyone made today that
24 the—the last thing you want to do is undo the work
25 that the groups have done in giving out wrong

2 information. I know sometimes what Peter and I have
3 to do we actually have to reach out to the
4 organizations to say how would you like to be listed
5 and what information would you like us to put? And I
6 think that's what the department's goal—you're still
7 here thank you—is to do. If-if we create this, what
8 information? I think there's going to have to be
9 this type of coordination. Joe

10 JOE BELLO: Just—just to tell him I think
11 that's why it's so important what Peter was saying
12 about vetting the bad apples in the groups because we
13 do see a lot of them, you know, even in the Bronx and
14 the outer boroughs. So it is important to see who's
15 really actually doing those services, who's using the
16 money to do good, and who's actually—who's not?
17 Because really, this is just a not-for-profit for
18 some other entity. But again, this goes to the
19 point. That's why it should be about direct services
20 like legal, housing, things of that nature where most
21 veterans—and this was just testify what most veterans
22 are looking for right now.

23 ELANA DUFFY: And additionally that is
24 one of our—our next steps for implementation on
25 Pathfinders is to work directly one-on-one with every

2 organization that is recommended to us by a veteran.
3 We don't list anything that has not been already used
4 at some point by a veteran for good or for bad.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So that's your
6 litmus test is--is all veteran referrals and--and--

7 ELANA DUFFY: [interposing] It--it is
8 veteran. It is services that veterans have something
9 to say about. It is like yes this was good, no this
10 was not good, and then we come--and then we comprise
11 them what's similar to a Yelp format of saying these
12 were worthwhile. These were not and here's why.

13 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Did you say Yelp?

14 ELANA DUFFY: It's similar to Yelp.

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Yelp like the
16 restaurant, where you--?

17 ELANA DUFFY: [interposing] It's like
18 Yelp for--it's like Yelp for veterans services--

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] Right.
20 That's very interesting. I didn't know that.

21 ELANA DUFFY: --to comprise all of the
22 different--to comprise all of the different elements,
23 but we're also working with the organizations to say
24 what is your actual mission statement towards veteran
25 integration? Listing veteran business--veteran-owned

2 businesses. We're starting to partner our work. I
3 have a call next week with the Chamber of Commerce in
4 Brooklyn actually to start getting Chamber of
5 Commerce so that we can integrate the entire city,
6 and make sure that everyone is aware of what's going,
7 and actually I've had a few conversations with both
8 Kristen and Joe and Commissioner Sutton about being
9 able to integrate all of this because we don't want
10 to duplicate efforts any more. There's already so
11 many people doing the same things. That's what we're
12 trying to avoid. We—we're trying to take out the
13 noise and the confusion from the services community
14 overall, and veterans is—is a great way to start
15 because it's such a diverse and sort of complex
16 network that—that it seems like it's one of the best
17 ways to be able to filter our community services and
18 not duplicate.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: There may be a
20 future hearing that the Chair—we are looking to on-on
21 vetting out the groups creating some type of system
22 whether it's like every other agency that has any VC
23 system or something that we can put a five star with
24 a voucher. Something that we can create to put
25 people to know that this group has been verified and

2 trusted by fellow veterans. This group may be new.
3 We don't know about it. This group has a track
4 record of violations on non-service or something.
5 But going forward any-anything else? I still think
6 Kristen I mean you seem the most skeptical of the
7 four I think of the creation of this. After hearing
8 everybody and what we have to say, it-any final
9 thoughts?

10 ELANA DUFFY: Printed guides are great to
11 be able to hand out, and I-I-I give out, and I-I-I
12 give out all of the time as a number one referral
13 DVS's phone number to get in touch with-with the-the
14 Veteran's Benefit coordinators. That's-that's the
15 first step, and NY Serves and IVA, but I have people
16 come up to me and say oh well, I-I called all of
17 those, and nobody could help me. And then so I do-I
18 do a warm hand-off to, you know, to service providers
19 who I know in the community, and I-I think the
20 community-based organizations are getting it, and-and
21 my organization doesn't even do direct service. But-
22 but people-yeah, people are-are coming to us to all
23 of our different email addresses. You know, the-the
24 volunteers answers, that I answer with all kind of
25 requests for help. And it's-it-it seems

2 overwhelming. People call our-our Google voice
3 number, and-and say I'm having this problem. I have
4 this complaint. I can't get it addressed through
5 government or through any other, you know, any of
6 other organization. Can you help direct me to the
7 right resource? And it's-it's been-it's been-it's
8 been really overwhelming just to me because that's
9 also not-not the primary purpose of the Alliance.
10 But so what-so community based organizations, have
11 gotten very-

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] But
13 why-but Kristen why are they turning to you, and not
14 the department? Why do people call you and not DVS?

15 KRISTEN ROUSE: [interposing] Um-

16 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: And what is the top
17 complaint that you receive?

18 KRISTEN ROUSE: I well--

19 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] Is it
20 housing or--?

21 KRISTEN ROUSE: So, so the-the top-the
22 top request/complaints are-are related to employment
23 and affordable housing, and a lot of times those go-
24 those go hand-in-hand because if you don't have a-a
25 job that pays decently then you-then you're going to

2 have a hard time paying your rent. And so, you know,
3 the requirements for HUD-VASH Vouchers or-or SSVF,
4 assistance-housing assistance or whatever the-you
5 know, the-there's very specific requirements that
6 somebody who works in that has to sit there-sit down
7 and advise a veteran on exactly what they're eligible
8 for because even if I say, you know, here is a perk--
9 here is a thing that you could be eligible for and
10 then they go to the, you know, the different
11 providers, and they have-they go through these long
12 application processes and long conversations only to
13 find out oh, I didn't actually serve on Title 10
14 during my time in the-in the Reserves or National
15 Guard. And so I'm not actually eligible for, you
16 know, SSVS Housing Assistance, you know, for example
17 like that's one of the recent situations that I ran
18 into, and it's a-

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
20 That's why you got the phone call.

21 KRISTEN ROUSE: Right and so-

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Because you know
23 all of them.

24 KRISTEN ROUSE: You know, so it's-it's
25 like all of these like sort of long and complex cases

2 that—that like I keep—I keep referring to people, and
3 then—and then it will—and then they will keep coming
4 back to me. And so, you know, and—and DVS I think
5 is—is probably tired of hearing from me on, you know,
6 like can't you, can't—isn't there something to help?
7 But so, so community based organizations are very
8 familiar with what each other provides and, you know,
9 a lot of this it's—it's like a small town. We all
10 know each other where we're able to refer one to—one
11 to another, and—and, you know, the DVS team is—is—is
12 increasingly part of that network that, you know, of
13 hand-offs. But, what is more opaque to—at least to
14 me—I don't know—you know, I don't want to speak for
15 Pete or—or anybody else who's referring veterans to
16 resources. What's more opaque is all of the
17 different programs that the city itself offers. You
18 know, there—there's all these guides produced by city
19 agencies that say what the city does for its
20 citizens, and—and that, you know, and perhaps instead
21 of thinking of well how can a city government—a city
22 agency tell the story of everything that's happening
23 in the community, why doesn't—why doesn't DVS perhaps
24 focus first on what the City itself is offering. I
25 also—I've also had the city's Department of Finance

2 come to me for help with promoting, you know, DRIE
3 and SCRIE Applications for veterans. I-I happen to
4 have a-a large, you know, email and social media, you
5 know, communications outreach right now. Hopefully,
6 DVS will soon exceed that reach, but-but the problem
7 is disseminating information into the community and
8 so like the-you know, the-the-the DRIE and SCRIE
9 eligibility requirements and where to go to apply
10 that could be something that would be in a city guide
11 for veterans specifically. That or, you know, or
12 programs for-for veteran entrepreneurs, veteran
13 street vendors. We-we've, you know, we've talked
14 about this, you know, in-in recent months about-it-it
15 can be very confusing for veteran street vendors to
16 even know what the city-what the city rules and
17 programs are, and where-who to call and where to go
18 to for help. And so, so even if the city could
19 consolidate its own guide for what veterans needs to
20 know, or what veterans, you know, could benefit from,
21 that would help the community based organizations
22 better understand what's going on. So-so you, you
23 know, maybe-maybe that could be a starting point
24 instead of trying to, you know, put all of-all of the
25 incredible wealth of all of the community based

2 organizations in New York City, and to figure out
3 what they're doing even if it's only direct services.
4 Like instead of trying to tell that story, why not
5 tell the story of what the city can do for veterans?
6 Because that's not getting out.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I think that
8 will be my last question, Chair. Is—is what do you
9 see as the ultimate as the department goes, do you
10 see its role as a better road map to the community
11 based organizations in providing and supporting
12 financial help and assistance to those groups, or do
13 you see the veterans organization agency growing to
14 actually supplement and eventually provide those
15 various sort of services?

16 KRISTEN ROUSE: Well, I—I see it as—as
17 working in tandem with because there's—there's
18 veterans who are never going to seek help from
19 government. You know, there's been veterans who—who
20 have felt betrayed by the—the old MOVA. You know,
21 going—going back, and—and they don't want to go to
22 anything that, any iteration of MOVA or a city
23 office. A lot of veterans feel betrayed by the VA.
24 There's, you know, there's—there's veterans who just
25 don't have a lot of confidence in government to

2 improve their situation and so their--so community
3 based organizations are where they're going to go.
4 You know, conversely there's also, you know, veterans
5 who--whose first, you know, first step is to call--call
6 government. You know, so it's--it's really--it's
7 really a mixed bag just like, you know-- And I think
8 you probably get that in the younger--younger
9 generations as well as the older generations. It's--
10 but, you know, the whole point is to make sure that
11 we have a--an overall network and that everybody
12 connected in that network so that any veteran
13 reaching out for help eventually finds it, you know,
14 with--without the dead ends, without the
15 misunderstandings, without the, you know, needing to
16 go to five different places only to find out they're
17 not actually eligible for something.

18 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Thank you, Council
19 Member.

20 PETER KEMPNER: [interposing] And--and can
21 I just answer that. I think that for the--for the
22 community based organizations could serve as watch
23 dog. I--I would, you know, there--I don't think
24 there's any malicious intent on any government
25 agency's behalf, but when you have independent non-

2 profits working in the field, you know, we can hold
3 the government's feet to the fire. And make sure
4 that veterans who are entitled to Mitchell-Lama
5 preferences are getting those. Veterans who—who have
6 disabilities and are—are entitled to a vetting
7 license are getting those, and sometimes the agencies
8 are—are improperly denying veterans the conferences
9 (sic) and benefits to which they are entitled, and—
10 and that's why I think you need independent non-
11 profits working in—in that space as well.

12 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Well, no question.
13 Mr. Bello, do you want the last word today?

14 JOE BELLO: Yes, I'm—I'm just going to
15 follow up on what Kristen was saying. I absolutely
16 agree with her. Maybe DVS should start with what the
17 City has because we—we, you know, we were talking
18 about how things are changing and in the veteran
19 space with philanthropy money and not-for-profits—now
20 veteran not-for-profits, but not-for-profits deciding
21 either to stay or go. But we don't know what's in
22 the city like for example with DCAS and they offer
23 waivers for the Civil Service exams. Now, they don't
24 do it no more. So, you know—

2 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] What
3 was that last point. I'm sorry.

4 JOE BELLO: DCAS was offering waivers for
5 Civil Service exams for I guess to take the City's
6 Civil Service exams. Well, now, you know, I've been
7 told by several people they no longer do that.

8 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Wow.

9 JOE BELLO: So, you know, I mean there's
10 changes within the city as well, and maybe, you know,
11 DVS should take a look and see what does the city do,
12 all its agencies offer for veterans and collate that
13 into something and maybe that's a start. You know,
14 or to move onto something so-

15 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: [interposing] We-we
16 don't expect them to put absolutely everything under
17 the sun what everybody is doing, who they are, where
18 to go.

19 JOE BELLO: Sure.

20 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: But they—we have to
21 tell a story, and we're not doing a very good job
22 telling our story. People don't know what the story
23 is. They don't know how they got here, what they do,
24 how to reach them, and they have these little, you
25 know, mechanisms that they currently use, which is

2 great, but there's nothing sort of tying it all
3 together. I just take a resource guide to be able to
4 do that, but they're building capacity, but they're
5 also building more contacts and--and expanding their
6 own network of outreach. I mean it--every day they
7 probably get email, addresses of veterans in New York
8 city that they're adding so they can include them on
9 the--the blast that they send out.

10 JOE BELLO: [interposing] And I--I can
11 just add in like as part of the Veteran's Advisory
12 Board, we have asked the Commissioner to take a look
13 and see what does the population of veterans actually
14 look like here in the city. Because the reason we
15 put all the numbers like 259,000, 295,000. Okay, now
16 how many is Vietnam? How many are OEF/OIF? Is it
17 growing? Are we shrinking? We really have no idea,
18 and so we've asked the Commissioner as part of the
19 Board to take a look into that. Just let us know
20 like what--what does the population--what does the
21 community look like now? You know because we suspect
22 the numbers have grown on the OEF/OIF side with the
23 Vietnam veterans, which they're--they're getting
24 older. I mean so we--we--we need to know that as
25 well.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, now you
3 know why we fought to put the veterans ID card out
4 there so we could start to get the data, and now that
5 they refused and didn't want to do that, and then
6 they had to put an amendment later on because we
7 wouldn't go away, but that was part of it. We should
8 try to get that data.

9 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Well, what if the
10 census captures that data and if it's updated with
11 the community survey every several years. I imagine
12 it has to. I know when we break it down by--

13 JOE BELLO: [interposing] Well, I-I know
14 John Rowan has had some--some thoughts about that and
15 everything but he--but again we figured since it's the
16 city, and since the Commissioner has access to
17 starting things we don't, that perhaps it would be,
18 you know, a good way for them to come back and at
19 least share at--at the public meeting like what
20 things--what that looks like.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Good idea.

22 ELANA DUFFY: The--the census captures,
23 the census can capture whether or not someone in a
24 household has served. So if an OEF/OIF veteran moves
25 back home, and then they would say yes a veteran

2 lives here, but it may or may not be the—the head of
3 the household. Like—so if the father had or had not
4 served in Vietnam. So it's a little bit more
5 complex, but you can pull the data from—from the
6 census, and the subject data in there.

7 CHAIRPERSON ULRICH: Well, lots of—lots
8 of wonderful topics today. A very informative
9 hearing. I want to thank all of you and, of course,
10 the Administration for their testimony today, and
11 hopefully we can keep the conversation going.
12 There's a lot of wonderful programs, a lot of great
13 services that are available to veterans. We have to
14 find better ways of disseminating that, and getting
15 it out there, and maybe this is the first step. If
16 there's a better way, I wan to hear that, too. So
17 thank you all for coming today. Thank you.

18 JOE BELLOW: Thank you.

19 [gavel]

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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 October 17, 2016