

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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October 29, 2018
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm.
14th Fl.

B E F O R E: CHAIM M. DEUTSCH
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Justin L. Brannan
Mathieu Eugene
Alan N. Maisel
Paul A. Vallone

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

Loree Sutton, Founding Commissioner, New York City
Department of Veterans Services

Deputy Commissioner Jeff Roth, New York City
Department of Veterans Services

Eric Henry, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs
New York City Department of Veterans Services

Coco Culhane, Director, Veteran Advocacy Project

Kristen Rouse, Army Veteran, President and Founding
Director, New York City Veterans Alliance

Ashton Stewart, Coordinator of SAGEVets Program, SAGE

Vanom Panasuk, Mezzo level Social Worker, Senior
Veteran Transition Manager, VTM a VA Benefits Lead
with IAVA's Rapid Response Referral Program

2 [sound check] [gavel]

3 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Good afternoon.

4 Just before we begin, I just want to say a few words
5 about an incident that happened in Pittsburgh just
6 the other day where 11 people were murdered in a
7 house of worship, and this is a reminder of how we
8 need to always thank the members who protect our
9 freedom each and every day here in the United States
10 of America, and for all those veterans who spent
11 their years protecting us in this great country—in
12 this great country. So, I'd just like to ask
13 everyone just to please stand and let's take a moment
14 of silence. [pause for a moment of silence] Thank
15 you. Good afternoon, my name is Chaim Deutsch, and I
16 am the Chair of the Veterans Committee. I would like
17 to thank you all for being here today, and I would
18 like to extend my warmest greeting to the veterans
19 and the veteran advocates who joined us today. This
20 hearing will focus on veterans' access to services
21 that the city provides across the five boroughs as
22 well as the findings of the Annual Veterans Services
23 Reports. Compiled by the Mayor's Office of
24 Operation, we will also hear testimony on Intro 1118,
25 legislation which seeks to gather more information

2 about how the Department of Veterans Services is
3 operating, and being used. Intro 1118, which I am
4 proud to sponsor would require DDS to submit and
5 annual report to the Council including indicators on
6 personal-personnel and performance. Specifically DVS
7 would required to report on the number of employees
8 serving in each titled within the agency as well as
9 the services provided by each of these titled
10 employees. The agency will also report the number of
11 veterans who receive services from DVS as well as how
12 veterans and their families learned about the
13 services provided by the agency. This bill is the
14 starting point for a conversation about what
15 information DVS can provide that would help the city
16 assess how it is serving our veterans. We hope to
17 hear from the Administration and advocates how to
18 improve it and to be more comprehensive and-and
19 useful as it can be. The 2017 Veteran Service
20 Reports will be another issue that will-that we
21 examine today. The report, which was prepared by the
22 Mayor's Office of Operations compiled information
23 from a number of city agencies that offer veteran
24 specific opportunities in the areas of employment and
25 housing. These agencies include DCA, DCAS, DOHMH,

2 HPD, and NYCHA. It is vital that veterans can access
3 to the benefits from Mitchell Lama housing to HUD-
4 VASH Vouchers, and civil service examinations to your
5 waivers in a convenient, timely and efficient manner.
6 I am excited to discuss the findings of the report
7 with the Administration to ensure that the former
8 service members have all of the support and
9 information they need as they readjust to civilian
10 life. I would like to thank committee staff counsel
11 Nuzhat Chowdhury; Policy Analyst Michael Katz and
12 Finance Analyst Zachary Harris for their work.
13 Finally, I would like to recognize the committee
14 members that have joined us here. I'd like to
15 recognize Council Member Paul Vallone. Thank you,
16 Commissioner, and if we begin by--well, okay.

17 LEGAL COUNSEL: Please raise your right
18 hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole
19 truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony
20 before the committee, and to respond honestly Council
21 Member questions?

22 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [off mic] I do.
23 [pause] Good morning, good afternoon, Chair Deutsch
24 and esteemed members of the New York City Committee
25 on Veterans. Chair Deutsch, I just want to thank you

2 on behalf of our community of veterans here in New
3 York City on behalf of the grateful nation for your
4 leadership setting up an opposition to hatred. Those
5 11 innocent Jewish congregants at the Tree of Life
6 Synagogue in Pittsburgh, our city is in mourning, our
7 country, our world is in mourning. But I—I must just
8 say as a point of personal heart felt gratitude as a
9 veteran to know that your leadership in this area
10 didn't start this weekend but, in fact, you were
11 founded or your Flatbush Shomrim. You are the Chair
12 of the Council Caucus, the Jewish Caucus and every
13 single day, you prove again and again why your work
14 in those capacities as a prominent Jewish leader in
15 our public life is such a complement to your
16 leadership capacity of the Committee on Veterans.
17 So, thank you. My name is Loree Sutton. As always,
18 I'm honored to serve as the Founding Commissioner of
19 the New York City Department of Veterans Services.
20 I'm joined today by Deputy Commission Jeff Roth, and
21 Eric Henry, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs.
22 As Veterans Day approaches next month including the
23 myriad events occurring throughout the city of New
24 York in November, DVS is excited to work together
25 with our city partner to celebrate and honor the

2 service of veterans, service members of all
3 components and family members locally and beyond. In
4 particular we invite everyone to participate in the
5 Annual New York City Veterans Day Parade now known as
6 America's Parade organized by the United War Veteran
7 Council on Sunday, November 11, 2018. I look forward
8 to seeing many of you on that special day as well as
9 throughout the month. Today, I welcome the
10 opportunity to discuss Local Laws 23-2015 as well as
11 the proposed Intro 1118 of 2018. Before doing so, I
12 would like to briefly highlight some of the ways DVS
13 since its transition from Mayoral Office to Citywide
14 Department in 2016 has put forward tremendous effort
15 into implementing best practices for connecting with
16 New York City veterans, service members and families
17 including active engagement and assistance activities
18 to improve the lives of our community. DVS is proud
19 to continue its citywide presence with satellite
20 sites in each of the five boroughs feature posted
21 office hours to participation in events occurring at
22 a variety of venues throughout the city. Through the
23 agency's newly organized Engagement and Community
24 Services Unit, Engagement Coordinators are trained to
25 connect veterans and their families to trusted

2 resources throughout the city including state and
3 federal government resources as well as course of
4 community-based organizations drawing from the
5 private philanthropic and social sectors. In
6 addition, DVS is committed to connecting veterans and
7 their families to city careers, services and
8 resources through the DVS website for direct access
9 to city job opportunities, collaborating with DCAS
10 citywide recruitment in Workforce 1 Centers and all
11 sectors to identify best practices and developing
12 public/private partnerships aimed at enhancing
13 business, educational, entrepreneurial and employment
14 opportunities. DVS also connects veterans and their
15 families with opportunities to heal, to grow, and to
16 thrive. As part of the First Lady of New York City's
17 Pioneering, Thrive NYC Mental Health Initiative, DVS
18 has developed the Vets Thrive NYC Core 4 Whole Health
19 Model was used as arts and education, peer to peer
20 support, holistic services and clinical treatment to
21 address the full impact war has on the mind, body,
22 and spirit of our veterans and their loved ones. DVS
23 continues to administer the provisions of Local Law
24 42 2013 by providing trainings to city agency veteran
25 liaisons. Training such as Veteran Mental Health

2 First Aid, which is also available to agencies, non-
3 profits and veteran service organizations. Working
4 in collaboration with our sister—our city agencies,
5 federal government and community partners, DVS
6 remains dedicated to effectively ending veteran
7 homelessness in New York City. DVS housing team
8 continues to develop new housing resources and using
9 our peer-to-peer model works directly with veterans
10 in shelter to help navigate the housing search
11 process in the city. This effort is supported by our
12 in-house Aftercare Coordinator and Constituent Team
13 that work day in and day out to prevent evictions,
14 and provides overall housing stability to formerly
15 homeless and at-risk veterans. I'm delighted to
16 share with you today that we have recently been
17 approved to add another veteran peer coordinator to
18 the team. This will increase the number of veterans
19 we move into permanent housing by about 20%. Another
20 important partnership is DVS' strong working
21 relationship with the city's Veterans Advisory Board,
22 the VAB, whose membership is currently in transition.
23 We look forward to working welcoming the upcoming
24 round of Mayoral and Council appointments soon to be
25 announced. Appointed by the Mayor and Speaker, the

2 VAB membership is carefully chosen to sustain a
3 diverse range of service backgrounds, community
4 engagement interests, borough representation and
5 professional expertise to help facilitate dialogue
6 within the New York City Veterans community. Moving
7 forward to the topics in today's hearing, I am
8 pleased to discuss Local Law 23, 2015 as well as the
9 proposed Intro 1118-2018. Local Law 23 was
10 introduced by Council Member Paul Vallone, passed by
11 the City Council and subsequently signed by the Mayor
12 in 2015. This law annually required the Mayor's
13 Office of Operations to compile various information
14 regarding veterans utilizing housing assistance to
15 the Department of Housing Preservation and
16 Development, and the New York City Housing Authority
17 by applying for civic service to the Department of
18 Citywide Administration Services, and applying for
19 and receiving the licensing permits through the
20 Department of Consumer Affairs and the Department of
21 Health and Mental Hygiene. This information is
22 useful in evaluating how many veterans are accessing
23 our city government through these specific agencies,
24 and DVS appreciates the work performed by our sister
25 agencies in documenting this data. In reviewing this

data from the past three calendar years, 2014 through 17, positive trend lines are noteworthy in two specific areas. One in the number of veterans who have applied for employment with the city of New York through self-identification via their veteran civil service credit, and secondly, the number of veterans who have applied for and access our city's public housing stock. DVS is proud to work in collaboration with NYCHA, HPD and HRA to connect veterans with eligible subsidies with all applicable [coughing] positive (sic) resources. We look forward to working with our fellow agencies involved to evaluate all data presented through the most recent report in determining how the city of New York can best continue to promote enhanced access to care, services and resources for its veterans community. I would also like to mention that DVS has the Mayor's Office of Operations to provide an opportunity for veterans to self-identify through Local Law 127-2016, which requires city agencies such as the Department of Social Services, the Administration for Children's Services, the Department of Homeland Services-of Homeless Services, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department for the Aging, the

2 Department of Youth and Community Development, and
3 the Department of Education to provide to all persons
4 served through these agencies with a demographic
5 information survey that contains an option for multi-
6 racial ancestry or ethnic origin. This form is
7 available now, and we look forward to new insights we
8 will learn concerning our city's Veterans population.
9 Regarding Intro 1118-2018, this proposal would
10 require the Department of Veterans Services to submit
11 an annual report to the Council on agency personnel
12 numbers, title and job functions, the number of
13 veterans who received services from DVS, the methods
14 by which veterans and their families learned about
15 seeking assistance through the agency, and the number
16 of veterans engaged in the system. Currently, city
17 budget documents and the management--Mayor's
18 Management Report include most of the information
19 sought through Introduction 1118. Furthermore, these
20 documents are released during the same timeframe
21 identified in this proposal. While DVS looks forward
22 to continued collaboration with the City Council
23 concerning DVS personnel and performance metrics, we
24 are confident that these aims can best be achieved
25 through existing reporting mechanism. Thank you

2 again for this opportunity to meet with you today.

3 At this time, I am happy to address any questions or
4 ideas you may have. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you,
6 Commissioner and thank you for your partnership and
7 work with my office, and always been accessible when
8 issues arise. So, let me—let me just begin by—so the
9 applications for general vending licenses submitted
10 by veterans from 2014—in 2014, there were about 570.
11 In 2015, there were 499. In 2016, 427 and in 2017,
12 372. So, what is the reason like why they gradually
13 go down? Like in 2014 there was—there were 570
14 vending license submitted by veterans, and from 2014
15 to 2017 and currently—in 2017, you had 372. So, I see
16 the numbers are going down. So what do you think?
17 What is the reason for that?

18 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: You know, we've—
19 we've consulted with our colleagues at DCA, and in
20 their estimation this is consistent with what they've
21 seen across the city in terms of decreased
22 applications for general as well as food vending
23 licenses. We're not sure how much this applies to
24 the veteran population. We do know that 2013 there
25 was legislation concerning disable veterans, which

2 allows them the opportunity to get special permits.
3 We don't know if that may have taken some of the
4 demand upfront before this legislation went into
5 effect, but it's certainly something that we are open
6 to understanding more, and as you get feedback
7 through your office and through the members of the
8 committee, we'd be very interested also in any
9 community and organizational feedback that anyone
10 has. So, that so far we—we know through DCA that
11 their thought is that perhaps—perhaps veterans like
12 other residents in the city may be pursuing
13 education—you know, employment opportunities
14 elsewhere than the vending area, but we don't know
15 much more than that at this point. It's—it's really
16 at the level of consultation and raising the
17 questions.

18 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Alright, is there
19 any way or like who would—who—I'd would really like
20 to look into it to see--

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Uh-
22 hm.

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --what the reason
24 is. Is there any one in the agency that is able to

2 determine why, in fact, it went down? Is anyone
3 that--

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Yes,
5 our--our--certainly our plan is to continue our
6 consultation with members of the community and
7 various advocacy groups including those who represent
8 veteran vendors. So, we can get a better idea of
9 what may be going on within this particular
10 community.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, and that
12 would be part of the reports? We could add that into
13 reports that, you know, if you see the reason why
14 those number went down, but once you make the
15 evaluation that maybe we could bring that back, and
16 just to see--

17 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] We're
18 happy to talk to you about anything that we find at
19 any--at any time, certainly.

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, the--

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] To
22 this--to this point that's what we--that's what we've
23 been able to uncover.

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, because I--
25 I've also seen that not only that the--it was--the

2 applicant—the vending licenses went down, but the
3 vending licenses that were issued to veterans as well
4 went down. So, if we could take a look at both, you
5 know, why less people are applying—less veterans are
6 applying for licenses, and those that have applied
7 for those licenses haven't been receiving those
8 licenses maybe--

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --because those
11 numbers went down, too.

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: No, I—I -I would—I
13 would agree there's—there's more to be learned from—
14 from the state and it's—I would, you know, highlight
15 and Council Member Vallone over there thank you for
16 your leadership in introducing this bill and, you
17 know, bring it to fruition three years ago, and I
18 think that it sparks exactly these kind of
19 conversations, which can help us raise questions and
20 better understand how the city can better provide
21 both access, but also processes, which make it easier
22 for veterans and their loved ones to—to seek—seek
23 support.

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Great. Okay. I'd
25 also love to hear from the advocates if you have any

2 input that you would like to give in my office of
3 DVS, some of the reasons what you may think why these
4 numbers vary from, you know, going back three or four
5 years up until--up until now. So, that would be very
6 helpful. I see also on the Civil Service Examination
7 Applications, received from applicants claiming
8 veterans credits that those number indeed--those
9 numbers went up. So, in 2014, you had 3475. In
10 2015--up until 2015, 1887; 2016, 2,843 and in 2017,
11 5,094. So what would you attribute that to?

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well, I think there
13 are a number of factors here. We've been working
14 very closely with our city partners to get the word
15 out on city civil service opportunities to be able to
16 apply not just for the uniform services, as important
17 as those are, but also for the myriad other career
18 opportunities that exist within city government. So,
19 my intention certainly as we continue to mature and
20 ripen and strengthen our outreach capabilities is
21 that we would see that number continue to go up
22 because the message we have been sending consistently
23 over the last several year is that the city of New
24 York we're already the number one employer of
25 veterans in New York City, but we want to shine a--a

2 brighter light on all of the opportunities and I
3 think these numbers indicating an upward trend or
4 pattern within the Civil Service Examination
5 Application is very, very positive.

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. I'm
7 also—I'm looking at the use of HUD-VASH Vouchers
8 administered by NYCHA.

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, I see that in
11 all five boroughs I see Bronx has the highest number
12 of HUD-VASH Vouchers administered by NYCHA. So, I
13 know like Queen, Brooklyn, you know, they have more
14 veteran population than the Bronx. So, and I see
15 that Bronx has 1,200-1,222 rental units. So, why-why
16 would-why is it that the Bronx has that higher number
17 opposed to other-other boroughs?

18 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: So-so when it comes
19 to for example the HUD-VASH Vouchers, the Bronx has
20 had a real spike in terms of units and developments
21 coming on line. I think you've actually gone to
22 visit at least one of those much appreciated in terms
23 of your hands-on leadership. I think that, you know,
24 in any given year it's going to vary depending upon
25 where the housing stock is. We'd be glad to dig into

2 it in more--in more detail if you'd like. I know
3 you're coming to visit us this Wednesday, and we look
4 forward to that conversation, but certainly wherever
5 the--the housing units are we--we get after them
6 because we do not want a single unit left unfilled if
7 a veteran can fill it.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, I know, yeah,
9 we have a meeting coming up because there were some
10 issues with some of the--some of the housing, but we
11 had some vacancies, and then, you know, I know I
12 mentioned some providers.

13 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: We had about 28
15 vacancies. So now I know the number went down
16 working with DVS, and it disturbed me back then why
17 there were so many vacancies when you have--when we
18 have veterans who are looking for housing. So, I
19 want to thank Jericho and other providers--

20 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Sure.

21 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --on supportive
22 housing.

23 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: But Mr. Chair, I'd
24 like to thank you as well. I think your hands-on
25 leadership exactly matches our aims and allowed us as

2 a city to shine a brighter light on the complexities
3 affecting the supportive housing market. As a
4 result, we have moved forward to do several things.
5 One is we've launched sort of an in-reach campaign to
6 be able to socialize the benefits the advantages of
7 supportive housing within our homeless veteran
8 population in the—the shelters. We sought to
9 mobilize the power of peer-to-peer social support.
10 We've also—our sister agency HRA has now launched a
11 weekly report so that we've got weekly eyes on these
12 units to make sure, as I said that we don't let a
13 single unit go unfilled if a veteran can fill it.
14 The other issue that I'd like to just bring to your
15 attention is, you know, at the end of 2015, this was
16 an all of city, all of government, all of our service
17 provider partners approach to achieving federal
18 certification for effectively ending chronic veteran
19 homelessness and as you know, supportive housing
20 eligibility criteria often times includes chronicity
21 (sic). So, we're actually engaged right now with our
22 colleagues at HUD, and they are working with us right
23 now to finalize some guidance, which we'll be
24 presenting to the Continuum of Care Group in
25 November, and we'll certainly keep you posted because

2 this is a great new story. If-if we and other
3 communities around the country that effectively ended
4 chronic veteran homelessness, if we can get a
5 broadening of the eligibility criteria given that
6 success, that would be—that would be a wonderful
7 thing, and it certainly looks like things are moving
8 in that direction.

9 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes, it is. Yeah.
10 Thank you very much, Commissioner.

11 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely.

12 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, okay. So, I
13 just want to discuss that the agencies, and then I
14 want to get to the members. I don't want to keep
15 them waiting here all day. In the areas that—that
16 veteran services—the city agencies offer veteran
17 services like DCA, DCA, DOHMH, HPD and NYCHA. So
18 either someone can walk into the agency and [coughs]
19 they could say they're a veteran or they could walk
20 into one of the DVS--

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]
22 That's right.

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --locations. Yeah.
24 So, if someone walks into a city agency without going
25 to DVS, right, does—how—what is that—what is the

2 collaboration between the agency and DVS? Like if a
3 veteran walks in to NYCHA looking for housing so
4 does—do they notify DVS? Do you have a record of
5 that or they do their own thing, and you just wait
6 for that veteran to come in if they have an issue?

7 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well, typically
8 there's collaboration that goes both ways. If
9 someone comes directly to DVS and there's something
10 that NYCHA can help them with, and we help connect
11 them, and we keep track in terms of what the outcome
12 of that interaction is. Likewise, if someone goes to
13 NYCHA, and our colleagues at NYCHA know about our
14 team and our program, and we work together. So, it's
15 really a collaborative effort that can work both—both
16 ways.

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, are—are these
18 agencies like familiar with what resources a veteran
19 may—may be eligible to opposed to DVS getting
20 involved and saying, okay, you know something, there'
21 more services or there's quicker services that you're
22 eligible to that the agency may not know of.

23 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well, the good news
24 is that the agencies now know that we exist. You
25 know, just not too long ago and I know that Council

2 Member Maisel and Vallone remember this all too well,
3 but the good news is that we do exist. We also have
4 an agency liaison at each of the agencies, and so the
5 agencies themselves can go directly to their own
6 agency liaison. Sometime they do that if a fairly
7 straightforward question or also come straight to us
8 or the agency liaison does. But again, there's a lot
9 of crosstalk, a lot of collaboration and, you know,
10 we keep our agency liaisons trained up with our
11 quarterly check-in calls, and the communication ties
12 just keep getting stronger and stronger particularly
13 now that we have agency status and have a lot more
14 capability to bring to the table.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, the agency
16 liaisons do they—do they work under DVS or they work
17 under the—the Mayor's Office literally?

18 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]
19 They're assigned to their respective agency, but
20 they're officially appointed by their agency as a
21 liaison for the Department of Veterans Services. So,
22 we, you know, their department appoints them. They
23 belong to their agency, which is good because that
24 way they can keep abreast of all of the changes, all
25 of the thins affecting their particular agency, but

2 then if we have a veteran who has an issue, whose
3 solution might be found through their agency, then
4 we're able to directly contact the liaisons, and then
5 we figure it out from there where we need to connect
6 and—and to find a solution for whatever the issue or
7 problem might be.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, do—do those
9 liaisons report the—all the case—all the case
10 working—all the cases they have DVS or they may keep
11 it within their agency? Let's say five veterans
12 walked in this week, do they keep that information or
13 do they give it to DVS and say oh, we just have five
14 veterans who just walked in. I just want to let you
15 know that this is what we're doing for them?

16 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: You know, we don't
17 have a formal reporting requirement from the agency
18 liaisons to DVS, but we certainly do collaborate on
19 many, many cases, and—and it's—it's a system that's
20 worked well over time, but that's a good question
21 that you raise, and at our next quarterly meeting I
22 think it would be important to, you know, to—to get a
23 sense from them how many veterans they're—or how many
24 questions they're fielding within their agencies that
25 they're able to resolve right within their agencies.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, this way we
3 have a better idea of how many veterans and we get
4 the exact numbers of how many veterans are being
5 served.

6 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Sure.

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, I think that's--
8 that's important. Okay, before I continue I'll just--
9 does anyone have questions? We'll start with Council
10 Member Vallone.

11 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: That's nice.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Good afternoon
13 Commissioner--

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Good
15 afternoon.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --and your
17 staff. God bless you and every veteran as Veterans
18 Day is coming up, and as we always say, every day is
19 Veterans' Day so always are blessings, and I think
20 especially in the times that we're in after this
21 weekend, there are those who reach out to you in
22 times of need, and those who support you every day.
23 I'm proud to be the latter.

24 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Yes, you are and
25 thank you.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: You cannot have
3 one without the other.

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you very
5 much.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Yeah, there's
7 been a lot of work over the last few years. It's
8 nice to see the data coming in and I think Chair
9 Deutsch's comments are exactly what we were looking
10 for. So, I guess it's the next step, and the Chair
11 touched on that. What would you like to see now as
12 the next step now that that stat is coming in?

13 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm. So, I think
14 we are continuing to grow, mature, ripen, strengthen
15 our data systems internally. Two years ago we didn't
16 have a database. As an example, when we were still
17 under the Mayor's Office we were, you know, not able
18 to collate or systemically report the data as we
19 increasingly are today. A year ago in July was when
20 we started our MMR collection, and we're very please
21 to have our data for the first time--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
23 Well, if someone can import--

24 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --published here.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --to look at
3 those numbers now versus just--

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Well-
5 -

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --you know,
7 coming up with hypa-like hypotheticals

8 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] It's
9 true.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --it's-it's so
11 much-not-not-easy is not the right word, but it's a
12 starting point.

13 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: It's a starting
14 point, you know--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing] And
16 I think the Chair's question about delineating
17 between the veterans that came through you and the
18 veterans that came through the other agencies, I
19 think that's-that's kind of critical. So, I think we
20 should make before somebody submits a bill around
21 that, I think we should-we should make that a
22 requirement, and I think that would be a perfect tool
23 for you to see where those new requests for services
24 are coming from, how many are coming through the
25 department? How many are coming through sister

2 agencies? I would like to see that. I would like to
3 see, and then I guess on a follow-up to the creation
4 of the information. The liaisons was kind of--this
5 was voluntary, but they were created internally. Are
6 you comfortable with that program as it stands? That
7 having someone in everyone in every mayoral agency
8 reporting to you with at this point?

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: You know, that's
10 worked--that's worked very well. We--we maintain
11 contact with them. We conduct regular training.
12 They know that they can reach out to us whenever they
13 need--need help. We've really built a relationship of
14 trust throughout city government. I will say that
15 we--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
17 And it's at every agency now?

18 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Pardon me?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Is there a
20 liaisons in every agency?

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: There is a liaison
22 in every agency and, you know, when--when there's a
23 transition maybe one agent--one agency liaison perhaps
24 moves onto another one. Then we work with the
25 agencies so that they'll identify a replacement. But

2 we've gotten very good support, and I would say that
3 one thing to just recognize is that, you know, some
4 veterans don't self-report, and that's something
5 we're working on to help our sister agencies, and to
6 help actually around the city folks understand that.
7 You know, one of the things we've learned over the
8 last several years is if you want to get a really
9 inadequate and incomplete number of veterans that
10 you're serving, ask that question: Are you a
11 veteran? Because you'll get answers all over the
12 map. We find that the two questions that really are
13 most effective: One is: Have you ever served in the
14 United States Armed Forces, National Guard, or
15 Reserves? The second one: Has your spouse or any
16 family member living in your household ever served
17 in the United States Armed Forces, National Guard or
18 Reserves? It gives you a far more complete number
19 because (1) you count in the peace time veterans.
20 Some people, you know, think, well, women veterans
21 were a particular culprit. We don't like to self-
22 report, and we think well, if we hadn't been in the
23 combat role or, you know, there are a number of
24 reasons that folks are reticent to self-identify, but
25 I-I think that's also an area where under the

2 leadership of the Mayor and the Council and—and all
3 of New York City's veterans community and advocates.
4 Just the standing up of this agency gives our
5 veterans, our community the clear message that they
6 are valued, that we consider them as civic assets and
7 that we are committed to supporting and empowering
8 continued ability to serve on behalf of others.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So, now that
10 they have this—this greater tool to self-identify,
11 what would you say is one of the remaining larger
12 obstacles for our veteran community and accessing
13 these city services?

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: You know it's
15 always a challenge—a challenge we eagerly embrace,
16 but it's always challenge to just keep getting the
17 information out there, and so for example, let me
18 just share with you--

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
20 That's come up in the past.

21 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] Yes.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: About the
23 coordination of information between advocates
24
25

2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Absolutely. So,
3 one thing that we—we just left a few I think about 25
4 or so of our one-pagers here--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --Uh-hm.

6 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --that really at a
7 glance as well as the RF Code that gives folks just
8 direct access through their devices to our—our
9 website, that gives folks really an overview of
10 everything that we do knowing that if we can get
11 their attention though our outreach efforts then we
12 have an opportunity to further engage with one-on-one
13 dialogue to better understand their concerns, and
14 then that leads to assistants who are absolutely—
15 actually able to connect veterans and their loved
16 ones to city services, care or resources so--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]
18 Which I think is important when we go to the Outer
19 Boroughs, too, but as a Queens Council Member, I am
20 always fighting to make sur the services are spread
21 out throughout the boroughs because it's difficult--

22 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]
23 Absolutely.

24

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --to get them to
3 get that information and get veterans, too, and that
4 was part of the reason of creating.

5 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing]
6 Queens has 28% of our veteran population.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [laughs] And my
8 last, Chair-question, Chair-Mr. Chair is: You know
9 there's been talk about expanding vendor licenses and
10 some of that talk is not for vendors. So, I was
11 opposing but I'd like to have some support from-from
12 you and on that that we have to be careful if we're
13 going to touch the system of vendor licensing in the
14 city that's going to somehow water down or remove the
15 privilege that veterans have received for that, and I
16 didn't see clarity in that last bill regarding that,
17 and that's why I didn't give my support on it.

18 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Uh-hm.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I think a lot of
20 work has to be done on that. I think we have to be
21 vigilant in any attempt to remove the benefits that
22 veterans have for some cause or some other cause, and
23 I think there's a reason why we have that benefit,
24 and I don't necessarily want to see that removed.

2 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] And
3 we would certainly look forward to continuing our
4 engagement and dialogue with central staff as that
5 comes back into consideration. Absolutely. We've
6 been a voice for veteran vendors. We'll continue to
7 be a voice. So we look forward to teaming with you.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you.

9 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Chair.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. Anybody
12 else? Alan? No. Okay. So, my next question is—is
13 that if a veteran goes to one of the mayoral agencies
14 and gets rejected, let's say for a Mitchell Lama
15 apartment, do they—do they report to you—back to—to
16 DVS, or they just tell them that they're rejected for
17 whatever reason? Like does it get back to DVS?
18 Like it's—if—if the veteran's liaison rejects and
19 application, do they report to DVS?

20 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: You know, I have to
21 check on that. I'm not sure. I'm not aware of a
22 formal reporting mechanism, but let me check on that.
23 Let's talk about that on Wednesday.

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, okay,
25 finally, first of all, I just want to say that I want

2 to thank you. We are going to be having the round
3 table on all those veterans' organizations who
4 provide many resources to the veterans. Just to let
5 everyone know we are going to be having the round
6 table discussion and agency will be sending in like a
7 one-page description of what resources they offer to
8 veterans, and then we're going to make a pamphlet out
9 of-out of that with all the agencies, and we're going
10 to see what loopholes there are that we need--we still
11 need to fund in the future, but this way we're all on
12 the same page and everyone is going to have that
13 resource book. So this way we don't have to go on
14 the website and navigate. Sometimes it may be a
15 little difficult. So, people could just--we'll have
16 that handy resource book, and just see when they need
17 legal services or housing. This would be a great
18 tool for our veteran population. This is something
19 new and--

20 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] We
21 look forward to working with you--

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah.

23 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: --on that, Mr.
24 Chair.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And in addition to
3 that, we also have—right so we have a meeting with
4 DOE on adding the two questions on the student
5 application. It looks like they may be coming
6 towards—at the request that I made of having those
7 two questions in the student applications: Are you
8 the child of a veteran or a child of parents who is
9 in the active military? So this way we know that
10 when it comes to the GI Bill we know what resources
11 we could give out to the children, what resources we
12 could give to our parents who is a veteran or still
13 in active military duty so--

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: [interposing] We
15 definitely look forward to working on that as well
16 with you, Mr. Chair. Also, when you mentioned the GI
17 Bill, I just want to mention that there's—we've
18 brought again about 25 I think or so copies of the
19 Joint Memo that the Department of Social Services and
20 DVS collaborated on. It was sent out to our—about 80
21 campuses that are veteran certifying officials and
22 veteran coordinators, and I know that you're
23 participating on the press release that will go out
24 later today that really frames the way in which the
25 city of New York is standing up to support its

2 veterans to make sure that anyone who might be at
3 risk of being eviction because of the delay in
4 receiving the basic housing allowance, as an example,
5 that the city has got a solution. We stand up behind
6 or veterans and their families. So, thank you so
7 much, and please everyone who's here, please put the
8 word out. We have a lot of student veterans right
9 now who are very, very worried, but the city has a
10 solution that will keep them out of financial
11 jeopardy.

12 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Great. Thank you
13 so much. So you support this bill?

14 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: As I said, Mr.
15 Chair, I am eager to talk with in further detail
16 about this bill, but it-it-to my read, much of what's
17 covered in the introduction is already published and
18 available in city documents. So, my-my view is that
19 between our regular dialogue and our engagements as
20 well as the public documents including now the MMR,
21 which is-we've talked about it. It's the first-the
22 first year that we've been able to be part of the
23 MMR. I feel like the existing mechanisms are-are
24 sufficient.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. I think that
3 this--this bill is a--a step forward to receiving the
4 information that we--we need and we deserve and the
5 veterans deserve, and this way we could better
6 continue to understand what the issues are and how we
7 could better implement some of the--in the areas that
8 we need improvement. So this is--it's basically--it's a
9 reporting bill, and I think it's important for the
10 City Council to receive all this information. This
11 way we could better understand.

12 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: And we'll continue
13 to engage in--in dialogue and certainly discussions
14 with the central staff on this as we go forward, but
15 certainly we share the aims and the intention and the
16 motivation behind this bill, and so we'll look
17 forward to further engagement and dialogue as we--as
18 we go forward, but I--I would--I would say that as a
19 Commissioner who just, you know, two years ago if I
20 had had two members of my--my team sitting beside me
21 that would have been 60% of the office, and I think
22 we've come such a long way that it's exciting now to
23 be able to as we start year number 3 to be able to
24 even contemplate things such as we're talking about
25 in this introduction and others--the bills that are

2 aging. So, thank you so much for your leadership and
3 your support, and we'll continue—we'll keep on
4 marching, Mr. Chair.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, so finally—
6 okay. So, we'll have a conversation about this, and
7 I think this is crucial. I'm going to keep on
8 pushing to make sure that we get the information we
9 need from the people working in DVS, and in order to
10 further work together with advocates and with DVS to
11 make sure that we have all the information we need
12 and so I look forward to that. So, I want to thank
13 your staff for their close collaboration and
14 partnership. I know that we're working in the—in the
15 area. I think we're setting up meeting now regarding
16 the supportive housing, and housing with your agency
17 to—to see if we could open up more rentals and
18 apartments for veterans and so this way we could—we
19 could get more people off the streets and out of
20 shelters. So, thank you very much, and we're going
21 to hear from advocates. If you could—if you don't
22 mind if you have—are you sticking around?

23 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Well, there's no
24 more important place for me to be right now, Chair.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing]

3 Great. Thank you very much, Commissioner.

4 COMMISSIONER SUTTON: Thank you very
5 much.

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you.

7 [background comments] Okay, Coco Culhane, Ashton
8 Stewart, and Kristen Rouse. How are you, Kristen?
9 Yeah, there you go. [background comments, pause]
10 Kristen, why are you hiding in the back?

11 KRISTEN ROUSE: I can see better.

12 [laughter] [pause]

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, we'll start
14 with you, Coco. We'll swear you in.

15 COCO CULHANE: No. Good afternoon,
16 Committee on Veterans. My name is Coco Culhane, and
17 I'm the Director of the Veteran Advocacy Project. We
18 provide free legal services to low-income veterans
19 and their families with a focus with those who are
20 living with Post-Traumatic Stress, Traumatic Brain
21 Injury [bell] and substance use disorders. The
22 creation of Department of Veterans Services is
23 success celebrated by everyone. [emergency
24 test/message over loud speaker] Okay, so--

2 MALE SPEAKER: [interposing] The test is
3 good.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, I wasn't part
5 of your--

6 MALE SPEAKER: [interposing] The test be
7 like--

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: It wasn't part of
9 your speech, right?

10 COCO CULHANE: Well, let's keep things
11 exciting. A couple of year later the department has
12 had a chance to explore its role in the city and
13 settle in, and I think the community has had a chance
14 to size them up in return. Some advocates are
15 wondering about the agency should be doing, and
16 there's been talk of benefits appeals, behavioral
17 health and other services, but I think that it may be
18 that DVS faces a similar dilemma as the VA, a public
19 perception that the agency is supposed to take care
20 of all of veterans' needs. And a look at the New
21 York City Charter reveals, in fact, that the mandate
22 of the Department of Veterans Services is to inform.
23 So, you know, given that the department was formed to
24 act as a hub, they've gone above and beyond. We all
25 know about their collaboration in terms of ending

1 homelessness. It's a nationally lauded model, which
2 has just been fantastic, and I think that that—the
3 community sees that concrete work and rightfully asks
4 what's next, which is not to say that homelessness
5 is—is solved obviously. But I think that asking
6 what's next has to be done within a framework of
7 efficiency and a framework that aligns with the
8 agency's mandate, and so before talking about
9 expanding into more direct services, let's ensure
10 that the agency is actually fulfilling its mission as
11 it was set up, which is to form—to inform and connect
12 veterans and their families to resources. So, that—
13 Veteran Advocacy supports the introduction of Local
14 Law 118 and believes that DVS reporting on even more
15 figures than they already do will benefit the entire
16 community. You know, the resources in New York City
17 are endless and a simple search can be very
18 overwhelming and, you know, New York or NY Serves or
19 NYC soon to be Vet Connect. It's hard to work behind
20 the scenes I think, you know, working out eligibility
21 and all of those details, but DVS really needs to be
22 the center of communication and where any veteran
23 service member or family member can reach out and get
24 all the information that they need, and be sent to
25

2 all of those resources. So, for that reason, we
3 would encourage the Council to define the word
4 "services" in the bill, in the law. Requiring more
5 detail on services will reveal meaningful information
6 about the achievements of DVS and may even highlight
7 further needs in the city. You know, my organization
8 could say we engaged a thousand veterans this year,
9 but without knowing what engaged means, you have no
10 idea what was accomplished. Outcomes are what matter
11 and this law asks for the number of services, right,
12 the number of veterans served, and then the method of
13 how the veterans found the department. So, finding
14 out that method is not really meaningful. So, if you
15 have a report where it says, you know an outreach
16 specialist not a veteran and an event. You've got a
17 number 1 and you've got method event, and that's all
18 you really know. So, we should be asking what kind
19 of informing is happening, and is it happening
20 effectively, and the number served just doesn't shed
21 light on what was achieved. So, tying the language
22 at Subsection (a) to the substantive requirements
23 that are in the Charter, you know, those topical
24 areas where service members are supposed to be able
25 to come to DVS and learn about it, right? Like the

2 employment resources, education benefits. All of
3 that, and in tying that definition will provide the
4 community with a better idea of what's being
5 accomplished by the department. And requesting that
6 is also going to give all of us insight, right.
7 We'll be able to recognize trends. We may be able to
8 see the gaps in services that the chairman was
9 referring to. It's really something that I think can
10 provide not only accountability, but insight and
11 guidance, and in conclusion, you know, veterans were
12 held accountable each day of their service in a way
13 that many civilians will never experience, and we owe
14 it to them to hold our agencies and ourselves to the
15 same level of accountability. So, I look forward to
16 seeing how DVS develops, and let's make sure we have
17 the meaningful data to track its impact. Thank you
18 for allowing me to speak.

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. Thank
20 you very much.

21 KRISTEN ROUSE: Good afternoon. Thank
22 you, Chairman Deutsch and the committee for the
23 opportunity to testify today. My name is Kristen
24 Rouse. I'm an Army veteran with more than 24 years
25 in service including three tours of duty in

2 Afghanistan. I'm President and Founding Director of
3 the New York City Veterans Alliance, a member driven
4 grassroots policy advocacy and community building
5 organization that advances veterans and families as
6 civic leaders and just to note, a key—a key project
7 that we run is our veterans.nyc, which provides real
8 time information on community events that are
9 happening around the city for veterans and their
10 families. It's the only regional community calendar
11 of its kind and we are growing in—in-online visits. A
12 gain, it reaches those who are able to access
13 information online, but—and we can see through the
14 city servers that the city is making great use of our
15 calendar and—and we appreciate DVS' support of our
16 veterans and—and we continue—we look forward to
17 continuing that relationship. On behalf of our
18 members and supporters, we state our strong support
19 for this committee providing oversight of the
20 services provided to veterans and their families by
21 DVS and other city agencies, programs and funding. We
22 are, however, uncertain of whether Intro 1118 or
23 other recent bill proposals will effectively
24 accomplish the oversight and accountability that our
25 community has called for and deserves. In February

2 2015, I stood beside members of this committee
3 including Council Member Vallone and Eugene in a City
4 Hall press conference to laud the passage of Local
5 Law 23 of 2015, which we've talked about already
6 today. We're glad to hear that that data has become
7 available and is now being utilized by DVS to assess
8 the overall—the overall provision of services and the
9 accessibility of services to veterans and their
10 families. We did—you did not see prior to this
11 hearing that that was made public. Has that—has that
12 information been made public? [background comment]
13 Has not. Okay, so—so my—the—the testimony—my
14 testimony refers to not having that information at
15 this time. Later in 2015, we advocated for the
16 creation of a independent city agency overseeing
17 veteran services stating the need that our community
18 saw for this new agency to play a vital coordinating
19 role in how the city delivers and accounts for
20 services to veterans and their families at taxpayer
21 expense. The establishment and growth of DVS has
22 been a tremendous benefit to our veterans community,
23 but an agency limited in size must be empowered in
24 its scope to synchronize and manage the city's
25 efforts to reach, serve and be accountable to

2 veterans and their families. The intent behind bills
3 for today and last just to bring accountability for
4 DVS and vet—and the veterans and family members that
5 are serving is good, but even better would be for
6 this committee to examine way it can further empower
7 DVS to accomplish its mission. To this end, we pose
8 the following questions to this committee: (1) Will
9 you make public the reports from Local Law 23 of 2015
10 that we have discussed today? Will this reporting be
11 made visible in the Mayor's Management Report and/or
12 other essential city records—citywide reporting? (2)
13 Will new legislation ensure that the city's
14 contracting and management of Vet Connect NYC will
15 effectively track services, referrals and referral
16 methods, follow-up metrics and other key access and
17 accountability data for veterans and family members
18 seeking resources from DVS and other government and
19 community-based organizations. (3) Will Legislation
20 include provision for a dedicated agency Chief
21 Contracting officer otherwise known as an echo to
22 manage the city's contracts for veteran services to
23 include not only Vet Connect NYC, but also the \$2.3
24 million in discretionary funds granted by the city to
25 community-based organizations for the purpose of

2 serving veterans and their families. (4) Will new
3 legislation ensure that DVS would not need to
4 duplicate reporting already included in the MMR,
5 budget documents and other existing public
6 information open data on its activities, staff and
7 salaries, and (5) also related or prior legislation.
8 Is this committee still overseeing the Veterans
9 Advisory Board? As the city's only charter body of
10 veterans advising city government, the VAB currently
11 has 11 members serving on terms that expired last
12 year and early this year. The VAB did not meet its
13 mandated five meetings last year, and it has held
14 three public meetings without quorum or current
15 appointments. There's much work ahead VDS as it
16 continues building programs and growing in its
17 performance and accountability to the veterans and
18 family members it serves. There's also much, much
19 work ahead for the Veterans Committee. On behalf of
20 the New York City Veterans Alliance, I thank you for
21 the opportunity to testify today. Pending your
22 questions, this concludes my testimony.

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Kristen.
24 Thank you and those are very important questions.

25 KRISTEN ROUSE: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: The VAB, we're
3 almost about to complete. We had to submit to the
4 Mayor's Office and to the Speaker's Office and they
5 had to vet each—each board member. So, it's—we're
6 almost basically done on that. So, yeah.

7 KRISTEN ROUSE: It's been a while.

8 DEIRDRE CARROLL: It's been—yes, it's
9 been a while, and—and it expired most recently. It's
10 been a—two code events committee, and—and they have
11 to—we have to go through the process, and I've been
12 meeting with people on the boards, and it's basically
13 almost done. So, thank you very much, and other
14 questions, very important questions we'll have the
15 committee get back to you on these questions. So,
16 thank you very much.

17 ASHTON STEWART: Thank you for holding
18 this Veterans Committee hearing. My name is Ashton
19 Stewart, and I am the Coordinator of the SAGEVets
20 program at SAGE. SAGE is the country's first and
21 largest organization dedicated to improving the lives
22 of the LGBT older adults. Founded in New York City in
23 1978, SAGE has provided comprehensive social services
24 and programs to LGBT older people for nearly four
25 decades. SAGEVets is one of our program offerings,

2 and is the only program in all of New York City
3 designed for older-older LGBT adults and, in fact,
4 SAGE vets is a statewide program engaging older LGBT
5 veteran across new York State. New York State and
6 New York City are among the top ten states and cities
7 with the highest concentrations of Gay and Lesbian
8 veterans both in number and per capita, and the needs
9 are deep among LGBT older veterans. According to a
10 recent statewide survey by the LGBT Health and Human
11 Services Network, 56% of LGBT veterans were over the
12 age of 50. Many LGBT older veterans in New York
13 State are struggling and yet are not accessing the
14 services they need. Also, according to the New York
15 State LGBT Health and Human Services Network, 43% of
16 Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual vets live or are under 200%
17 of the Federal Poverty Line and that number is even
18 higher for transgender veterans with 60% earning less
19 than \$31,000 per year. 30% of lesbian, gay and
20 bisexual veterans were homeless and 46% of
21 transgender veterans were homeless. 34% of lesbian,
22 gay and bisexual veterans were food insecure with
23 over 61% of transgender veterans struggling with food
24 insecurity. Thirty-percent lesbian, gay and bisexual
25 veterans and 48% of transgender vets fear

1 discrimination from their providers. Staggeringly,
2 one-third of out state's LGTP-LGBT veterans who
3 answered the survey, identifies as transgender. This
4 mirrors national data, and across the country 163,000
5 veterans identify as transgender, and of that 163,000
6 more than 51,000 are 65 and older. In other words,
7 31.8% of transgender veterans are over the age of 65.
8 In fact, the Veterans Health Administration indicates
9 the prevalence of diagnosed gender dysphoria among
10 form U.S. Service members. It's five times that of
11 prevalence estimates in the general population.
12 Psychiatry.org defines gender dysphoria as someone
13 who is uncomfortable with their body or with the
14 expected roles of their assigned gender. According
15 to a 2016 article in the Genenologist, due to the
16 rapidly increasing aging population and the high
17 proportion of veterans among older Americans, the
18 number of transgender older adult with a history of
19 military service will continue to increase
20 substantially, and with respect to employment, our
21 state's transgender and LGBT veterans are having a
22 hard time finding and keeping a job. Forty-six
23 percent or transgender veterans report being unfairly
24 fired, and that's nearly half. Similarly, 28% of
25

2 lesbian, gay and bisexual veterans report the same.
3 47.5% of transgender veterans report being unfairly
4 not hired. Among lesbian, gay and bisexual veterans,
5 that number is over one-third at 34.8%. LGBT older
6 people struggle more with financial insecurity in
7 their later years. Invisible, Sage's market study on
8 the attitudes of LGBT people ages 45 to 75 found that
9 more LGBT older people are worried that they haven't
10 saved enough money to retire. In fact, 42% of LGBT
11 older people are very or extremely concerned that
12 they will outlive the money they have saved for
13 retirement as compared to 25% of non-LGBT older
14 people. 44% of LGBT older people are very or
15 extremely concerned that they will not have to—or
16 that they will have to work well beyond retirement age
17 just to have enough money to live as compare to
18 26% of non-LGBT older people, and transgender older
19 people experience even more extreme levels of
20 financial insecurity especially when we consider the
21 high levels of unemployment and under-employment
22 throughout their adult lives. Consider that older
23 LGBT veterans served in the military at a time when
24 discrimination against LGBT veterans and people was
25 rampant and a matter of official government policy.

2 Add that to the current administration that is trying
3 to ban transgender people from serving in the
4 military, and the financial insecurity and
5 unemployment and under-employment, it's no wonder why
6 our LGBT veterans are struggling and not accessing
7 their federal VA and related benefits. Instead,
8 many rely on state public assistance programs
9 shifting what should be a federal expense to New York
10 State. SAGE created SAGEVets with support from the
11 New York State Assembly to respond to this growing
12 need among LGBT vets and to improve access to care
13 among LGBT or veterans across the state. Veterans
14 are former federal employees who have earned the
15 right to access veteran programs and services that
16 are designed to improve the overall health and
17 wellbeing. SAGEVets saves both the state and the
18 city significant amounts of money by ensuring
19 veterans' access to federal benefits entitled to
20 them. Council Members, thank you for your continued
21 support of SAGE. We at SAGE look forward to
22 partnering with the New York City Council to ensure
23 that our LGBT veterans can receive the support that
24 they so richly deserve after proudly serving our
25 country with pride. Thank you so much.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. Thank
3 you very much. You did say here that the LGBT
4 veterans struggling and they're not accessing their
5 federal VA benefits. How many—how many of those do
6 you feel that you serve each year?

7 ASHTON STEWART: That's a great question.
8 We just started doing a report for the New York State
9 Assembly. I took over the program in May and for the
10 last two quarters we're about at 400 veterans that
11 we've had dialogue with. We made presentation to.
12 We've presented the program to them. We go all over
13 the state in Rochester and State Fair in Syracuse
14 over the summer, and Long Island. We go out there
15 often. We're starting to develop our relationships
16 with other VSOs to reach out to the over 100,000 LGBT
17 veterans that are in the state. I'm helping a
18 veteran right now with a discharge up for a case.
19 I'm working with another one who I'm trying to
20 encourage him to do the same. He's never been
21 enrolled in the VA because of his experience in the
22 military. The self-identification that was discussed
23 earlier is a bigger problem among the LGBT veteran
24 community because a lot of them were serving during
25 Vietnam. So, you have the combat issues, PTSD more

2 than likely. I'm working with a client getting him
3 assessed for that, and then you also have the
4 discrimination and the homophobia that was part of
5 their experience. This is prior Don't Ask/Don't
6 Tell. So the numbers are great. I-I'm working
7 closely doing client care. So 400 was the
8 approximate number for the last two quarter and
9 there's a lot more work to be done.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Is that statewide
11 or--?

12 ASHTON STEWART: That's--that's statewide
13 given there was about 66 that we had from our
14 Rochester affiliate, SAGE Up--and SAGE Upstate has a
15 few as well, and also SAGE has centers in Brooklyn,
16 Harlem, Staten Island and--

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Yeah,
18 if you could give me the numbers for New York City.

19 ASHTON STEWART: New York City--

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, if you could.

21 ASHTON STEWART: --off the top of my head
22 we have 400 in the database for--for--and that's minus
23 the 66. So--so about 350 just in New York City.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So—so they're all
3 350. All these individuals have the information of,
4 you know, the Veterans Services.

5 ASHTON STEWART: Yes, and we're also
6 trying to do a database as well that's a little bit
7 broader in scope because we're a statewide program,
8 but we're also trying to categorize city services
9 opposed to statewide and also some of the more
10 specific veteran programs for LGBT veterans. I'm
11 going to have a separate—separate category--

12 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

13 ASHTON STEWART: --for that, and that's
14 all part of our—our—our deliverables for the funding.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Alright, thank you
16 all for taking the time to testify to day.

17 ASHTON STEWART: Thank you so much.

18 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I look forward to
19 working with all of you, and I hope the next time
20 Kristen comes in, she'll sit right in front of me.
21 [laughter] Thank you all very much. Thank you.
22 [laughter] I'd like to call up—I think there are two.

23 LEGAL COUNSEL: Two.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, the last two
3 people who are testifying Adam. I'm not sure. I
4 can't read your last name.

5 ADAM: Adam Percy. (sic)

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Percy, and to what?
7 [background comments, pause]

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Will everyone who are
9 here making sure you sign in appropriately.

10 VANOM PANASUK: [off mic] Hello. Hello
11 everyone. I want to begin by thanking Commissioner
12 Sutton.

13 FEMALE SPEAKER: Push the button in.

14 VANOM PANASUK: [on mic] Hello. Hello
15 everyone. I want to begin by thanking Commissioner
16 Sutton for her leadership with DVS. Chairman Deutsch
17 and distinguished members of the committee, on behalf
18 of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, and ore
19 more than 425,000 members, I would like to thank you
20 for the opportunity to testify here today on the
21 pending legislation. My name is Vanom Panasuk (sp?)
22 I'm a New Yorker, a Ukraine Expatriot, a naturalized
23 citizen, an Iraq War Veteran serving two tours with
24 the Third Infantry Division, and Mezzo level social
25 worker working as a Senior Veteran Transition

2 Manager, VTM a VA Benefits Lead with IAVA's Rapid
3 Response Referral Program or RIP for short. RIP is
4 IAVA's site that I kind of touch, referral service
5 for veterans and their families with a complete and
6 comprehensive case management component. We assess
7 veterans of all eras with any discharge status
8 worldwide and confronting significant challenges like
9 unemployment, financial and or legal struggles,
10 homelessness and mental health related issues. To
11 date, RIP has served almost 9,000 veterans and family
12 members nationwide and over a thousand in New York
13 City alone providing critical support and resources
14 to ensure that the city's veterans' needs are
15 effectively met. After 14 year has become the
16 preferred empowerment organization proposed 9/11
17 veterans. While our members are spread throughout
18 the nation, we are proud to say that our national
19 headquarters is located in New York City. Since its
20 beginning, IAVA has fought for and has been
21 successful in advocating for policies that are able
22 to meet the needs or our newer generation of
23 veterans, which includes our advocacy doors of
24 creation of proper funding and oversight of the
25 Department of Veterans Services, DVS. DVS has

2 enormous—enormous potential in its establishment
3 nearly two years ago was a historic moment for
4 veterans of the city. DVS can significantly access
5 and improve service delivery to many of the most
6 critical veteran specific programs and resources
7 already available here. Today we voice our concern
8 to the veteran—the veteran’s community that the
9 additional reporting requirement for the department
10 in the—their current form did not do enough to
11 measure effectiveness and to ensure proper oversight
12 of DVS and its programs to include Vet Connect NYC.
13 IAVA supports the intent behind the bill. However,
14 it appears that it is somewhat redundant as some of
15 the data is already widely available, and does not
16 require the reporting of necessary metrics to
17 accurately evaluate the department’s performance in
18 many of its various initiatives. IAVA is a data
19 driven organization and as such our view is that when
20 appropriate metrics are applied for measuring the
21 program performance and veteran outcomes, services
22 delivered can continue to improve and become more
23 accessible and effective for the target population.
24 This all—this approach also empowers us to identify
25 positive and negative trends and to better document

2 accomplishments to be studied and replicated
3 elsewhere. This bill does not require the reporting
4 of organizational and programmatic metrics necessary
5 to accurately assess DV's performance or its many-or
6 its impact on the-on the city's veterans. IAVA has
7 applied metrics as a service standard to various
8 components of our-of our RIP Team. RIP is staffed by
9 a dedicated team of master level veteran transition
10 managers. For example, our clients receive a survey
11 every time they make a referral. The client is able
12 to provide feedback and rank the quality time limits
13 effectiveness and customer service of every
14 organization referred to. We also provide the same
15 opportunity to the clients of great (sic) RIP as well
16 as the VTM there are working with once the case is
17 closed providing us with a gauge of our performance.
18 Using qualitative data in tandem with quantitative
19 metrics has helped us better understand about the
20 needs of the population we serve and to continue to
21 make targeted improvements to services we provide.
22 As a senior veteran-a Senior VTM, I've also has the
23 pleasure to work with many of the Vet Connect-Vet
24 Connect NYC, and we have found them to be very
25 responsive and east to work with, but we have had

2 challenges in seamlessly receiving referrals. One of
3 the challenges is the burdensome increase in the
4 amount of digital paperwork needed to sync the work
5 of our case management team with Vet Connect NYC.
6 Another clear deficit we see—we can see is the lack
7 of comprehensive case management component. We also
8 view the requirement to use the Vet Connect software
9 to participate in the network as a barrier limiting
10 the number of types—the number and types of programs
11 available through Vet Connect NYC. As a vet—as Vet
12 Connect NYC continues to find its footing as a
13 platform, we encourage this committee to provide them
14 with the oversight and tools needed to be successful.
15 Members of the committee, thank you again for the
16 opportunity to share ideas and views on these issues
17 today, and we look forward to answering any questions
18 you may have. [pause]

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, thank
20 you very much. Do you work with DVS on a daily basis
21 or a weekly basis?

22 VANOM PANASUK: We receive their
23 referrals whenever they want to send veterans our
24 way. Sometimes it's daily, sometimes it's weekly.
25 So, yes.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And if you have a-
3 if you have a problem navigating through Vet Connect,
4 I mean you know you could feel free always to contact
5 DVS, and they could even help you with that—with the-
6 the paperwork.

7 VANOM PANASUK: Oh, absolutely.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, yes. So,
9 that's what they're there for, and also this bill,
10 there's just a—a start of the reporting. You need to
11 start from somewhere. We cannot go down and just
12 like ask for every single report, you know, right
13 away. So, what we're doing is a—is a starting point
14 and as we receive more information from advocates and
15 see what the issues, what—what more issues we till
16 need to address when it comes to reporting. So, this
17 is a start. So, I want to thank you for taking the
18 time. I know it's not easy to take some time off and
19 to—to sit here for a few minutes of testimony, and
20 it's—it's really—it's recognized and appreciated. So
21 thank you. Towaki, it's great to see you again as
22 always.

23 TOWAKI: Okay.

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: We'll see if it's
25 great to see you today [laughter] as it usually is.

2 TOWAKI: So, to begin my testimony, let
3 me play an audio recording that I legally and
4 secretly recorded where as I last week in terms of
5 deficiencies with repairs, lack of oversight.

6 **AUDIO RECORDING NOTE: Audio difficult to**
7 **hear.**

8 FEMALE SPEAKER: If they think that the
9 rats are all over here. They think I'm going to be
10 dealing with these rats. They think I'm going to be
11 dealing with these that came back, the way it applies
12 from that carriage. See what I'm saying? I'm-I'm
13 not getting to no regret. That's not my job here.

14 MALE SPEAKER: Is your--

15 FEMALE SPEAKER: [interposing] That's not
16 my job. I don't have nothing to do with that,
17 please.

18 MALE SPEAKER: But you started saying
19 that first. The peak because I've been--

20 MALE SPEAKER: But we saw-

21 FEMALE SPEAKER: [interposing] Because-
22 because I really want to know what's going on with
23 Urban Pathways and this building. We need those
24 other programs. Something has be going on.

2 MALE SPEAKER: But they deal with the big
3 items first and then we--

4 FEMALE SPEAKER: The legal professionals
5 don't and I think that you're facing more bills, and
6 by that tail we're hitting it eventually. It was that
7 statement and the basic internal memo when he told me
8 that they already had money to start their own
9 repairs that day. So, if they have the money, why
10 can't they have agenda over here?

11 MALE SPEAKER: Well, they have the money
12 for it.

13 FEMALE SPEAKER: I don't know. He's just
14 satisfied. But he's like the magical power. But he
15 saw me—he saw me and, and I was here by myself that
16 day.

17 MALE SPEAKER: But he saw you with your
18 power or what. (sic) No.

19 FEMALE SPEAKER: But that's true. At
20 least that is—that is like moaning and groaning this
21 day.

22 MALE SPEAKER: And they were the biggest
23 ones.

24 FEMALE SPEAKER: They were four of them—
25 there were four of them, and I told to—we said wait

2 there on that side that vehicle, but he was all
3 behind. (sic)

4 FEMALE SPEAKER: And I don't think so.

5 TOWAKI: That's enough of that. So,
6 there's a lot talk that goes on his room, but after--

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: But can you just
8 explain--?

9 TOWAKI: Sure, I'll give the context.
10 The person who you heard in that audio recording was
11 me, and someone who works in the building.

12

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Which building.

14 TOWAKI: At 802 Fairmont Place in the
15 Bronx. You and I have had conversations previously
16 bout--

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I-I want people to
18 hear. So, is that a--?

19 TOWAKI: Yes, it's a HRA building, HRA's
20 contract with Urban Pathways that confirms they can
21 fire Urban Pathways for evidence at any point in
22 time. I repeatedly put HRA--

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Is
24 that--is that a NYCHA building?

25 TOWAKI: HRA.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: HRA. Okay.

3 TOWAKI: I got assaulted in that
4 building. I got 15 punches to my head on July 2,
5 2016. I've had a concussion from that assault. That
6 concussion cost me a job that would have paid me \$450
7 a day and HRA is also doing business with a company
8 that stole my pay six years ago. It's a company
9 called Entity Data an IT company. The Chief
10 Operating committee perjury in a sworn affidavit.
11 So, like I said, there's a lot of talk that goes on
12 this room, but there's hardly any action thereafter.
13 So, when I leave this room, I'm going to be walking
14 over to Federal Court to file papers for an emergency
15 injunction to essentially force HRA to fire Urban
16 Pathways to cancel its contract with Urban Pathways
17 to cancel its contract with Entity Data so that
18 people like you don't have to keep financing it since
19 all contracts with government agencies are funded by
20 taxpayers. Also, there's going to be a meeting
21 scheduled this Thursday between Urban Pathways and
22 people who live in my building at HRA's office at 32
23 Beaver Street. I found that walk-up today. However,
24 in the papers I'm going to file with Federal Court
25 that's going to put an end to that because I was in

2 that meeting. There was also a public hearing in
3 September about legal assistance and that kind of
4 stuff. When I tried going to HRA's office to take a
5 look and try to cut the draft-draft contracts prior
6 to that meeting, they didn't let me inside. So,
7 you're talking—you're having this meeting today about
8 how veterans can get access to services provided by
9 city agencies. So, if I can't walk through the door
10 of HRA at 150 Greenwich to see what's in those
11 contracts to object to it prior to that meeting, how
12 is that going to affect the purpose that you're
13 having this meeting for today? Also, there's going
14 to be a court hearing in three days at the Bronx
15 Criminal Court. That's in relation to me. Twelve
16 days after I testified against NYPD on December 14th
17 of last year in City Hall, members of the NYPD
18 legally stopped, harassed, assaulted and injured me.
19 When I engaged in self defense lawfully, they
20 arrested for that. I got an IV letter right over
21 here saying we substantiated your claims against the
22 officers. When I talked to Ms. Darcel Clark, the
23 Bronx DA about this letter, she told me that she
24 can't talk to me about it, and in this particular
25 case, I don't have any evidence despite the fact this

2 dates back to December of last year. The officers
3 were wearing body cameras. The court appointed
4 counsels that were assigned to me didn't do their
5 jobs so I had to fire them. So, the point is you're
6 talking--again, you're talking about services for
7 veterans. So, if I was lawfully engaged in self-
8 defense against these people that grabbed my arm
9 while I was walking on the sidewalk for no reason,
10 and I have to walk into court despite having this--I
11 hope you notice my hand--then where does fit on the
12 services being provided to veterans? That's in my
13 testimony.

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: That you. When was
15 that recording made?

16 TOWAKI: October 25th.

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Of?

18 TOWAKI: This year.

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: This year.

20 TOWAKI: I moved for an appeal (sic) in
21 case--

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] And
23 what exactly was on that recording we saw--I mean, can
24 you just explain?

25 TOWAKI: Yeah, so basically--

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: What that is.

3 TOWAKI: --I was looking to supplement
4 existing proof I already had against Urban Pathways.
5 So, they have been pocketing the cash taxpayers have
6 been providing to them through HRA. They haven't
7 been making repairs. They've had the building
8 invalidly registered with HPD. I had conversations
9 with Mr. Banks, Steven Banks face-to-face with Ms.
10 Stringer the head of HPD, face-to face. They told me
11 they would look into it to improve.

12 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, this lady was
13 complaining about rats.

14 TOWAKI: This was a guy who was--this was
15 a guy who works for Urban Pathways put on--apprised me
16 of the fact that--

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Whose apartment was
18 that?

19 TOWAKI: He was--we were talking in the
20 hallway.

21 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Oh, it wasn't a--it
22 wasn't inside someone's apartment.

23 TOWAKI: No, he's on--there are
24 deficiencies in specific apartments as well. I
25

2 recorded black mold in one person's apartment as
3 disabled veteran.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah but--yeah but
5 who--who reported the mold? You did or--?

6 TOWAKI: Yes, I went in their apartment,
7 too.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, but how come
9 that person doesn't reporting it?

10 TOWAKI: They are lackadaisical so--

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] I'm
12 sorry?

13 TOWAKI: They lack--they are not
14 proactive, no proactive.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, but--yeah, but
16 it's true--

17 TOWAKI: [interposing] But they
18 also==they also reported it to Urban Pathways and
19 nothing got out. Nothing happened. So, instead of
20 reporting the violation to HPD, they reported
21 directly to the property manager. The property paid
22 a deaf or blind ear to the problem and let the
23 problems persist.

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Alright, Towaki,
25 thank you for coming down today to testify and I

2 think we are done for today, and today's hearing is
3 adjourned. [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 November 18, 2018