



**Testimony of Loree Sutton, MD (BG, USA, Ret.)
Commissioner for the New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS)**

New York City Council Committee on Veterans

Committee Room, City Hall

March 14, 2019

2:30pm

Good morning Chair Deutsch and esteemed members of the New York City Committee on Veterans. My name is Loree Sutton and, as always, I am honored to serve as the founding Commissioner of the New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS). I am joined today by Deputy Commissioner Jeff Roth and Legal Counsel Eric Henry; we are pleased to testify at today's Preliminary Budget Hearing.

As you know, DVS was created in 2016 to facilitate access to and coordination with organizations and entities throughout New York City that serve our veterans' community. The agency has grown remarkably over a few short years in both staffing and reach. Since inception the agency has gone from a staff of 4 to a current complement of 36, with multiple employee hires expected to occur in the near term to fill our 11 remaining vacant positions. Our staffing reaches across focus areas including administration and operations, outreach and employment assistance, peer-mentoring and whole health services, veteran homelessness, press and communications, legal and intergovernmental affairs, and public-private partnerships.

In the design of this new agency, our strategic operational model includes the use of information technology to drive digital innovation of traditional service delivery as a critical component to increase DVS reach to the City's veteran community. Our VetConnectNYC platform, launched in November 2018, is what we veterans like to call a "force multiplier." VetConnectNYC serves to connect veterans, active military, and their families to a growing network of vetted veteran-centric service providers through the personalized hands-on efforts of a coordination team of social service professionals. Organizations in the network span the range of life needs, in areas including legal services, housing, mental health assistance, education, and employment.

We will continue to evaluate our capacity to grow VetConnectNYC and our technology infrastructure systems to meet the needs and strengths of our veteran community.

Our proposed Fiscal Year 2020 budget of \$5.2 million is essentially flat as compared with the modified Fiscal Year 2019 budget, barring the addition of one new position who will support our legislative advocacy work and serve as an ombudsman to facilitate effective communication and timely action with respect to City Council discretionary funds allocated to increasing community veteran services. While it may appear that our OTPS budget has been reduced, this also remains static, and we are working with OMB to shift appropriate funding for the Pay for Success initiative to FY20. Pay for Success is a 3-year employment outcomes project which I'll describe in greater detail later during this testimony.

At the heart of our agency's mission is direct outreach to our nearly one-half million veteran and veteran family population. Connecting with these cherished citizens is a challenge as they are a

divergent group spanning in age from their early twenties to centenarians, like Manhattan-born but Brooklyn-raised Sidney Walton, whose 100th birthday we recently celebrated at our office. Our varied population has experienced radically different military and wartime experiences, returned home with unique medical and mental health conditions, and, most poignantly, communicate and socialize in distinct and predictably disparate ways. Our population, not all of whom self-identify as veterans, is also spread out over the 302 square miles of New York City's five boroughs, presenting additional challenges to providing critical in-person outreach.

We are tackling these challenges by developing a multi-pronged communications and outreach approach to convey relevant and meaningful information about programs and services specifically targeted to different segments of our veteran community. We are also growing our social media footprint, including our new SITREP Podcast series; actions in progress include increasing visibility within the outer-borough community radio/newspaper/broadcast platforms.

Examples below illustrate DVS actions to better reach our diverse veteran community:

Post 9/11 veterans

- DVS is launching a community-based approach to supporting veterans during their transition from military service. The Veterans Success Network (VSN) initiative, comprised of three pillars, is designed to create pathways to employment & education, business & entrepreneurship, mentoring, and volunteer resources and opportunities.

Veterans of All Eras

- DVS recently merged two outreach teams to create our Engagement and Community Services (ECS) team, increasing our capacity to conduct comprehensive in-person outreach. This merger temporarily limited our Outreach team's capacity to process assistance requests, as is reflected in the 2019 PMMR, due to the time required for cross-training and capacity-building to manage an expanded portfolio of responsibilities and additional training. With the merger now complete and hiring underway to ensure the Outreach team is fully staffed, DVS expects to quickly regain its former capacity to process assistance requests.
- Our newly merged ECS team -- comprised of veterans, family members, and seasoned outreach specialists -- is ramping up to launch an outreach ambitious campaign to help reinvigorate the veteran service organizations in our local neighborhoods, educate veterans, family members, and their caregivers about VetConnectNYC, hold Thrive Mental Health First Aid Trainings, encourage enrollment in IDNYC Veterans program, and individually meet with veterans to connect needs with services.
- Other components of this campaign include outreach to vet centers, schools, senior centers, NYCHA community centers, community board veteran committees, and VA Medical Centers across the City.

- As always, we look forward to continued collaboration with all city council members, state and federal elected leaders to help spread our word to their constituents.

Unemployed or Under-Employed Veterans Diagnosed with PTSD

- Many veterans diagnosed with service-connected post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have long been unable to hold permanent employment or have been underemployed in earning a competitive wage. That's why we're participating in the Veterans CARE coordinated approach to rapid employment pilot project, a partnership with the VA that leverages an innovative financing model to provide direct employment services to some of our city's most vulnerable veterans. Over three years, the pilot project will serve 120 veterans registered with the Brooklyn and Manhattan VA hospitals, by matching each with an employment specialist who will work in conjunction with the individual's mental healthcare provider to place them in jobs that match their skills, personal goals, and disability needs. Each veteran will receive highly individualized support during the job-seeking process, such as resume and interview preparation, job placement, and mentorship, along with integrated mental health care.
- The *Veterans Employment Pay for Success* project is another example of how our City is taking bold steps to find creative solutions to address New York City veterans' employment needs. This is the first-ever cross-governmental Pay for Success project in the country that brings together city, state, and federal partners, and it is the second-ever Pay for Success program to be operationalized in our City.
- Many veterans diagnosed with service-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have long been unable to hold permanent employment or have been underemployed in earning a competitive wage. Through an experimental payment program known as Pay for Success, 120 veterans registered with the Brooklyn and Manhattan VA medical centers, now can be paired with a VA work force specialist who will work with the veteran's VA therapist, and place them in jobs that match their skills, personal goals, and disability needs. Each veteran will receive individualized support during the job-seeking process, such as resume and interview preparation, job placement, mentorship, and integrated medical care.
- The *Veterans Employment Pay for Success* Program is another example of how our City is taking bold steps to find creative solutions to address New York City veterans' employment needs.

Veterans with Mental Health Needs

As noted earlier in this testimony, this year we merged our community outreach and mental health lines of action. This was done to both expand our outreach capacity, but also to reflect the reality that veterans rarely approach our staff requesting to be connected to mental health services directly. Rather, their mental health needs emerge from engagement with our outreach team while assisting them on other matters or in discussions at community and veteran-related events, leading to treatment referrals, either directly or through VetConnectNYC.

VetsThriveNYC is a program aimed at increasing help-seeking behavior and social engagement, moving the front lines of healing from clinic to community. The program is comprised of two parts: (1) the Engagement and Community Services Outreach Team; and (2) the Core4 Whole Health Model™. *VetsThriveNYC* recognizes that social determinants of health – including social engagement, housing, nutrition, education, employment, transportation, financial and legal stability – are vital for wellbeing. To this end, DVS uses a collective impact framework, featuring its coordinated care network, VetConnectNYC, that ensures veterans & their families can access whole-of-life services through expanded access and connection to care, services and resources.

In light of the ongoing national veteran suicide epidemic, DVS is incorporating the Columbia Protocol, a leading evidence-based tool to identify risk and prevent suicide, for widespread dissemination and use within the NYC veteran community.

To further expand opportunities to meet veteran mental health needs, we have undertaken a series of emotional health activities designed to boost veteran health-seeking and community engagement behavior aimed at destigmatizing mental health services. These include:

- Our outreach team continuously provides Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) for Veterans Trainings and assertively seek opportunities to conduct more trainings for organizations who work with veterans and their families. From 2017-2019, the City of New York has trained nearly 500 individuals in MHFA for Veterans.
- Brooklyn Public Library, along with its partners the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, and the NYC Department of Veterans' Services (DVS), recently announced a new collaboration with Theater of War Productions to offer more than 75 free performances throughout the five boroughs during 2019. This collaboration will continue Theater of War Productions' partnership with City agencies and community-based organizations developed during Bryan Doerries' two-year tenure as Public Artist in Residence for the NYC Department of Veterans' Services through the Department of Cultural Affairs' Public Artist in Residence program (PAIR).

Homeless Veterans

Working in collaboration with City agencies, the federal government, and community partners, DVS remains dedicated to effectively ending veteran homelessness in New York City. DVS' homeless program, our most developed line of action, has three components:

- *Peer to Peer Assistance* - Using our peer to peer model, DVS staff work directly with veterans in shelter to help them navigate the ever-challenging housing search process in the City. In just over 3 years, this team of 4-5 Veteran Peer Coordinators have moved 670 veterans into permanent, affordable housing. I am delighted to share with you today that we have recently added another Veteran Peer Coordinator to the team. This will increase the number of veterans we can move annually into permanent housing by an estimated 20%.

- *Housing Resource Generation* - DVS' housing team works with owners and property managers to rent apartments to veterans; develops new housing resources where there are gaps; and improves access to existing resources. Examples include:
 - o Working with NYCHA to be the first city in the country to pilot a program to house disconnected veterans and their families, not eligible for VA housing assistance. In 2018 over 100 veterans received a voucher through this new program and are currently being connected to a community-based provider for clinical aftercare.
 - o Moving more veterans into the City's affordable housing stock. Since the team was formed during CY 2015, there has been a 64% increase in veterans approved for Mitchell-Lama housing and a 19% increase in veterans moving into NYCHA housing.
- *Housing Stability Services* – DVS' Aftercare Coordinator and constituent team work day in and day out to prevent evictions and provide overall housing stability to formerly homeless and at-risk veterans. Last year DVS provided housing stability services to 388 veterans in need.

To highlight the effectiveness of this program I'd like to share an example of a veteran we housed last month. Ms. K is an Army veteran struggling with severe PTSD, GAD (Generalized anxiety disorder), panic disorder & depression -- but is not eligible for VA healthcare or housing assistance. When our team started working with her and her husband on December 14th they had been homeless for 842 days. On February 4th, just seven weeks later, Ms. K and her husband moved into their own home with one of the special new vouchers to ensure 1) their rent is subsidized in perpetuity and 2) she gets the mental health treatment she deserves.

Women Veterans

- This past year, through public - private partnerships, we were able to dedicate the first monument to the over 13,000 women service members and veterans in the New York City area – “Women Serve”—at Calverton National Cemetery to honor the service and sacrifice of women in the military.

LGBTQ Veterans

- We are painfully aware that many of our LGBTQ veterans were discharged with less than honorable status and as a result may not qualify for the array of federal and state benefits afforded to other veterans. I am pleased to say that here in NYC, no veteran who applies for City benefits is ever turned away from consideration due to discharge, sexual orientation, length of service, or any other identifier.
- For those veterans who are seeking discharge upgrades, my staff refers them to veteran legal service organizations such as Urban Justice Center and the City Bar Veterans Assistance Project which specialize in this very important, complicated and lengthy work. Additionally, SAGEVets, which provides legal and social services and operates

senior centers for LGBTQ elders, is currently being vetted as a provider for the VetConnectNYC.network.

Veteran Families, Caregivers & Survivors

- Recognizing that nobody serves alone, and that families serve, too, DVS has teamed up with national organizations like the Elizabeth Dole Foundation's Hidden Heroes Initiative, the American Red Cross Military Veterans and Caregiver Network and the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors to shine the light on the tireless efforts of families, caregivers, and survivors.
- Through presentations, scheduled and walk-in appointments, our outreach team connects families, caregivers, and survivors to these organizations and others through warm handoffs and peer support encouraging them to participate in caregiver only chat sessions and take advantage of a 24-hour hot line for survivors.
- Appointed to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs Advisory Board on Families, Caregivers, and Survivors, I look forward to sharing best practices on ways we could be most productive in assisting these dedicated individuals.

We would also like to highlight the important partnership between DVS and the City's Veterans Advisory Board (VAB). Appointed by the Mayor and Speaker, the VAB membership is carefully chosen to sustain a diverse range of service backgrounds, community engagement interests, borough representation and professional expertise to help facilitate dialogue with the New York City veterans' community. We look forward to working with returning and newly-installed members of the VAB to facilitate greater communication between the City of New York and its veteran population. Please check out the VAB annual report on the DVS website.

These are just a few of the ways DVS has leveraged the work of governmental, non-profit, and private stakeholders to deliver coordinated response and services to our City's underserved veteran populations, and we look forward to future opportunities to do so.

Closing

In closing, DVS firmly believes that all veterans, men and women, and their families are our City's, and our nation's, leading natural renewable resource. What's to be renewed? Their commitment to and capacity for continued service on behalf of others.

We look forward to discussing with you how we can best support our veterans in finding resources and services that will provide them with a renewed and continued sense of purpose, mission, stability, and community.

I thank you for providing me the privilege of representing the interests of New York City's veterans and family members with you today. I'll be happy to address any questions.



TDF Veterans Theatergoing Program

- ▶ TDF is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to bringing the power of the performing arts to everyone. This includes our city's vets, too many of whom have been missing in our audiences. In 2017, we created with the City Council's support the TDF Veterans Theatergoing Program.
- ▶ The program provides tickets at no cost to New York City's former servicemen and women of all ages who have served in any branch of the armed forces and reside in one of the five boroughs.
- ▶ Included with every pair of tickets is an invitation to enroll in a one year complimentary TDF membership that gives each vet the opportunity to purchase tickets for additional shows at a greatly reduced cost.
- ▶ We partnered with 25 different veteran groups this year, 16 of which were new, to distribute tickets to vets in substance abuse programs, shelters, transitional housing, educational programs, city organizations, community social and support groups.
- ▶ We've offered a total of 1,200 complimentary tickets to 12 different Broadway shows this season for veterans and their companions. In the Disney show pre curtain announcements, they acknowledge the veterans, the TDF program and City Council funding all of which brings spontaneous applause and cheers from the whole audience. We've been able to schedule brief talkbacks with cast members after most of the performances which the vets have enjoyed.
- ▶ To enhance the experience, several of our partners have put together pre-performance events. The most memorable for me was Wounded Warrior Project hosting a diner at Dallas BBQ before vets with their children attended *Frozen* on January 29 and having Sandy Kenyan Channel 7 Eyewitness News there to do a story on the program.
- ▶ Be it physical or invisible wounds, the simple principle of our program is that we believe going to the theatre is healing. It gives veterans a chance to come together as a community, engage with each other, feel appreciated and enjoy a live theatre experience.
- ▶ We are grateful to the New York City Council with special thanks to Councilman Chaim Deutsch, Chair of the Committee on Veterans, for funding this program for a second year and hope you will continue your support for the healing power of the performing arts. I would now like to introduce Robert Wadiak, a veteran from Samaritan Village.



Free Financial Coaching for Veterans

Call us to learn more about the program.

Tele-coaching and virtual coaching services available.

Contact

Rhonda Sherwin, AFC®
Financial Coach

Contractor, Armed Forces Services Corporation
250 Schermerhorn St.
Brooklyn, NY 11201
718-613-3736
929-280-4550
rsherwin@afsc.com



NYS Dept of Labor has partnered with *the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau* to provide free financial coaching services to veterans. Financial coaches provide support, encouragement, accountability, and tools to help make informed decisions.

Who is eligible for this service?

- Veterans
- Inactive National Guardsmen and Reservists
- Immediate family members

A financial coach is a **trained professional** who will guide you in a process that is **non-judgmental and based on your goals**. Financial coaches provide **support, encouragement, accountability, and tools** to help you make informed decisions.

- **One-on-one:** Your coach will work with you to help you identify your financial goals, create a plan, and track your progress
- **Personalized:** The coaching relationship starts with you. Your financial coach will meet you wherever you are on your financial journey.
- **No cost to you:** The financial coaching services are offered at no cost to you and with no strings attached.

We do not sell products or give specific investment advice.

Financial coaching is provided through an initiative of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), a federal agency. This program is managed through a contract with the Armed Forces Services Corporation (AFSC).

Financial Coaching Program Fact Sheet



Short Program Description (for Veteran clients)

The financial coaching program is specifically for Veterans. A financial coach is a trained professional who will guide you in a process that is non-judgmental and based on your goals and values. Financial coaches provide support, encouragement, accountability, and tools to help you make informed decisions and define your financial dreams or aspirations. You can meet with a financial coach as many times as you need to and there are no additional qualifications for the program.

Frequently Asked Question (FAQs)

Q: Do I have to pay for this financial coaching?

No. The financial coaching program is free for all clients.

Q: Who is eligible for financial coaching?

This program serves all Veterans, regardless of the conditions of your separation. It cannot serve active duty service members. We can serve guardsmen and reservists who are not currently active, and family of service members who died on active duty.

Q: Will my coach be a Veteran?

Our coach specializes in working with Veterans of all ages, and can connect you with resources that are helpful for any transition, whether leaving the military, going back to school, or dealing with changes to your work or family. Many of the coaches in the national program are Veterans or military spouses themselves.

Q: How many times can I meet with a coach?

You may meet with a coach as many times as you like.

Q: What can a coach help me with?

Our coaches are trained professionals with information on many topics. Financial coaches provide support, encouragement, accountability, and tools to help you make informed decisions. Coaches can help you with questions on credit, debt, managing a household budget, and much more. Coaches cannot give you investment or legal advice and they cannot call any financial entities on your behalf.

Q: Will my coach share my financial information with anyone?

No. This service is entirely confidential. None of your personal or financial information is shared.

Q: How do I know if I'm ready or right for coaching?

If you have goals that you're ready to work towards, if you have specific questions about how your finances impact your current life and situation, or if you're simply curious about better ways to achieve financial stability, you are probably ready for coaching.

Q: Can coaches connect me with other resources?

Yes. Our coaches are connected to many other resources in the community and can help you get identify which of these resources would best fit with your goals.

Q: How are the coaches trained?

All coaches are required to have or be working towards their Accredited Financial Counselor Certification (AFC) and their Financial Fitness Coach Certification (FFC). They get ongoing training and education to make sure that they are up to date on any financial issues you may have.

Q: Who does the coach work for?

Coaches are employed by the Armed Forces Services Corporation, which manages the contract for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) Financial Coaching Initiative. This program is funded by the CFPB Civil Penalties Fund.

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Testimony of the New York University Tandon School of Engineering
before
The New York City Council Committee on Veterans

March 14, 2019

Chairman Deutsch and fellow Council Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the New York University Tandon School of Engineering's Veterans Future Lab (VFL). We are pleased to share how VFL is enabling New York City veterans to thrive in their post-military service careers. NYU recognizes the challenges veterans face when reintegrating into the economy, and we are committed to providing effective, tangible solutions.

Operated by NYU Tandon, VFL helps early-stage companies created by veterans, or their spouses, transform into successful businesses by providing the guidance, expertise, and resources that startups need to succeed. The incubator is a public-private-academic partnership where entrepreneurs are nurtured by university partners with support from government and the private sector. By leveraging the wealth of talent and diverse skill sets found in the New York City Veterans Community, we are able to accelerate the growth of new ventures and bring economic activity to the area. Out of the twenty active members of our inaugural incubator class, 19 jobs have been created, approximately \$450,000 in revenues have been earned, and \$2.3 million has been raised.

This past February, VFL announced that we will begin providing veterans accepted into our Apex program—a selective, year-long incubator program—with free housing at the Fort Hamilton Army Base in Brooklyn. Moving to a new city presents many veteran entrepreneurs with a significant financial burden. Coupled with the support services VFL already provides, the new housing benefits will make NYU's world-class resources more accessible to veterans across the country.

VFL is in the process of launching a host of other new initiatives, one of which is the Female Veteran Venture Creation (FVVC) Program. Once established, FVVC will assist aspiring female military veteran entrepreneurs with all aspects of the creation of their new business. This includes, but is not limited to, developing a business idea, legal incorporation, obtaining product market fit, advertising, networking, accounting, and instruction on becoming a City-certified Woman-owned Business Enterprise (WBE).

Of the City's 8.6 million people, there are approximately 14,500 female veterans and 193,000 male veterans. After completing military service, roughly half of all veterans settle in a city apart from where they originated. With this in mind, through FVVC, VFL seeks to increase the proportion of female veterans who pursue entrepreneurship, and by extension, the number of female veterans who settle in New York City. In addition, the self-employment rate for female Veterans is 5%, compared to 12% among their male counterparts—FVVC will seek to bridge this gap. These goals are closely aligned with the City's efforts to address the disparities related to raising capital experienced by women entrepreneurs, especially in the tech industry.

Similar to most startups, the early financing stages of FVVC ventures are considered high-risk. While FVVC programming will help minimize risk by providing cradle to maturity in-person support, donors

whose capital is risk-tolerant is necessary for VFL to take action and begin execution. For this reason, we are seeking the support of the City Council to help us embark on this initiative. Funds from the City Council will help subsidize the cost for each individual entrepreneur, including rent expenses, business incorporation, website, branding, software, textbooks and materials, certification fees, and more. Once execution begins, VFL will tap into its existing network of donors to acquire the remaining funds necessary.

NYU Tandon is greatly optimistic about the future of FVVC and other bold Veterans Future Lab initiatives. With the partnership of the City Council, we look forward to continue improving the lives of veterans across New York City and around the country.

Thank you for the opportunity to share information about our exciting programs at NYU Tandon School of Engineering's Veterans Future Lab. We welcome any additional questions the Committee may have. (Please contact Konstantine Tettonis, NYU Government Affairs, kt1249@nyu.edu)



**Testimony of Kelly Sabatino, MSc
Public Policy Manager
Community Healthcare Network
New York City Council Committee on Veterans
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Thursday, March 14, 2019**

Thank you Chairperson Deutsch and members of the Committee on Veterans for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Kelly Sabatino and I am the Public Policy Manager at Community Healthcare Network (CHN). CHN is a network of 14 federally-qualified health centers, including two school-based health centers and a fleet of medical mobile vans. We provide affordable primary care, behavioral health, dental, and supportive services to 85,000 New Yorkers annually throughout Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx.

As part of our mission to meet the needs of all New Yorkers, CHN launched the Military Health and Wellness Family Program in 2017 to provide comprehensive health and social services to military populations throughout New York City. The program directly helps meet the need for timely, culturally-informed, integrated healthcare among active duty service members, veterans, and military-affiliated family members, regardless of discharge status. Since July 2017, we have engaged 538 military-affiliated patients.

Through a medical-legal partnership with the Urban Justice Center's Veteran Advocacy Project – or VAP – CHN offers primary and behavioral health care, legal and social services. Individuals referred to the program – through VAP, VetConnectNYC, numerous veterans' assistance organizations, or internal staff – are paired with a member of our social work team, screened using an intake form specially-designed for military-affiliated patients, and provided with the care that they need.

Launched in 2017 with an innovative grant from the New York Community Trust, both CHN and VAP were able to substantially expand the program in 2018 with funding supplied by the New York City Council's Veterans Mental Health Initiative. With Council support, we have also been able to expand

the number of “Centers of Excellence” in military care offered at our health centers. Staff at these centers are trained by the Veteran Advocacy Project to provide comprehensive, culturally-informed care to military populations. We now offer four military health “Centers of Excellence” at our Harlem, Long Island City, Sutphin Boulevard, and South Bronx Health Centers.

Looking forward, we plan to designate two more health centers – in Williamsburg and Tremont – as military “Centers of Excellence,” and significantly expand the number of patients we serve through the Military Health and Wellness Family Program. As part of this effort, we plan to bring our integrated health van to new locations throughout the city and explore opportunities for expanding trauma-informed dental services for veterans at our health centers. We also plan to host a Military Families Health & Wellness panel in mid-to-late 2019 addressing best practices, challenges, and experiences serving and receiving care among military-affiliated populations.

We thank Chairman Deutsch and the Committee on Veterans for their generous support on this project and look forward to continuing our work alongside the City Council to better serve military populations throughout New York City.

CHN Centers

Open Weekdays, Evenings,
Weekends, and Holiday Hours

Mobile Health Vans

Primary Care, Birth Control,
Plan B, HIV & STD Testing,
PrEP/PEP, Optometry

For information, times, &
locations: **212-545-2495**



1 Washington Heights

511 West 157th Street
New York, NY 10032
212-781-7979

2 Phoenix SBHC

511 West 157th Street
New York, NY 10032
917-521-3130

3 Harlem

81 West 115th Street
New York, NY 10026
212-426-0088

4 Lower East Side

150 Essex Street
New York, NY 10002
212-477-1120

5 Seward Park SBHC

350 Grand Street, Rm 240
New York, NY 10002
212-634-7550

6 Williamsburg

94-98 Manhattan Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11206
718-388-0390

7 Crown Heights

1167 Nostrand Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11225
718-778-0198

8 East New York / DBS

999 Blake Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11208
718-277-8303

9 East New York Hub

25-81 Atlantic Avenue, FL 1
Brooklyn, NY 11207
718-495-6700

10 Tremont

4215 Third Avenue, FL 2
Bronx, NY 10457
718-294-5891

11 South Bronx

975 Westchester Ave
Bronx, NY 10459
718-320-4466

12 Long Island City

36-11 21st Street
Long Island City, NY 11106
718-482-7772

13 Sutphin Boulevard

97-04 Sutphin Boulevard
Jamaica, NY 11435
718-657-7088

14 Jamaica

90-04 161st Street, FL 5
Jamaica, NY 11432
718-523-2123

Manhattan

Bronx

Queens

Brooklyn

CHN Fast Facts

Who We Are: We are a not-for-profit organization providing health care to underserved New Yorkers of all ages. We have twelve Health Centers, two School-Based Health Centers, and a fleet of Mobile Health Vans. We never turn anyone away from care, regardless of ability to pay.

We offer sliding scale fees based on income. We screen all our uninsured patients for insurance eligibility.

Annual Impact	Care Support Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 85,000 patients• 250,000 medical and ancillary visits• 40,000 visits for STI testing and counseling• 36,000 patients with one or more chronic conditions• 34,000 HIV tests• 3,700 smoking cessation visits• 5,500 back-to-school physicals• 11,200 mental health visits• 1,600 insurance applications via NYS Health Exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Primary Care Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, and other providers in Family Practice, Internal Medicine, OB/GYN, Pediatrics, Midwifery, Dental, Psychiatry, Podiatry• Supportive Services HIV Treatment Adherence Counselors, Nutritionists, Mental Health Therapists, Social Workers, Family Planning Health
	Comprehensive Centers
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Primary care teams at each site• Holiday, evening, and weekend hours• Walk-ins accepted• Integrated use of electronic medical records

Unique Services and Programs

- **Transgender Health Services:** affirming primary care services for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals.
- **Nurse Practitioner Fellowship Program:** first primary care and psychiatric nurse practitioner fellowship in New York State.
- **Health Literacy Department:** workshops on effective patient care communication strategies for healthcare professionals.
- **Nutrition Program:** individualized eating and exercise plans, & counseling on health and wellness issues.
- **Wellness Program:** fitness classes, acupuncture, yoga, meditation, reiki, sound healing, wellness workshops, and health coaching.
- **Health Homes:** care coordination services focused on mental health, substance abuse, housing, and public benefits.
- **Teens P.A.C.T. :** peer-based program empowering teens to prevent unintended pregnancies and sexually-transmitted infections.
- **Integrated Addiction Services:** integrated primary care and substance abuse treatment including buprenorphine services.

Patient Centered Medical Home: We provide each patient with a primary care provider and an expert team supporting their care.



Committee on Veterans: Preliminary Budget Hearing

Good afternoon members of the Committee on Veterans. My name is Coco Culhane and I am the founder and director of the Veteran Advocacy Project ("VAP"). Since 2010, we have been providing free legal services to low-income veterans and their families, with a focus on those who have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder ("PTSD"), Traumatic Brain Injury, and other mental health issues. Our holistic approach to advocacy removes barriers to housing, health care, and income; and our work doesn't end with a legal decision; we ensure that veterans access these services and benefits through our many partnerships across the city.

When we appear before this committee it is usually to address a pressing issue facing the community or the introduction of a bill. Our testimony is always based on the needs we see and hear about directly from our clients. Then, almost without fail, I remind everyone of the thousands of veterans who have been wrongfully separated with less-than-honorable discharges due to symptoms of trauma. Today I would like to actually tell you about our work and the many programs and partnerships we have developed to meet the needs of New York City's veterans.

In addition to our general legal services, like representation in Housing court and at Fair Hearings, we have a number of initiatives to ensure clients receive holistic, trauma-informed social services.

We partner with the **Jericho Project** and **Services for the Underserved** on the VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families ("SSVF") grant, focusing on legal representation for eviction prevention, as well as providing wrap-around legal services to promote housing stability. We are onsite weekly at SUS's SSVF office and at two SSVF locations for Jericho. Our partnerships allow us to connect veterans to rapid rehousing assistance and arrears when other resources have failed.

We have two medical-legal partnerships ("MLPs") that comprise multiple locations for each partnership entity. With the Department of Veterans Affairs ("VA"), we have MLPs at three **Vet Centers**, in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens, where combat veterans and their families can receive therapy, adjustment counseling, and much more. We are on site one day a week at each center with office hours for appointments and walk-ins. Our MLPs include training for the staff on legal topics and issue spotting, and know-your-rights sessions for veterans.

We also have an MLP with **Community Healthcare Network** ("CHN"), a system of federally qualified health centers across the city. For the many clients we serve who cannot or do not want to access the VA, CHN's Military Family Health and Wellness program has been an incredible resource. They provide primary and behavioral health care, dental services, and specialized women's health care and pediatrics for our clients and their entire families.

All of our MLP sites work with us to provide medical evidence, including trauma evaluations, for VA and Department of Defense cases. Our clients with mental health needs are guaranteed to get the culturally competent care they need, without delay, and in their own neighborhood. Our work with all of these centers improves health outcomes, removes barriers to housing and

income, and provides veterans law representation and advocacy for VA and DOD matters.

We have recently launched outreach and services for justice-involved veterans. In treatment courts and at four units at Rikers plus the veterans track at the Rikers parole court, we are providing direct services and empowering veterans with knowledge about the VA and other resources available to them, even with a bad discharge. In addition to providing direct legal services, our initiative, which is rooted entirely in partnerships and collaboration, educates key stakeholders in the criminal justice system about veteran-specific resources, eligibility issues, and the VA's collateral consequences. Our primary partner is the **VA's Veterans Justice Outreach** initiative, whose social workers engage in all areas of the justice system, advocating for treatment for veterans. We are also partnering with treatment courts, Legal Aid staff, and others. We complement the incredible work they are doing, bringing veterans law to their clients. By working with those already advocating in the system, we remove barriers to income and health care needed for recovery; we prevent VA debt, connect families to benefits, and improve reentry success.

Our latest initiative focuses on restoring honor to LGBTQ veterans with bad discharges. In addition to veterans who were forced out under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," there are older veterans who were often discharged under a pretext of misconduct and need expert advocacy to uncover the prejudice that led to their less-than-honorable discharge status. We hope to expand capacity for this work, as we have just formalized our partnership with SAGEVets.

In addition to our general legal services and initiatives, we specialize in veterans law, with an emphasis on fighting for veterans who have experienced trauma or a mental health condition. It would not be VAP testimony if I didn't close by advocating for those veterans who served their country and because of invisible wounds were left behind, cut off from VA health care and benefits because of unjust less-than-honorable discharges. We are the only legal services organization in the city with a practice dedicated to military discharge upgrades. Together with our pro bono network, including the New York County Lawyers' Association (NYCLA) and the Veterans' Rights Clinic taught by our director at Brooklyn Law School, we represent hundreds of veterans to restore honor to their records and open the door to the benefits they earned and deserve to receive so they can heal.

All of this work is vital to New York City's veteran communities. The Veteran Advocacy Project is requesting an increase in support so that we can reduce the number of people on our waitlists for veteran-specific legal representation. Veterans and their families need all kinds of legal services; for example, nothing is more crucial than housing, and thus representation in Housing court is critical. But there are other sources for those services; in fact, massive city funding already exists for civil legal services that do provide representation to veterans who are among all other low-income New Yorkers.

We believe that the Veterans' Initiative dollars should prioritize veterans law, which is so distressingly scarce in our city. We thank the chair and entire committee for the terrific effort that has gone into creating a department and for the funds supporting many tremendous programs.

Thank you for opportunity to speak today.



Testimony by the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)

Before the New York City Council Committees on Veterans regarding:

Preliminary Budget Hearing – Veterans

March 14, 2019

Chair Deutsch, Council Members, and staff, good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Veterans Committee about the FY20 budget. My name is Maria Hunter, and I am the Director of the Public Benefits Unit at the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG). I am joined by my colleague, Ryan Foley, who is the Coordinating Attorney of NYLAG's Veterans Practice. The New York Legal Assistance Group uses the power of the law to help New Yorkers in need combat social and economic injustice. We address emerging and urgent legal needs with comprehensive, free civil legal services, impact litigation, policy advocacy, and community education. NYLAG serves immigrants, seniors, the homebound, families facing foreclosure, renters facing eviction, low-income consumers, those in need of government assistance, children in need of special education, domestic violence survivors, persons with disabilities, patients with chronic illness or disease, low-wage workers, members of the LGBTQ community, Holocaust survivors, veterans, and others in need of free civil legal services.

The Importance of Attorneys in Veterans' Benefits Cases

For veterans looking to obtain or increase their veterans' benefits, having an attorney by their side is crucial. Eligibility for different benefits varies and is predicated on a variety of factors, and the VA requires that anyone who aids in preparing, submitting or appealing a VA benefit claim be accredited by the VA. The 2017 Annual Report of the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) shows appeals brought by attorneys had a success rate 10% higher than all other representatives and

advocacy groups combined, on average.¹ In FY17, some 81% of appeals claims with attorneys were either approved or remanded, and claims appeals with attorneys also had the lowest denial rate, at only 14%.

Even federal courts acknowledge the difference when veterans are represented by counsel.² Moreover, VA statistics show that a veteran's *best chance* at winning on an appeal is to have an attorney as her or his representative. Attorneys are accustomed to analyzing complex laws and regulations, understanding complicated policies, and navigating the various bureaucracies that are keeping their clients from obtaining the benefits they need.

NYLAG's Services for Veterans

NYLAG serves hundreds of New York City veterans each year through its medical-legal partnership clinics at the Bronx and Manhattan VA hospitals and through its community-based Veterans Practice, which is funded by the City Council's Legal Services for Veterans Initiative. NYLAG aims to provide comprehensive services to the veterans who come through our doors, and has served more than 350 veterans through the Legal Services for Veterans Initiative in just the first eight months of the current fiscal year. While many veterans come to us to assist them with obtaining the benefits to which their service entitles them, we often find through our screening process that they have additional legal needs in areas such as housing, consumer debt, and advance planning. NYLAG's Veterans Practice provides assistance with all these areas of law, and is also able to refer other matters in areas such as immigration and family to attorneys within NYLAG. The ability to fully serve clients in-house is especially crucial for veterans, who often suffer from mental health issues such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which can be exacerbated when they

¹ Department of Veterans Affairs, Board of Veterans' Appeals. *Annual Report Fiscal Year 2017*. https://www.bva.va.gov/docs/Chairmans_Annual_Rpts/BVA2017AR.pdf

² See *Szemraj v. Principi* 357 F.3d 1370 (Fed. Cir. 2004); *Roberson v. Principi*, 251 F.3d 1378 (Fed. Cir. 2001); *Moody v. Principi*, 360 F.3d 1306 (Fed. Cir. 2004).

are asked to tell their story to multiple organizations or deter them from seeking out other services they may need.

As an example, Frank, a 22 year veteran of the United States Army, had never sought VA benefits prior to coming to NYLAG. After discussing personal mental health issues with a fellow soldier that he served with, Frank realized that he exhibited many of the same symptoms. This led Frank to seek assistance with an application for service-related disability benefits. While we were helping Frank obtain additional VA benefits, we were also able to counsel on a potential employer discrimination issue and on how to avoid a threatened eviction. Because NYLAG is a large office employing attorneys with many areas of expertise, we were able to assist with these additional legal issues and provide comprehensive legal assistance. We were successful at helping Frank receive a rating of 50% service connection for his disabilities, providing him with an additional \$937 per month to help with his living expenses. Further, he is now eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VOC-REHAB) benefits through the VA, which will cover 48 months of education and living expenses as Frank seeks new employment. Working with NYLAG's Veterans Practice through the Legal Services for Veterans Initiative allowed Frank to increase his income by nearly a thousand dollars per month, prevent eviction, and pursue new educational and employment opportunities.

Many of our veteran clients come to us on the edge of homelessness, and require immediate legal assistance to help them avoid eviction and remain stably housed. Harold, a 69-year-old veteran, came to us after appearing in Housing Court without the benefit of counsel. Harold's landlord pushed him to sign a court settlement agreeing to pay \$13,600 - over double the amount Harold believed was owed. NYLAG was able to represent Harold in his housing matter through the Legal Services for Veterans Initiative, and found discrepancies in the landlord's rent ledger that allowed us to settle the

case for \$5,820. By having counsel, Harold avoided excessive charges of about \$7,780 and was able to remain in his home.

NYLAG partners with dozens of community-based organizations that serve veterans throughout the five boroughs, and they often help us meet clients who might otherwise never make a call to a legal services provider. We receive many of our clients through these trusted community organizations, and often meet with clients on-site in their own communities, where they feel most comfortable. NYLAG is also able to refer clients with non-legal needs, such as case management or counseling, to these organizations. Being able to make a warm referral to an organization that we already know and trust makes an enormous difference to our veteran clients.

Legal Services for Veterans Initiative funding is crucial to providing necessary and deserved benefits to New York City veterans. Veterans need qualified, experienced attorneys who can assist them with the complexities surrounding their veterans' benefits cases as well as help them with their ancillary legal needs. NYLAG strongly urges the Council to expand the Legal Services for Veterans Initiative to allow us to help even more New York City veterans.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We look forward to engaging in further discussions about serving our veteran communities and improving their access to critical legal services and other resources.

Respectfully submitted,

New York Legal Assistance Group



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Legal Information for Families Today (LIFT) was launched in 1996 when three women lawyers had the simple but revolutionary idea of establishing “go-to” locations in New York City’s Family Courts that would provide on-the-spot help for unrepresented parents struggling to make their way through the Courts on civil issues. These issues are typically related to child support, custody, visitation, domestic violence and guardianship.

LIFT serves nearly 30,000 families annually and the following list includes our core programs: **Education & Information (EI) Sites:** Located in heavily trafficked areas of the Family Courthouses in New York City’s five boroughs, the EI Sites provide quick answers to urgent legal questions. At the Sites, our Staff Attorneys and volunteers work with dozens of people each day, and distribute LIFT’s 38 original, multilingual **Legal Resource Guides** that cover a wide range of family law issues.

Family Law Information Helplines: The EI Sites are augmented by our Helplines, accessible by telephone, email and live-chat. We receive approximately 14,000 calls per year.

Court Consultations: At the Family Courthouses, LIFT also provides in-depth consultations that enable unrepresented litigants to meet privately with a Staff Attorney and receive vital legal advice and counsel in preparing a case.

Family Law Information Helplines: The EI Sites are augmented by our Helplines, accessible by telephone, email and live-chat. We receive approximately 14,000 calls per year.

Court Consultations: At the Family Courthouses, LIFT also provides in-depth consultations that enable unrepresented litigants to meet privately with a Staff Attorney and receive vital legal advice and counsel in preparing a case.

Legal Education and Community Outreach: LIFT often presents legal education workshops and legal clinics at local organizations where family law issues are beyond the scope of their services.

Thanks to FY 2019 funding by the City Council and Council Member Deutsch, LIFT is now able to target our legal information resources and limited scope representation services to active military and returning veteran parents in New York City and State. We are in the process of creating two new Legal Resource Guides, our easy to read, multilingual guides – one for active military members and one for returning veterans who are transitioning out of the military. The guides will cover a variety of issues relevant to active duty military or those transitioning to civilian life, such as:

- What does “adequate support” mean?
- How can parents navigate the military child support requirements and the civil child support requirements?
- Child support modifications based on change of employment
- Custody and visitation modifications based on change of living circumstances
- VA benefits and Child Support
- Retirement benefits and Child Support

Legal Information for Families Today
32 Court Street, Suite 1208
Brooklyn, New York 11201
OFFICE 646.613.9633
FAX 646.613.9632

Legal Information for Families Today (LIFT) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, EIN 13-3910567. Your contribution is tax-deductible to the extent provided by law. No goods or services were provided. A copy of our latest Federal Form 990 or NYS Form 497 can be obtained from LIFT or from the Office of the Attorney General by writing the Charities Bureau, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.

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We are working with a number of veterans groups to ensure that we address the most pertinent issues in our guides. These include the NY City Bar Veteran's Assistance Project, American Corporate Partners, NYLAG, Legal Services, Legal Aid, SAGEVets, NYC Department of Veterans Services and others. We expect both guides to be completed in May. After completion of the guides, we hope to partner with community based agencies and provide workshops and legal clinics in the community where active military and retiring veterans go to receive services. We hope to distribute the LRGs widely, through the Family Courts and through extensive outreach efforts.

Thank you for your support and we hope to continue to be able to work with you through the next budget cycle. We are thrilled to be working with this community and are working hard to make the parenting transitions and challenges easier for veterans and their families.

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Legal Services NYC

DEMAND JUSTICE

**New York City Council Hearing
Thursday, March 14, 2019, 2:30 p.m.
Testimony RE: Preliminary Budget, Committee on Veterans**

Good afternoon. My name is Dao Sun. I am a Senior Staff Attorney with the Veterans Justice Project at Manhattan Legal Services, a part of Legal Services NYC (LSNYC). I want to thank the City Council for inviting us to testify at this Preliminary Budget hearing for the Veterans Committee. We also want to thank the Veterans Committee for their past support of our Veterans Justice Project. Without the funding we have received, we would not have been able to provide legal services to such a large number of the City's veteran population and their family members.

Legal Services NYC is one the largest provider of free civil legal services in the nation with offices in all five boroughs where we serve over 110,000 New Yorkers annually. LSNYC created the Veterans Justice Project (VJP) to help low-income veterans, active duty service members and their families navigate the complex world of housing law, public benefit eligibility, family law, consumer law, social security benefits and other essential needs. As you are all aware, many low-income veterans facing civil legal problems cannot afford to hire an attorney, yet they are at a severe disadvantage without one. Legal Services NYC's Veterans Justice Project works to ensure that veterans receive the benefit of free legal counsel when tackling complicated civil legal matters.

LSNYC's Veterans Justice Project helps more than 1,300 New York veterans and their families annually. We do this by creating numerous access points and partnerships through which veterans can learn about and receive our services. This includes establishing and operating a city-wide Veterans Hotline (347-592-2409); creating numerous legal clinics throughout the city to train pro bono attorneys to assist veterans, one such clinic is the Military Monday clinic at the 23rd Street VA hospital; operating several intake sites; creating and maintaining a veterans justice clinic at New York Law School; forging new partnerships with and receiving referrals from more than 42 public and non-profit organizations that serve veterans; operating an innovate Veterans Student Loan Project; and educating hundreds of social workers, case managers, medical providers, and other lay advocates from all over the City so they understand veterans' legal rights and connect veterans to the Veterans Justice Project.

Here are three stories of the veterans we have helped:

Mr. P is 84 years old and served in the Korean War. He suffers from dementia, Parkinson's disease, high blood pressure, and heart disease, and relies on Access-a-Ride for transportation. Mr. P's son contacted the Veterans Justice Project when he found out that his father's \$1,200 a month Social Security benefit was slated to be reduced by \$240 a month, leaving him unable get through the month and pay for basic living expenses like food and rent. We learned that the IRS was imposing the \$240 a month "levy" because they claimed Mr. P owed a \$5,000 tax debt. As a result of advocacy by the Veterans Justice Project, the IRS reversed the levy and agreed to stop all collection activities. Mr. P can now keep his apartment and afford basic necessities.

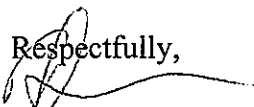
Another client LSNYC represented is **Mr. G.** When Mr. G applied for social security benefits in 2013. The Social Security Administration (SSA), amazingly, decided that his mental and physical impairments were not disabling. This was in spite of the fact the 62-year-old veteran had PTSD, cancer, degenerative disc disease in his back and knee, to mention just a few of the long list of debilitating conditions he suffers. He uses a cane to walk, and gets short of breath since the operation he had after a heart attack. Until recently, his only income was \$1,070 a month from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). In 2015 LSNYC helped Mr. G complete a new application for social security benefits. His application was denied yet again. Thereafter, LSNYC represented Mr. G at his administrative hearing in May of 2018. In August the ALJ issued a favorable decision, finding that Mr. G could be considered disabled as of January 2015. This terrific outcome translates into much-needed support for the disabled veteran. It means that Mr. G will receive an additional \$1,296.00 a month in Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). Additionally, his benefits will be backdated to 2015, meaning that he will receive retroactive benefits from 2015 through 2018, which amounts to another \$52,000.

Ms. M is an Army veteran who has lived in the same rent-stabilized apartment in Brooklyn for a decade. She suffers from atrial fibrillation--a rapid and irregular heartbeat. A few years ago, she was hospitalized because she had pneumonia infecting both of her lungs, as well as too much carbon dioxide and too little oxygen in her blood. Around the time she was hospitalized, she needed to give her sister some financial help. Her sister, who has lupus, and was waiting to receive her Social Security disability benefits, had been evicted from her apartment. Ms. M put her sister up and paid to have her possessions put in storage, rather than letting her sister lose her possessions and become homeless. Because she was struggling to keep up with these emergency medical and familial expenses, Ms. M fell behind on her rent and her landlord began eviction proceedings. LSNYC negotiated a settlement and moved to extend time to advocate for her applications for assistance payment of the large sum of arrears. LSNYC obtained a stay of the marshal's notice of eviction and delivered payment to the landlord from sources including the veteran's escrowed funds, HRA assistance, and the Bridge Fund of New York City. Upon payment of \$21,000, the landlord was forced to dismiss the case and Ms. M's housing was preserved.

Our veterans should not have to face a rationing of civil legal services. They have sacrificed for all of us. We have a duty to ensure that veterans receive the benefits to which they are entitled, have access to safe affordable housing and a good education, as well as access to justice. While we have come a long way in ensuring that our veterans get the support, services, and resources they need, there is still far to go. I am proud to represent veterans and urge the City Council to continue its general civil legal services funding for veterans.

Thank you again for giving us the opportunity to testify. Legal Services NYC looks forward to working with you and the administration to ensure that New York City is able to best support our veterans in need.

Respectfully,


Dao Sun
Senior Staff Attorney, Veterans Justice Project
Manhattan Legal Services
Legal Services NYC

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Renewing lives. Reclaiming hope.

Testimony of
Jody Rudin, Chief Operating Officer
Project Renewal, Inc.

Committee on Veterans
Hon. Chaim Deutsch, Chair

New York City Council
March 14, 2019

Good afternoon chair Deutsch and fellow City Council members.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify here today.

My name is Jody Rudin and I am the chief operating officer of Project Renewal, a New York City homeless services nonprofit agency.

For more than 52 years, Project Renewal has empowered individuals and families who are homeless or at-risk to renew their lives through critical programs focused on health, homes and jobs.

Each year we serve nearly 15,000 New Yorkers, including hundreds of veterans.

We are grateful to chair Deutsch and the City Council for giving Project Renewal \$300,000 for homeless prevention services for veterans – support that has been crucial for us to help veterans across all our programs.

Your funding has allowed us to improve our assessments and tracking of our veteran clients, which is enabling us to serve them even better now.

So far in FY2019, we have provided health care to 218 veterans at our mobile medical vans and shelter-based clinics, and through our psychiatry and substance use disorder programs.

Veterans use our health care programs at a higher rate than our non-veteran clients. Their needs are complex and require coordinating services with many different organizations. As a result, their care is more expensive.

These are men and women who have served our country. We owe it to them to take care of them. I thank the Council for recognizing this and supporting our work.

Additionally, our employment programs—which have been recognized nationally, including being awarded the Call of Duty Endowment’s “Seal of Distinction”—help veterans obtain and keep career-path jobs.

Our Next Step program provides job training, internship placements, interview coaching, and retention support. And our award-winning culinary arts training program places 80% of graduates in jobs—nearly twice the national average for similar programs.

Both programs have helped veterans. One of our clients, Herbert, grew up in Queens and served in the U.S. Army. Herbert was also formerly incarcerated. In 2015 he became homeless. Herbert participated in our Culinary Training Program and when he graduated he got a job as a cook. Thanks to his job, Herbert was able to move into his own apartment in Rosedale, Queens.

No veteran should be homeless. We are proud that our permanent and transitional housing programs have provided apartments to 50 veterans so far in FY2019.

Moving forward, we want to deepen our expertise working with veterans. We have an opportunity to enhance our services and provide more training to our staff, so they can be more effective working with our veteran population.

We also want to collaborate with the VA health care system to improve continuity of care for homeless and at-risk veterans, so we can better address their unique needs.

The City Council has played a vital role in helping reduce veteran’s homelessness in New York City to near “functional zero.” This tremendous progress has been possible because of the city’s concerted investment and the work of the nonprofit agencies it supports, like Project Renewal.

I encourage the City Council to continue its investment in homeless prevention services for veterans, so we can ensure that every New Yorker who has selflessly served our country has access to health, homes and jobs.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I’m happy to answer any questions.

Jody Rudin; jody.rudin@projectrenewal.org 212-620-0340 ex 518

Veterans Committee Preliminary Budget Hearing
Public Testimony
Nicole L. Cicogna
Executive Director, GallopNYC

March 14, 2019

Thank you to the city council and the veterans' committee for allowing me to be here and testify in support of program funding for NYC's veteran population.

My name is Nicole Cicogna and I am the Executive Director of GallopNYC. We provide therapeutic horsemanship programs for children and adults with disabilities, including at-risk youth and veterans, in NYC. Horsemanship includes horseback riding, groundwork, and horse care). Our mission is to help riders in NYC with disabilities walk, talk, and learn, inspiring them to live their lives as fully, independently, and productively as possible.

At the height of our season, we provide lessons to 686 individuals a week, and operate our programs at four locations across the boroughs. We are committed to serving low-to-middle income families, a majority of whom receive tuition scholarships.

We have offered a Veterans Program for eleven years now that is open to all New York City veterans at no charge to them. *Councilmember Deutsch, Speaker Johnson, and the entire City Council, with your generous support and that of this committee, through the veterans' initiative, GallopNYC received funding this year to support our growing program.* Funds are being used to support the free therapeutic horseback riding and groundwork program for veterans in Queens at GallopNYC Forest Hills and GallopNYC Sunrise Stables in Howard Beach.

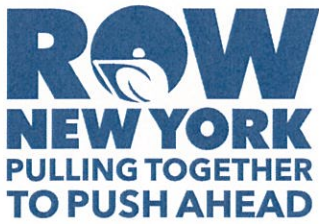
Therapeutic horsemanship is effective with veterans for both physical and emotional rehabilitation, including for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and brain injuries. Our therapeutic horsemanship program for veterans focuses on interactions with horses, and helps improve skills in decision-making and self-regulation. Effective horsemanship requires leadership, and as one can imagine, many veterans respond well to opportunities to be leaders. It also helps veterans with PTSD get in touch with their emotions.

Many veterans experience a hyper-vigilant state of mind that does not subside after they return home from military service, often as a result of PTSD. Consequentially, many veterans struggle with being able to relax and make vital connections with other people. Structured time with horses can help veterans overcome the tendency to be hyper-vigilant and learn to relax in the moment.

We offer programming to veterans twice each week at our two locations in Queens, and the outdoor environment at our five-acre park site at Sunrise Stables provides a natural healing and stress-relieving setting.

With your support, and continued support this fiscal year, our therapeutic program can continue to be offered to veterans at no cost to them.

Thank you for your generosity to GallopNYC and the veterans of NYC.



March 14, 2019
New York City Council
City Hall Park
New York, NY 10007

Dear Veterans Committee,

Hello and thank you Council member Deutsch and the Committee on Veterans for allowing me to testify today. My name is Courtney Orr and I am the Director of Individual Engagement at Row New York. I am here to testify on behalf of Row New York's Veterans Programs.

Through the discipline of rowing, Row New York transforms the lives of New Yorkers, regardless of background or ability. Across our three program sites, we serve 270 middle and high school students from low-income neighborhoods, 1,500 teens in public schools, and over 200 individuals with cognitive and physical disabilities, including our Veterans program.

Row New York's Veterans Rowing Program provides New York City's veterans with opportunities to experience the sport of rowing. The program is designed to help Veterans avoid poor health outcomes, such as obesity and depression, by improving their physical fitness, including strength, speed, endurance and mobility. Veterans also benefit from the opportunity to compete on a team, belong to a supportive community, and experience New York City's waterways.

Rowing can be easily adapted to meet different ability levels, making the sport uniquely suited to para-athletes. Individuals with visual impairments, physical disabilities, and/or cognitive disabilities can all excel as rowers. In the past, our adaptive programs have served Veterans with a wide range of cognitive and physical disabilities, including, but not limited to, amputations, multiple sclerosis, blindness, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Our Veterans Rowing program has three activities: our recreational program, competitive para program, and Indoor VA program. In our recreational program, participants learn the fundamentals of rowing and physical fitness both on the water and on indoor rowing machines. Our competitive para program meets three times per week to practice for competitive races which they participate in throughout the year. Lastly, we have our Indoor VA program – through partnerships with VA offices across the city, Row New York delivers indoor rowing instruction at local VA Centers.

Support from the City Council will enable Row New York to continue delivering high-quality programming for our underserved Veteran community, and we count on the continued support and leadership of the Committee on Veterans to ensure that Veterans throughout the city are given the resources they need to have positive mental physical health outcomes.

Thank you,
Courtney Orr
Director of Individual Engagement

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Testimony to the Veterans Committee of the New York City Council

Delivered in person on March 14, 2019

by Thomas Weber, Director of Care Management Services

Thank you for holding this Preliminary Budget Hearing focused on Veterans' Services. My name is Thomas Weber. I'm Director of Care Management at SAGE, and I oversee the SAGEVets program.

SAGE is the country's first and largest organization dedicated to improving the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) older adults. Founded in New York City in 1978, SAGE has provided comprehensive social services and programs to LGBT older people for four decades. SAGEVets is one of our program offerings and is the only program in New York City designed for older LGBT veterans. In fact, SAGEVets is a statewide program engaging older LGBT veterans across all of New York State.

New York State and New York City are among the top ten states and cities with the highest concentrations of gay and lesbian veterans, both in number and per capita. And the needs are deep among LGBT older veterans.

According to a recent statewide survey by the LGBT Health and Human Services Network of New York State, 56% of LGBT veterans were over the age of 50. Many LGBT older veterans in New York State are struggling and yet, are not accessing the services they need. Consider that older LGBT veterans served in the military at a time when discrimination against LGBT people was rampant and a matter of official government policy (of course, for transgender people serving in the military, this is still not a resolved issue). Older LGBT veterans have a unique set of needs that stem from this discrimination and harassment, and therefore have been reluctant to engage in VA and other veteran services that they might be eligible for, fearing ignorant and inferior treatment from providers, because of an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity. Furthermore, older LGBT veterans live in isolation and usually do not have family caregivers to rely on when their health begins to deteriorate. As I mentioned, SAGEVets is the only program in New York City that serves LGBT veterans over the age of 50 and we are a culturally competent resource that LGBT veterans trust to give them information and refer them to service providers who understand their unique needs and are able to contribute towards improving their overall health and well-being.

The SAGEVets Program has been in existence for over three years, but has never gotten any support from the city even though our numbers have been growing, a trend that we anticipate

will continue due to our successful outreach strategy. 2018 was an exciting year for our program as we expanded our circle of fruitful partnerships with many veteran service providers and agencies, both government and not-for-profit. We have developed a great working relationship with the VAs throughout the City who we often involve in various SAGEVets events and programs. We have key partnerships with the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG), the Veterans Advocacy Project (VAP) at the Urban Justice Center, and other legal entities where we make referrals in order to address individual legal issues around discharge upgrades and VA service provision. In fact, discharge status for veterans who were discharged due to their sexual orientation, tops our list of concerns since a discharge other than honorable is a barrier to receiving federal and state veteran benefits.

We are building a productive relationship with the New York City Department of Veterans Services. Commissioner Sutton, along with her Chief of Staff, visited SAGE this week to talk about our collaborative efforts. They have participated in several of our recent programs and events, and we have been working together to assist individual veterans. They are also hooking us up to VetConnectNYC to ensure SAGEVets will be added to this vital resource for local veterans. Likewise, we are building a relationship with the Veterans' Committee of the NYC Council and its Chair, Chaim Deutsch, who invited us to participate in a Round Table of Veteran Service Providers and included SAGEVets in a guide to Veteran Resources in NYC.

Additionally, we are partnering with the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs (DVA). We have jointly produced New York City events for LGBT veterans with them, and are currently planning another which will take place later this month to honor the service of LGBT veterans who served in or during the Vietnam War era. Ashton Stewart, our SAGEVets Program Coordinator, was also invited to be part of a panel at the DVA's Veterans Human Rights Conference to talk about the history of ostracism and discrimination LGBT people endured in the American military, which is taking place today in Albany.

SAGE is able to offer a host of services to LGBT veterans through our five senior centers throughout the city, which serve daily hot meals and have health & wellness, socialization, arts, technology and other programs. We also serve vets with case management, caregiving support, friendly visiting and other Care Management Services, in addition to the individuals who will soon be living in our new LGBT-friendly affordable senior housing projects that are being built in Brooklyn and the Bronx.

The SAGEVets program is a small operation, with only one staff person, to perform outreach, address the veteran-related needs of LGBT older veterans, and honor their service not just in New York City, but across the state. Our program is flourishing, reflective of the need of our local LGBT veteran community and willingness of veteran service providers and agencies to work with us, but we have outgrown our capacity and we need more help to be able to do more in New York City. I am here today to ask the Council to invest in the SAGEVet program and LGBT older veterans, and provide additional funding to help us deepen and expand on this important work. With additional funds, we hope to be able to hire a part-time SAGEVets Program Assistant. The Program Assistant would have an exclusive New York City focus and

would perform outreach, produce veteran programs, table at veteran-related events, give presentations, conduct intake evaluations for new participants into the program, and work with volunteers. Funds will also help cover program expenses related to the costs of performing these functions. Having the extra help will position us to have more one-on-one time with LGBT veterans in need, meet more people, and be in more places.

Councilmembers, thank you for your continued support of SAGE. We, at SAGE, look forward to partnering with the New York City Council to ensure that LGBT older veterans who are residents of New York City and served in the American military with pride, get the support they need and deserve.



NYC Veterans Alliance

www.nycveteransalliance.org

www.ourveterans.nyc

Testimony by

Samuel Molik

Director of Policy and Legislative Advocacy
NYC Veterans Alliance

**Committee on Veterans
Preliminary Budget Hearing**

March 14, 2019

committee and discussions with Chair Deutsch, we strongly urge the Council to allocate funding in DVS's budget for a dedicated ACCO with the specialized expertise in the city's contracting and procurement processes. We believe DVS would be enhanced by an ACCO with the right expertise, relationships, and sense of urgency for veteran priorities. The delays that have taken place over the last three years in bringing VetConnectNYC under DVS management would likely have been mitigated by in-house contracting and procurement expertise. An ACCO would also bring the capability of providing meaningful oversight of discretionary funding from the Council to organizations serving veterans based on their expertise and knowledge of the veterans community. **We ask the Committee: will you advocate for inclusion of an ACCO in DVS's budget?**

We also continue to call for more effective and transparent metrics for success in DVS's programming. For example, the Veterans Employment Pay for Success Program should have more robust metrics attached to it. The amount projected in the FY 2019 budget for the VA-orchestrated Veterans Employment Pay for Success Program proposes a social impact investment pilot for NYC, with payment by NYC for employment outcomes for veterans with PTSD. We appreciate this innovative program, but we urge the committee to ensure the program is accompanied by robust metrics for success prior to any further funding. The DVS agency, staff, and programming are supported by NYC taxpayers. We believe there should be transparency in the form of more effective qualitative data reporting. We strongly urge this Committee to call for DVS to focus on enhanced data refining and more cost-effective delivery of information and services for veterans and the broader taxpaying public.

We also ask that information about the programmatic work done by DVS in conjunction with funds raised under the Mayor's Fund for Advancing NYC be made available for public review. While not part of the city's budget, we realize DVS has been utilizing philanthropic funds for veterans programming through the Mayor's Fund. Veterans are not mentioned in last year's annual report for the Mayor's Fund, and we are interested in how we might learn more about this funding and how the city is utilizing it for the benefit of veterans. We believe this would help to create a fuller picture of DVS's programming and impacts as a city agency, and build trust with the community it serves.

We look forward to continued dialogue and partnership with DVS as it continues to grow and work toward serving the NYC veterans community. On behalf of the NYC Veterans Alliance, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Pending your questions, this concludes my testimony.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/14/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JEFF ROTH

Address: NYC 1 CENTRE ST, #2208 NY NY 10007

I represent: NYC DVS

Address: 1 CENTRE ST #2208, NY NY 10007

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Appearance Card

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Date: 3/14/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ERIC HENRY

Address: 1 CENTRE ST #2208, NY NY 10007

I represent: NYC DVS

Address: 1 CENTRE ST, NY NY 10007

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Appearance Card

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Date: 3/14/19

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Name: LOREE SUTTON, MD - COMMISSIONER

Address: 1 CENTRE ST #2208, NY NY 10007

I represent: NYC DVS

Address: 1 CENTRE ST #2208, NY NY 10007

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Date: 3.14.19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nicole L. Cicogna

Address: 88-03 70th Road, Forest Hills, NY 11375

I represent: Gallup NYC

Address: _____

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3-14-19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Coco Culhane

Address: 40 Rector

I represent: Veteran Advocacy Project

Address: 40 Rector apt 10006

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Date: 3-14-19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: TOM WEBER

Address: _____

I represent: SAGE

Address: (LGBTQ Veterans services)

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/14/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kelly Sabatino

Address: _____

I represent: Community Healthcare Network

Address: (Veterans mental healthcare)

**THE COUNCIL
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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3-14-19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Cathy Cramer

Address: _____

I represent: Legal Information For Families TODAY (LIFT)

Address: (Legal Services)

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Date: 3-14-19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dao Sun

Address: _____

I represent: Legal Services NYC

Address: (legal services)

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/14/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kathleen Strubal

Address: 16-15 Boro Park Apt 1C, Ridgewood

I represent: NYU Veterans Future Lab

Address: 87 35th St, Brooklyn, NY 11232

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/14/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: James Hendon

Address: 87 35th St, Brooklyn, NY 11232

I represent: NYU Veterans Future LAB

Address: 87 35th St, Brooklyn, NY 11232

**THE COUNCIL
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Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Samuel Malik

Address: 118 W 22nd St 12 fl.

I represent: NYC Veterans Alliance

Address: _____

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Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Maria Hunter

Address: _____

I represent: Royal AB Renewal

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Catherine Ryan

Address: _____

I represent: Royal AB Renewal

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jody Rudin

Address: _____

I represent: Project Renewal

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rhonda Sherwin

Address: 1520 YORK AVE

I represent: VETERANS FINANCIAL COACH

Address: 1520 YORK AVE NY NY 10028

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Date: 3/14/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lisa Carling

Address: TDF

I represent: TDF Veterans Theatregoing Program

Address: 520 Eighth Ave #801 NY NY 10018

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Robert WADIAK

Address: 327 W 43rd St. N.Y. N.Y. 10036

I represent: Td F

Address: 5208th AVE N.Y. N.Y.

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms