

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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May 21, 2019  
Start: 10:06 a.m.  
Recess: 11:21 a.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Room  
14<sup>th</sup> Fl.

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Alicka Ampry-Samuel  
Mathieu Eugene  
Alan N. Maisel  
Paul A. Vallone

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

Alexis Wichowski, Associate Commissioner for Public Affairs, New York City Department of Veteran Services, DVS

E. Cecil Henry, General Counsel and Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Department of Veteran Services, DVS

Coco Culhane, Founder and Director, Veteran Advocacy Project

Samantha Kubek, Staff attorney, Legal Health Division, New York Legal Assistance Group, NYLAG

Male Representative from, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, IAVA

Kristen Rouse, 25-Year Veteran of U.S. Army, Army Reserve and Army National Guard and Member of New York City Veterans Alliance



2 [sound check] [pause]

3 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Testing 1, 2.

4 Testing 1, 2. Okay? [gavel] Good morning. I'm  
5 Councilman Chaim—I am Council Member Chaim Deutsch,  
6 Chair of the Committee of Veterans. Thank you all  
7 for joining us today. I first want to acknowledge  
8 the presence of the military veterans and advocates  
9 who have joined us today. Thank you for taking the  
10 time to attend this—hearing. As you know, this  
11 coming Monday is Memorial Day, and this an  
12 opportunity for entire country to pause and remember  
13 those in the armed forces who gave their lives in  
14 service to this country. We only have the freedoms  
15 we cherish because of their sacrifice, and the  
16 sacrifices of everyone who has served in our  
17 military. Let us observe a moment of silence in  
18 tribute to the men and women in uniform who we have  
19 lost. So, please rise and let's take a moment of  
20 silence. [moment of silence] Thank you. [coughs]  
21 In honor of Memorial Day, the committee will be  
22 hearing three important pieces of legislation two of  
23 which exclusively recognize veterans for their in the  
24 law. As one, which supports the city, veterans,  
25 advocates and efforts to provide to veterans with the

2 best possible services. These three pieces of  
3 legislation are: Resolution 844 introduced by  
4 Council Member Cabrera, a resolution recognizing the  
5 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary—Anniversary of D-Day and Resolution  
6 568 introduced by Council Member Rosenthal, which  
7 calls on the Veterans Administration to name its  
8 hospital in Manhattan after the American  
9 Revolutionary War Hero Margaret Corbin, and a  
10 Preconsidered Introduction sponsored by Council  
11 Member Ampry Samuel, which would make public the  
12 report from the Mayor's Office of Operations on  
13 veterans receiving certain city services. Resolution  
14 844 recognizes the 75th Anniversary of D-Day, June 6,  
15 1944, a pivotal day in history and the turning point  
16 in World War II. I have mentioned before that  
17 throughout World War II my father was imprisoned in  
18 three concentration camps including Auschwitz. D-Day  
19 is personally significant to me as well as thousands  
20 of Holocaust survivors and their descendants because  
21 it was a day that helped in the form of 156,000  
22 allied troops landed on the shores of Normandy. More  
23 than 4,000 troops are estimated to have been killed  
24 in the battle on that day alone. Resolution 468  
25 calls for the VA Hospital ere in Manhattan to be

2 named for the Revolutionary War hero and the first  
3 ever female member of the United States Military,  
4 Margaret Corbin. Renaming the hospital for Margaret  
5 Corbin would honor the dedication of hundreds of  
6 thousands of women who have and continue to serve in  
7 the armed forces. Additionally, female veterans  
8 often report feeling disenfranchised when seeking  
9 treatment at a VA hospital. This resolution aims to  
10 acknowledge the equal rights to services and  
11 highlights women's contributions to the military.  
12 Finally, the Preconsidered Introduction we will hear  
13 today was born from advocates' testimony to this  
14 committee in October of 2018. At the hearing,  
15 advocates testified that the Veterans Service Report  
16 submitted by the Mayor's Office of Operations  
17 pursuant to Local Law 24 of 2015 was not publicly  
18 available. This legislation would make that report  
19 available publicly on DVS's websites. This will  
20 ensure transparency and the reporting of what city  
21 service veterans are receiving and allow for the  
22 public to better understand how these services are  
23 used by veterans and their families. Ultimately,  
24 this report could lead to meaningful policy changes.  
25 I would like to thank the Veterans Committee staff,

our Counsel Anwarul Chowdhry, our new Policy Analyst Kevin Kapowski (sp?) and our new Finance Analyst Andrew Wilbur. Before we—oh, and I want to thank Tova. Where's Tova? She's here somewhere. She left her name out. Before we begin, I'd like to read a statement from Council Member Fernando Cabrera who could not be with us today. Statement from Committee Veterans Resolution 844 of 2019 recognizing the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D-Day, Tuesday, May 21, 2019. Resolution 0844-2019 by Council Cabrera recognizes the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D-Day when on June 6, 1944 when 156,000 American, British and Canadian soldiers landed on five beaches in Normandy. Supported by more than 5,000 ships and 13,000 aircraft. More than 2,200 allied bombers attacked enemy targets both along the coast in inland. D-Day marked the beginning of the final phase of World War II in which the allies drove the Nazis out of Western Europe before accepting their surrender on May 8, 1945. This historic event helped to shape our country and further affirmed our commitment to freedom and democracy. Council Member Cabrera asked for the committee's favorable consideration of this resolution. So, before we

2 begin, I'd like to ask Counsel to swear in our  
3 panel.[pause] Oh, so you want to—

4 MALE SPEAKER: Yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, we're going to  
6 have Alicka-Ampry Samuel to say a few word on the  
7 bill. Go ahead.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Well, good  
9 morning everyone and thank you Chair Deutsch for  
10 allowing me this opportunity to speak on my bill, and  
11 I'm very honored and excited about being a new member  
12 of the Veterans Committee.

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Congratulations.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: This is  
15 actually my first hearing as a committee member. So,  
16 my bill will require the Department of Veteran  
17 Services to make publicly available on its website  
18 the report on veterans receiving certain services  
19 required by Local Law 23 of 2015. This law states  
20 that the city of New York must be transparent  
21 regarding veterans served by our city agencies, and I  
22 just want to just give a little bit of context as to  
23 where I'm coming from. So, during the public  
24 hearing, your hearing of February 26, earlier this  
25 year, I highlighted my experiences as the spouse of a



2 disabled vet who's receiving services right here in  
3 New York City. My husband was the recipient of a  
4 Bronze Star who fought in both Iraq and Afghanistan,  
5 found it very challenging to maneuver through the  
6 systems and the bureaucracy between the federal  
7 government and the city systems, and just being a  
8 wife and well connected, I found it difficult as well  
9 and so I, you know, I figured if I'm having  
10 difficulty as someone well informed, I can only  
11 imagine what the other military families are going  
12 through and the veterans themselves. And so, we live  
13 in a world of being able to receive information and  
14 be transparent. The City, we're always trying to be  
15 transparent, and because we always go to the social  
16 media in order to look on their website, it just  
17 makes sense to be able to have reports readily  
18 available online so that we can see what's going on  
19 and be able to utilize that information in the  
20 Council so we can see how we can be of best service  
21 for our veterans and our families, and so it's just  
22 coming from, of course, a personal experience, but  
23 it's something that I see every single day amongst my  
24 constituency. And so that's what the bill is about,

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10

2 and I can't wait to hear your opinion, and thank you  
3 for the time.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, and that  
5 came straight from your heart because you had a  
6 prepared speech and you spoke straight from your  
7 heart.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Uh-hm.  
9 [laughter

10 LEGAL COUNSEL: Please raise your right  
11 hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole  
12 truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony  
13 before the committee and to respond honestly to  
14 Committee Council Members?

15 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: [off mic] I do.  
16 [pause] Thank you. Good morning to members of the  
17 Committee on Veterans, Chair Deutsch and bill  
18 sponsors Council Member Ampry-Samuel. Welcome to the  
19 Committee on Veterans, and I want to acknowledge  
20 Council Member Rosenthal and Council Member Cabrera  
21 who could not be here today. My name is Alexis  
22 Wichowski. I am proud to serve as Associate  
23 Commissioner for Public Affairs at the New York City  
24 Department of Veteran Services, and I'm joined today  
25 by E. Cecil Henry, General Counsel and Director of

2 Intergovernmental Affairs at DVS. On behalf of  
3 Commissioner Laurie Sutton and DVS we would like to  
4 extend our appreciation for the citywide enthusiasm  
5 and support for New York City's upcoming Fleet Week  
6 and Memorial Day events. Every day we see our city  
7 wrap its arms closer around veteran community in a  
8 collective effort to become more military friendly.  
9 We are pleased to be with you here today to discuss  
10 the package of proposals before this committee, and  
11 advocate on behalf of our city's veterans and their  
12 families. I would like now to address the proposed  
13 reconsidered legislation T2019-4398, which would  
14 require the Department of Veteran Services to make  
15 publicly available on its website the report on  
16 veterans receiving certain city services as required  
17 by Local Law 23 of 2015. Local Law 23 of 2015 first  
18 introduced by Council Member Paul Vallone requires  
19 the Mayor's Office of Operations to report in writing  
20 on the total number of veterans and their spouses who  
21 applied for and been approved my Mitchell Lama  
22 housing. Number 2: the total number of VA exempt  
23 mobile food vending licenses and food vending permits  
24 issued by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene  
25 to veterans. Number 3: The number of general vending

2 licenses issued by the Department of Consumer Affairs  
3 to veterans. Number 4: The total number of veterans  
4 who submitted an application to DCA for a general  
5 vending license Number 5: The total number of  
6 veterans residing in the city who utilized a HUD VASH  
7 Voucher and Number 6: The total number of veteran  
8 applicants for the Veteran Civil Service Credit for  
9 Civil Service examinations. Local Law 23 increase  
10 awareness about the city sources for veterans and  
11 their families by requiring the Office of Operations  
12 to provide this report to three entities. Number 1  
13 to DVS, number 2 to the New York City Veterans,  
14 Advisory Board, an independent Council whose members  
15 appointed by both the City Council and the Mayor  
16 advocate for veterans throughout the five boroughs,  
17 and number 3, the City Council itself. The report  
18 identified in this this resolution is already  
19 available to the public through multiple channels and  
20 noted above. DVS shares the reports with our  
21 partners. The 11 member of the VAB share the report  
22 as they deem appropriate, and we do not know to whom  
23 the Council Speaker's Office disseminates the report  
24 but DVS is proud to advance transparency four our  
25 constituents through dissemination of this and other

2 relevant reporting about New York City's veteran  
3 population. We will continue to share the report  
4 when requested and hope the City Council takes  
5 similar steps and we're happy to work with the  
6 Council to take further steps towards our shared  
7 goals. I would like now to address the resolutions  
8 proposed today 0568 of 2018 proposed by Council  
9 Member Rosenthal and 0844 of 2019 proposed by Council  
10 Member Cabrera. Resolution 0056-2018, aligns with  
11 DVS' missions to serve all New York City veterans  
12 including traditionally under-recognized populations  
13 such as women veterans. Since the inception of our  
14 nation, women have served whether by fighting on the  
15 battle field themselves or providing essential  
16 assistance that made it possible for other s to do  
17 so. Margaret Corbin exemplifies the spirit of  
18 service that will inspire future generations of women  
19 to similarly serve their country. It is on fitting  
20 that we honor her service and sacrifice and indeed  
21 the contributions of all women service members and  
22 veterans with the renaming of one of our nation's  
23 most essential institutions dedicated to veterans'  
24 care, the VA. Resolution 0844-209 honors the  
25 thousands of brave Americans and allied soldiers

2 whose courage turned the tide of history 75 years ago  
3 this June. In President Dwight D. Eisenhower's  
4 letter distributed to the 175,000-member  
5 expeditionary force on the eve of the invasion he  
6 wrote: The eyes of the world are upon you. The  
7 hopes and prayers of liberty loving people march with  
8 you. This resolution honors the spirit of those words  
9 ensuring that the eyes of the world remained upon the  
10 courageous soldiers who fought and defended the  
11 liberties we hold dear. In conclusion, DVS applauds  
12 the City Council for its leadership in formally  
13 recognizing the dignity of our brothers and sisters  
14 in service over the course of history. We look  
15 forward to the continued partnership with the Council  
16 and advocating for veterans and their families in New  
17 York City. We thank you for this opportunity to meet  
18 today, and at this time I would be happy to address  
19 your questions.

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. So,  
21 Local Law 23 you mentioned that you already  
22 disseminate this information. So, according to the  
23 Bill 82 (sic) reported from writing. Right, so you  
24 did mention that DVS shares the reports with our  
25 partners and 11 members of the VAB. So, how-how-how

2 difficult would it be to—I mean is this in writing?  
3 Like who do you—who do you send it to? Tell me  
4 exactly the procedure how you share it.

5 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: So, I don't have a  
6 list of the people who we've shared the report with.  
7 We get the report at the same time, we presume, as  
8 the other members of--the other recipients of the  
9 report, which is the City Council Speaker's Office  
10 and the 11 members of the VAB.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, you share it  
12 with the City Council Speaker's Office?

13 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: No, sorry. This  
14 report is not produced by DVS. This report is  
15 produced by the Mayor's Office of Operations. They  
16 send it to DVS and we're the recipients of the  
17 report--

18 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

19 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: --as is the City  
20 Council Speaker's Office and the members of the VAB.

21 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Is it also  
22 on DVS' websites?

23 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: Not at this time.

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. So, okay, so,  
25 according to this bill maybe you—you're basically

2 saying that it's already been reporting--reported so  
3 you don't support this bill, right?

4 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: No, what we're saying  
5 is that DVS is not the owner of the report. We don't  
6 produce the report. We are recipients of the report.  
7 We understand that the intention of this bill is to  
8 increase transparency--

9 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes.

10 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: --and we're happy to  
11 work with the Council to figure out the best ways to  
12 ensure that we can increase transparency.

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, so through  
14 this bill this is to increase transparency, right?

15 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, let's--let's do  
17 that.

18 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: Yes.

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes, so I--so if  
20 you're getting--if from the Mayor's of--the Mayor's o  
21 Operation, then now you have in your possession and  
22 the role of DVS is to disseminate the information  
23 right? So--

24 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: Right.



2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --what Is the big  
3 deal that you receive this information to promptly  
4 put it on your website to disseminate the information  
5 opposed to saying that DVS shares your report with  
6 our partners.

7 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: So, we--

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, obviously it's  
9 not enough, right?

10 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: Sure and we are happy  
11 to discuss the best way to get it online whether it's  
12 through our offices or through the Mayor's Office of  
13 Operations. One of the things we wanted to make sure  
14 that was understood was that we don't produce the  
15 report ourselves.

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing]  
17 what's fine, but a lot of things—a lot of things DVS  
18 doesn't produce, right? So you get information. You  
19 may get it from different sources--

20 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: Yes.

21 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --and then part of  
22 DVS' job is to properly disseminate this information,  
23 right? So, no one is denying that you're not  
24 getting—that you're not producing this information,  
25 but you are receiving it. So, once your receive it,

2 how it's part of DVS, Department of Veteran Services  
3 now it's your role to take that information whatever  
4 information you receive whether it's in the city in  
5 the state in the federal government. Now the job of  
6 DVS that's what the role of DVS is, is to then  
7 properly disseminate the information and to have  
8 transparency all around. So, if you are interested  
9 in having conversations then you would support this  
10 bill and say this is a great bill, and that now lets  
11 it down with Alicka Ampry-Samuel and let's figure out  
12 how we could do better. [background comment]

13           GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: And we agree. We  
14 think we're happy to discuss all the ways that  
15 transparency is currently achieved throughout the-  
16 through all the enumerated partners. We'd love to,  
17 you know what methods this Council uses to  
18 disseminate this report also when it receives it, and  
19 we'd love to talk about what the best effective ways  
20 in the future might be to get this report out whether  
21 it's through the City Council's website or us or ops,  
22 we'd love to continue those conversations with you  
23 down the road.

24           CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, one thing I'm  
25 not sure of is that if DVS is-would love to have

2 these conversations then they would support this  
3 bill, and then say look, we'd love to have a  
4 conversation. We're supporting this bill. It's a  
5 great bill. Let's have these conversations, but if  
6 you're going to say let's have these conversations  
7 without supporting a bill that leads to these  
8 conversations, and then it's a problem.

9 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: I think that  
10 conversations are evolving, and this is the beginning  
11 of a conversation. We thank Council Member Ampry-  
12 Samuel for bringing this and bringing this to-to  
13 light, for starting this discussion, and as you  
14 mentioned this is--this is the beginning of the  
15 conversation and we look forward to where it evolves.

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, why isn't DVS  
17 supporting this?

18 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: So, there--there is not  
19 a--this is not to say that DVS does not support the  
20 spirit of the bill. The challenges is this is not  
21 something that DVS owns.

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: But it's not  
23 everything that DVS owns.

24 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: So we want to make  
25 sure that we are the appropriate parties to

2 disseminate this broadly because there are—we are one  
3 of three recipients. The City Council is a  
4 recipient, the VAB is a recipient and DVS is a  
5 recipient. So, we want to have conversations to  
6 ensure that we are the best vehicle to post this  
7 publicly on our website. The other element is we  
8 can't control the—necessary the—the timing or the  
9 context that is provided with the report itself. So,  
10 we want to make sure that we have the appropriate  
11 conversations to make sure that is the—the right path  
12 forward.

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, I just want to  
14 say this was supposed to be a very short hearing,  
15 [laughter] and can you explain to everyone what is  
16 the role of DVS?

17 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: So, I—just to clarify,  
18 we do support the bill. We do support the idea of  
19 putting this information out. We want to make sure  
20 that it's understood, though, that we don't own the  
21 report itself, and we don't own the data that is  
22 producing the report.

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Does DVS own all  
24 the information that they disseminate, and all the  
25 information that you give out and you let people know

2 what services DVS does, and what services and  
3 resources veterans are eligible for? Yes or no.

4 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: No.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: No. So again, I  
6 understand that DVS doesn't own this information.

7 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: Okay.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, just like  
9 everything else, that DVS does not own, and the role  
10 of DVS is to disseminate the information properly.  
11 This way all advocates and veterans understand what  
12 resources are available. So, you just said you do  
13 support the bill before on the testimony. You really  
14 don't support the bill because you're already doing  
15 this, but obviously not doing enough.

16 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: So, we--

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] So,  
18 how can we get DVS to support this bill?

19 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: I would say in  
20 the conversations that directly proceed this here as  
21 we mentioned for this at the beginning of the  
22 conversation, this is the beginning of the  
23 discussions, and we are happy to talk about what the  
24 next steps might be, and as we continue along, you

2 know, this-this bill progression throughout the City  
3 Council.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, I will not  
5 accept that because I'm still waiting to receive  
6 answers from the last hearing. There's some  
7 outstanding questions I had at the last hearing and I  
8 only received half of those responses. So, off line,  
9 we're having difficulties receiving responses. I  
10 could print it out if you want, and I could bring it  
11 down here. Can you print it out for her? Okay, and  
12 I'll send you what you did respond from the last  
13 hearing, and what you didn't respond from the last  
14 hearing, and that's supposed to be an offline  
15 conversation.

16 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: Council Member,  
17 we'd be glad to have those discussions with you, but  
18 we'd love to touch you (sic) talk about the crux of  
19 this hearing. So, we-we-we're fine to follow up on  
20 those that you believe are still outstanding, but for  
21 right now, I think it's most appropriate that we  
22 focus on the bill at hand, and I think it's also most  
23 appropriate that we again highlight that we are  
24 interested in talking about how we can achieve  
25 greater transparency further on down the line.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: But by not-by not  
3 supporting this bill, it's not-you're not proving  
4 that you want to have conversations about this. I'm  
5 going-I'm going to have-I'm going to have my  
6 colleague ask questions before I continue.

7 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: Thank you for  
8 your questions, Council Member.

9 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: If I could make one  
10 more clarifying remark. We agree with the idea that  
11 this information should be shared publicly, should be  
12 transparent. There are some details that we want to  
13 make sure that we are clear on for instance about the  
14 date, about adding contextual information perhaps  
15 that might make it more useful. So, those kinds of  
16 details we think are important to include posting  
17 this information.

18 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, so usually  
19 when a bill is passed then there's conversations  
20 between the City Council and DVS and the Mayor's  
21 Office regarding to what you just mentioned--

22 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: Uh-hm.

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --going through  
24 okay what needs to be reported and-and how-how can we  
25 do better, but if you don't support the bill, it's

2 like there's nothing to talk about. Okay, we—we're  
3 going to do what—we are—we are going to do whatever  
4 we want to do. So, you have to give something and  
5 then we could have a conversation exactly what you  
6 just mentioned. Okay, how—how is this bill going to  
7 work, right?

8                   GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: I don't think  
9 that's quite reflecting how conversations work, but  
10 attain we are more than happy to talk about how we  
11 can reach a mutual—mutually beneficial arrangement  
12 for this particular bill.

13                   CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, in this  
14 Administration even when we pass bills, it's  
15 difficult for this Administration even to implement  
16 those bills. I still have bills that were passed  
17 that we're still waiting for the Administration to  
18 implement and that's what—and that's with passing  
19 bills. Imagine if we don't pass it, it's never going  
20 to get done. So, I'm going to go to my colleague,  
21 but first I want to recognize Council Member Paul  
22 Vallone. Thank you and I'll go to Alicka Ampry-  
23 Samuel.

24                   COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: So, on  
25 February 26<sup>th</sup> when you held a hearing and I had a



2 couple of questions, I remember the feeling that I  
3 have now is the same exact feeling that I had on  
4 February 26<sup>th</sup> because I sat and I remember saying  
5 it's been an hour and a half, and I've been listening  
6 to the Commissioner Sutton just talk about all of  
7 these great things that DVS was doing on behalf of  
8 veterans and families in New York City, and we heard  
9 over and over and over about programs and—and tabling  
10 and I remember saying I've been sitting for an hour  
11 and a half, and I don't feel anything that you're  
12 saying. That's what I said to the Commissioner at  
13 that time, and I said and I definitely don't feel the  
14 impact in my community, and so I thought this  
15 particular bill was just kind of like a no-brainer  
16 like, you know, just post it on the website. You  
17 know just report out on, you know, the Local Law so  
18 that we can know what's happening, and figure out  
19 where there are gaps and how we can be helpful, and  
20 so to hear oh, you know, we're supportive of the  
21 essence or the spirit of the bill, I'm like, come on,  
22 what kind of—like literally it sounds like  
23 bureaucratic like crap, right? Because I also heard  
24 you say a couple of times, you know, we send it to  
25 the Speaker's Office and so the Council—the City

2 Council has it. So, what are you doing with that  
3 information, and that's exactly what I said in  
4 February that the veterans and the families who are  
5 going to, you know, figure out where resources are,  
6 some of them may be able to go online, but to say  
7 that I'm going to go to my elected official to figure  
8 out how to run around and get my, you know, services  
9 as a veteran that's—that's crazy to even think that  
10 that's something that would happen because that's  
11 not—that's not what they do. Like the go and. you  
12 know, they deploy all over the world and they're  
13 connected to the federal government, and then when  
14 they come home there's still that connection to the  
15 federal government, and they're trying to figure out  
16 what's available to them as veterans, and there are  
17 programs and resources supposedly that are available  
18 to them, but it's not getting to them. It's not  
19 reaching them. So then to think there should be some  
20 kind of third parties involved to be a connection  
21 between the city, I said in February, you know,  
22 what's a direct connection to the veterans? Like  
23 have you decided to set up a table in the VA Hospital  
24 on a daily basis or in the—the VA Office in Downtown  
25 Manhattan. I said that in February, and so to me

2 it's like—like just—just, you know, saying something  
3 is the case and it's not really that, and so this  
4 would really make it transparent, and if you're doing  
5 the work, and you want to do the work and, you know,  
6 you're supportive of the spirit of it, then just do  
7 it. That's the part I don't understand right now,  
8 and it's very frustrating because again, I'm a member  
9 of the New York City Council, you know, and my  
10 husband now who is part of the Foreign Service who is  
11 still a disabled veteran, we—when he comes home we  
12 still have to go 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, and I'm still sitting  
13 in the lobby looking at all the other veterans who  
14 have, you know, sacrificed their—their —their lives.  
15 They sacrificed everything for this country, and then  
16 they're sitting in New York City, which is like the  
17 greatest city in America, and we have agencies that  
18 are in place that are supposed to help them, but  
19 they're not getting that on the ground. So, I really  
20 don't understand how like this is—this is—this can't  
21 be done. If there's a website, and you receive a  
22 report, then put the—the information on the website.  
23 What's the difficulty there?

24 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: So thank you for  
25 sharing all of this with us, and we—this is something

2 that we can do, and this is something that we want to  
3 explore the best way to do. Just from my perspective  
4 in Public Affairs and Communications, I want to make  
5 sure that whatever we put on our website is the most  
6 useful information possible. The report--

7 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: So, what  
8 can you put on the website? Because you're Public,  
9 Public Relations and Public Affairs and so  
10 Communications. So, you're the experts of this.  
11 This is why you're sitting at the table right now.  
12 So, explain to us what can be put on the website  
13 right now.

14 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: What I think is the  
15 most useful information to put on the website is  
16 information that has context.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: So, give me  
18 an example.

19 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: So, an example would  
20 be for instance the reasons why some metrics go up or  
21 go down as is reported in this particular document  
22 that we're talking about the Mayor's Office of  
23 Operations Report. I would want to know well, why do  
24 those numbers go up and down? What does it mean?  
25 What do these numbers mean? Where's the context that

2 explains what this is? This report doesn't have any  
3 sort of context, and so we would love to work with  
4 you to determine the best way to present this  
5 information so that it's actually useful to the  
6 veterans and their family members who are getting the  
7 information

8 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: So, last—so  
9 in February, I talked about two families, two veteran  
10 families that are homeless, and one lived in an  
11 abandoned building, right and since that hearing, I  
12 was told—when I walked out of that hearing I was  
13 told, you know what, give me the information of that  
14 family so we can make sure they're doing what they're  
15 supposed to be doing. The city went to that—that  
16 building and said none of these families are supposed  
17 to be in here. Everybody got to get out and go back  
18 to the Pathway, go back to the shelter system from  
19 the beginning and they put the families in an even  
20 worse situation than—than they were in before I sat  
21 here and—and spoke about their situation, and they  
22 called me angry. So then I had to get all other kind  
23 of people involved to—to, you know, to assist the  
24 family and then get on the phone and say, what the  
25 hell were you all thinking when I went out there?

2 Right, and so I would like—so I wanted to know how  
3 many families are in the shelter system who are  
4 veterans and how many of them have applied for  
5 services or—or vouchers or—or, you know, housing  
6 through DVS, and then get that information posted  
7 online so we can know what you're doing, and know,  
8 you know, if there's 200 families and only two of  
9 them received something, you know, a voucher. So  
10 what's the problem here? Do we need to get more  
11 funding for housing, for—specifically for veteran  
12 families? So, why is that difficult? Why do we need  
13 like a fancy matrix to figure out what the problem  
14 is? Why we can't just report the actual numbers?

15           ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: So, it is possible to  
16 report the numbers. It is possible to report the  
17 numbers, but I'm saying that from perspective having  
18 worked in the field of communications for a long  
19 time, numbers by themselves don't tell the whole  
20 story, and it doesn't provide necessarily the most  
21 useful information. So, what we would like to do is  
22 work with you to figure out first from your  
23 perspective if you're saying just the numbers alone  
24 aren't enough, then we—I hear you on that. If you're  
25 saying that you have--the reason for this report to

2 be posted is posted online so that you can have a  
3 better understanding of what's happening, but I think  
4 there needs to be more context provided with these  
5 numbers, but the challenge is that we don't produce  
6 this report. So, for us to find that context means a  
7 different—a different kind of partnership, which  
8 we're happy to explore, but it's just I think that  
9 it's not as straightforward as just posting the  
10 numbers. That's the perspective that--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL:

12 [interposing] And so, and then the problem is we've  
13 got too many smart people around the table trying to  
14 make decisions as to what should be transparent or  
15 not, right? And I'm sorry that even might take up  
16 too much, and I'll—I'll

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] We  
18 have plenty of it, alright.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: [laughter]  
20 And-and-and you all correct me if I'm wrong. Like I  
21 think that' the problem because you know, I've—I've  
22 been in the social service field, and I—and I get,  
23 you know that it's—it's difficult to be able to look  
24 at numbers and—and speak to what the numbers are  
25 because there's so much concepts around, it but at

2 the same time, numbers are important, and you can  
3 have that conversation about the numbers in another  
4 like roundtable discussion, but we first need to know  
5 what the numbers are and report that out to the  
6 people, right, because if you're not being  
7 transparent, then you're having all these  
8 conversations trying to figure things out around the  
9 table and can never figure it out because people are  
10 jumping from one administration to the next. Because  
11 one, you know, when the new mayor is in place or a  
12 new Speaker, I don't know, whoever is in place,  
13 things change, and then now we to have this next  
14 conversation again starting in 2021. Where just  
15 reported their number—excuse me, just report the  
16 numbers, and we talk about the numbers and figure  
17 this out.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Right. You're  
19 wherever I was four years ago, which was when we  
20 first came, there was not a number anywhere to be  
21 found, and these old—well they're old now. Three  
22 years ago when we passed these bills was the first  
23 attempt against post-office to actual agency to  
24 actually start this process, and it's frustrating and  
25 a lot of it what I've seen is it's sometimes unfair



2 to this group because they're so small, and a lot of  
3 the work that's being done is other interagency work,  
4 but we—we want the numbers. Remember the mental  
5 health hearing we had las month--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Uh-hm.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: --when you  
8 explaining to about that, and they had information  
9 because it was coming from DOH. It wasn't coming  
10 from TDS. So, so much work has to be done to get  
11 veterans the resources and the cooperation from the  
12 other agencies to get them the data that we want to  
13 see so we can plan how and what's. And I feel--so I'm  
14 agreeing with you, and it's just we've had this  
15 conversation time and time again. We're getting  
16 there because of where we were four years. It's an  
17 office with three people, I was actually nervous. We  
18 get nervous. (sic)

19 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: An agency with  
20 a website.

21 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: So, one the things  
22 that--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL:  
24 [interposing] And we just want the information on the  
25 website.

2 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: Yes, one the things--

3 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL:

4 [interposing] One of the upload things.

5 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: --we wanted to remind  
6 the Council about was that we do have a new Local  
7 Law, Local Law 44 which is enacting requiring the  
8 agency to report on our numbers on a yearly basis I  
9 believe in December of every year. So between the  
10 PMMR, the MMR and the Local Law 44, there'll be these  
11 three points in time over the course of the year  
12 where we be reporting on robust figures that the  
13 agency either produces itself or has access from  
14 other agencies. So, it's not that we are number  
15 resistant, or opposed to posting numbers, we want to  
16 make sure we're in compliance with the reporting  
17 requirements that we have and we look forward to  
18 compiling this information for the report in-in  
19 December.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Yeah, and  
21 also a reminder that it's actually advocates that  
22 were, you know, asking for this information to be  
23 online, you know, and you know, I know it mentions in  
24 your testimony, you know, who gets it, the 11 members  
25 of the VAB, and, you know, as they deem appropriate

2 and, you know, report with your partners, you know,  
3 but if like somebody advocates--

4                   ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: [interposing] I  
5 understand and I think that one of the--look, we've--  
6 we've made our--clear our concerns about the context  
7 around the numbers. We also hear you when you say  
8 that we do the numbers as a starting point, and so I  
9 think we can support that and move forward to figure  
10 how to provide the best context to put on our website  
11 to make the numbers make sense. I think that DVS can  
12 support that.

13                   COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay, thank  
14 you.

15                   CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Paul.

16                   COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, Mr.  
17 Chair. Thank you. I know I came in a little late,  
18 but I--I know we're discussing the current bill and  
19 the resolutions and where we went from the past bill.  
20 So, I guess it's interesting to absolutely  
21 supporting. Any time we can continue to grow this.  
22 I think I just I guess because over the last four  
23 years--and that's why we're having that conversation--  
24 can bring a little bit of that consoling for you on  
25 how much you've done over the last couple of years to

2 get to this point, but what we're asking for is the  
3 continued frustration that you see because so little  
4 was accounted for before. There's so much  
5 information now that we need to get this data.  
6 Otherwise we can't then—just like the Council Member  
7 said, if we want for then next administration, who  
8 knows what the focus is going to be. I mean we had a  
9 Veterans Day this year. So, we decided four years  
10 ago it's time to do that. So, even last month's  
11 hearing with the chair and focusing on mental health,  
12 and Alicka telling about her husband, and what he's  
13 went through, and then so much of that data wasn't in  
14 your hands. It was in other agencies, and I think  
15 that's where there's continuous bills coming out  
16 whether it's DFTA, whether it's here saying you need  
17 this data because you're the Veterans agency, and if  
18 another whether it's Thrive, or Department of  
19 Buildings or Housing or whatever aspect a veteran is  
20 applying for services, you need to know that. You  
21 need to know the case management file that was set  
22 up. You need to be notified, you need to keep a list  
23 for that, and it needs to be done. Not just thrown  
24 on your desk, but giving tools to handle that, and  
25 that's what this committee is here to do, and whether

2 it's budget season to make sure you get more because  
3 what you do with the pennies you have is crazy  
4 depending on the veterans that we're working on, but  
5 we want to continue to grow that and give you the  
6 tools that are needed to get this data so that it's  
7 just like yeah, it's more than the data. It's the  
8 context, too, but first, we need some data to figure  
9 out the content. So, I think it's a--it's a  
10 continuing work. So, I support these like we've done  
11 in the past, and I think if you could, you were  
12 saying in your perspective how you were, and-and one  
13 question we just received and what would you do  
14 differently.

15 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: What would I do  
16 differently with respect to this--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Uh-hm.

18 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: --reporting  
19 requirement. I think that I would refer back to the  
20 agency that produces the report. They are the ones  
21 that gather the data. They're the ones that produce  
22 the report. They're the ones that release the  
23 report, and so I would ask would they not be an  
24 agency or an office that is better positioned to  
25 release the report. We don't have control. For

2 instance, over the timing of when it comes out, how  
3 robust the data that is included in the report,  
4 whether there is any contextual information provided.  
5 I from my own perspective as a communications  
6 professional would want to see--

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: [interposing]

8 Yeah, but then that would--that would--that would be  
9 the same--that would be circumventing every agency and  
10 every hearing that we're having. So, it would depend  
11 on the company that's actually doing the report.  
12 That--that just can't look, otherwise city agencies on  
13 the whole we would never be able to hold them  
14 accountable because they would say well that company  
15 could do it so let's find out. It--that's not the  
16 answer that we can work with because it doesn't work  
17 in the system that we're handed. So, we have to be  
18 responsible for the contractors in the RFP that's out  
19 and who does the work and gives us the data, then we  
20 have to take that data and make it our own and figure  
21 out how to do that. So, you've got to be able to do  
22 that with this information, and if they're not  
23 turning it around, then, of course, we're standing  
24 with you on either never having that company again or  
25 find out what happened, the information, but you're

2 not alone on agencies being dependent on someone  
3 else's data. But we need that so when we're getting  
4 yelled out together we go back with the company and  
5 say hey, listen, I can't show up at this hearing  
6 without that data.

7 ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: So, yes, understood.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, Mr.  
9 Chair.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. So, in  
11 other words, so you support the bill now, right? I'm  
12 not leaving until you support this bill. I'm telling  
13 you right now. [laughter] I've got all day. I'll-  
14 I'll sit here 'til Memorial Day. [laughter]

15 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: We support the  
16 fact that this is made-is brought to-brought to  
17 forefront, but this has now become robust issue when  
18 that's loud and visible, and now that it is, we can  
19 go about talking about what the best ways for  
20 transparency might be. As Council Member Vallone  
21 said, working with our stakeholder agencies, working  
22 with you, working with our advocates. Let's talk  
23 about how we can really come to a resolution that  
24 benefits the veterans' community, agencies, the City  
25 Council, everyone involved. So, we support the fact

2 that is the beginning of a conversation that will  
3 eventually lead to something productive.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, do you support  
5 this bill? [laughter] Yes or no?

6 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: We support that  
7 the city, that--that--

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] No,  
9 it's--do you support this bill?

10 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: Council Member,  
11 again, I think we've--

12 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: We can stay all  
13 day. Do you support this bill? Does DVS support  
14 this bill? DVS' job, their roll is to disseminate  
15 information to advocates. So, we don't have to work  
16 with the Mayor's Office. DVS needs to work with the  
17 Mayor's Office to come up with what should be  
18 reported and how it should be reported and more  
19 information you need, but first we need to start by  
20 agreeing that this is important and that DVS supports  
21 the bill, and then we could discuss what information  
22 we need to get in order to disseminate. So, now if  
23 you have a veteran that needs information, and we  
24 say, Oh, go on DVS' website. Oh, but it's not there,  
25 it's not there. It should be, but it's not. So,



2 it's important for DVS to support this bill and then  
3 you could have conversations with the Mayor's Office.  
4 You could have conversations with advocates. You  
5 could have conversations with Council Members who are  
6 sitting here today, and then we could work out of  
7 what needs to be in the body of that bill in order to  
8 have the proper information like you mentioned,  
9 Alexis. So do you support this bill? Who makes the  
10 decision before you got here? Who made a decision to  
11 not to support this bill? Whose decision was that?

12 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: Council Member,  
13 when we evaluate a bill, we draw in—we take the input  
14 from stakeholder agencies. We take the input from  
15 agency leadership. We gauge what the purpose, what  
16 the impact of the bill might be, and we discuss  
17 whether that's that the—the most proper way to  
18 achieve the goals that, you know, it may set out to  
19 be.

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, who made the  
21 ultimate decision? Before you walked in here today,  
22 who typed up this paper?

23 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: The—the ultimate  
24 decision--

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Who  
3 made the decision for whatever—who's working on your  
4 test—on—on your testimony?

5 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: The ultimate on  
6 what eventually passes through the City Council is a  
7 result of discussions, which happen with the Mayor's  
8 Office, with relevant stakeholder agencies, with the  
9 City Council and we look forward to what the ultimate  
10 disposition with this bill is.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, why isn't  
12 anyone here from the Mayor's Office testifying? If  
13 they're—if they're part of the decision on these  
14 bills and not to support it, which is pretty much  
15 like Aletha mentioned, it's common sense, why isn't  
16 someone here from the Mayor's Office to giving more  
17 details of why they are giving DVS some information  
18 that we're supporting this bill because it's not  
19 something that needs to be done?

20 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: So, we support  
21 the bill in its intent like any bill, like any other  
22 bill that doesn't register or process with our role,  
23 appointed with, we all apprised it, and we look  
24 forward to engaging in that with you.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, could we move  
3 this to the next Stated Meeting?

4 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: I think we can  
5 move this to--

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] I  
7 get your point.

8 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: --I think we can  
9 move this offline to discussions between your office,  
10 our office, the stakeholder agencies.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] So  
12 you--

13 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: We can move--  
14 that's the next step in this process.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] So  
16 you want to get back on offline? You sure you want  
17 to get to that because we could sit here for another  
18 two hours, and I have the email thing that waiting  
19 for information.

20 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: Great. We'll--  
21 we'll--we'll have that conversation with you offline,  
22 Council Member.

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I'm so happy.

24 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: And thank you--and  
25 thank you for your questions.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Oh, great.  
3 Have a nice Memorial Day.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah. Okay.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: [off mic] I  
6 feel disrespected. A family should be efficient for  
7 this—

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] I'll  
9 wait 'til you, yeah. Yeah, turn on your mic.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Okay.  
11 [laughter] Like—like you we're—we're smiling, you  
12 know, but I like I feel disrespected right now. So—  
13 like this is so important for me. My husband right  
14 now is in an airport because he was going to be here,  
15 right, but this—this—this hearing was scheduled for  
16 1:00, right, and my husband was at—he said my husband  
17 is getting here at 1:00 so is going to be late  
18 because they had to push it up to 10:00, but that's  
19 how important this is. And the advocates who—who are  
20 pushing for this just to have the information placed  
21 on a website, right, it's so disrespectful to me  
22 because it's like playing games. It's like we hear  
23 it and this is just—we hear it over and over and  
24 over, and I'm not the controversial kind of person.  
25 That's not me. I just like to work and actually get

2 things done, but to me I feel like this is  
3 disrespectful to the people who has given their all  
4 to this country. And all we're asking for is for the  
5 DVS to put information that you receive on the  
6 website so that partners, advocacy groups, the  
7 Council. If anyone knows who cares about veterans  
8 and their families could have the information that  
9 they need to provide them with the services and  
10 resources they need. Plan and simple.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, I would like to  
12 take a 10-minute recess. So maybe DVS can make some  
13 phone calls, and we'll continue—we'll reconvene in 10  
14 minutes. So, now it is 10:50. We will reconvene and  
15 have testimony from our advocates. We'll come back  
16 in 10 minutes. Thank you. [pause]

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Thank you  
18 very much. So—so I just want to ask the panel  
19 regarding Local Law 23 if you could believe—if you  
20 believe that we can reach an agreement or get support  
21 from DVS, Department of Veteran Services in  
22 supporting Local Law 23 to bring transparency and to  
23 everyone, to advocates, to veterans and ensuring that  
24 information gets disseminated properly especially on  
25 DVS—on DVS's website in regards to working with the

2 Mayor--Mayor's Office of Operations, and getting this  
3 information to the Department of Veteran Services so  
4 we could better get this information out for the  
5 public?

6                   GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: Thank you, Mr.  
7 Chair and thank you bill sponsor Council Member  
8 Ampry-Samuel. So, we do support the aims and the  
9 intents of the goals of the bill, and with a few  
10 tweaks with some--with some adjustments, I think we  
11 can have a bill ready for passage.

12                   CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you.

13                   ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: If I could then say  
14 something. (sic)

15                   CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes, of course.

16                   ALEXIS WICHOWSKI: I wanted to address  
17 that Council Member Ampry-Samuel specially this sense  
18 that you feel disrespected and as a new member of the  
19 Committee--the Committee on veterans, this is  
20 distressing to us, and we want to make sure that we  
21 work with you collaboratively to come up with  
22 solutions that will make our together be the most  
23 productive with veterans and their families. My  
24 whole perspective on this particular bill has been to  
25 make sure we provide context so that people aren't

2 just looking at a sheet of number, but they have an  
3 understanding of what they need. So, we look forward  
4 to working with your office to achieve those goals.

5 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: Chair Deutsch, we  
6 will follow up with your office in regards to those  
7 other outstanding items that you brought to our  
8 attention as well. Thank you for that.

9 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, thank  
10 you very much. Thank you so much. Happy Memorial  
11 Day.

12 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: Happy Memorial  
13 Day to you, too. Thank you so much.

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you so much.

15 GENERAL COUNSEL HENRY: We're just  
16 supportive of that understanding.

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. [pause]  
18 So, our first panel, I'd like to call Alexis  
19 Wichowski. [background comments/pause] Oh, it's  
20 you. [background comments] Sorry. I didn't know  
21 your last name, [laughs] Alexis. Okay, Coco,  
22 Samantha Bodeem (sp?) and Kristen. Let's just get  
23 one more chair up there and we'll have everyone come  
24 up at one time. [pause] Hi. You can begin.

2           COCO CULHANE: Hi. I'm Coco Culhane, the  
3 Founder and Director of the Veteran Advocacy Project.  
4 We provide free legal services to veterans and their  
5 families. I just wanted to point out that this  
6 original bill when Paul Vallone introduced it about  
7 four years ago I think, included information on HRA  
8 and a lot of advocates in the community testified  
9 saying that it really doesn't go far enough, and by  
10 the time it made to the Mayor's Office, HRA was taken  
11 out, right. So, there's so much valuable data that's  
12 not being collected that could be. There's just no  
13 reason when we have a veterans job center. We should  
14 be tracking how many veterans are coming through  
15 there. How many veterans are on public benefits,  
16 what-what is the need. I mean this is so crucial to  
17 how fund services for veterans, how we, you know,  
18 plan programming. It's something that DVS should be  
19 asking for. It's just there's so much more data that  
20 should be regardless of whether or not it's DVS or  
21 the Mayor's Office, whomever it is, it can be worked  
22 out, but there's just-there's an opportunity to  
23 really better inform our services, our budgets, all  
24 of our efforts, and we hope that somebody pushed and  
25 played, you know, even take the bill even further and



2 ask for even more data, and be tracking other things  
3 like hospitals. How many veterans are going into  
4 emergency rooms? I mean these things are just so  
5 crucial to how we support the entire veteran  
6 community in New York. Thank you. [pause]

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. We took note  
8 of what you just said, and I'm going to send it over  
9 DVS and start DVSing. Okay, go ahead.

10 SAMANTHA KUBEK: Good morning and thank  
11 you for the opportunity. I'm here to speak regarding  
12 the renaming of the VA Hospital in Manhattan to the  
13 Margaret Cochran Corbin Campus. My name is Samantha  
14 Kubek and I'm staff attorney in the Legal Health  
15 Division of the New York Legal Assistance Group.  
16 This year Legal Help for Veterans Initiative will  
17 serve nearly 1,000 veterans. I staffed (sic) the  
18 nation's first legal clinics exclusively for women  
19 veterans the first of which was opened at the  
20 Manhattan VA. We created these clinic in response to  
21 the growing need of our women veteran clients. Women  
22 veterans are the fastest growing veteran population,  
23 but as more women veterans return to civilian life,  
24 many are facing new battle at home. My clinics  
25 opened with the goal to provide a safe space for

2 women veterans that would be uniquely theirs and in  
3 so doing help to make them feel more comfortable in  
4 the VA's male dominated atmosphere. I've seen the  
5 first—I've seen first hand the ways in which  
6 providing a welcoming environment to women veterans  
7 can change the extent of our reach. Since 2015,  
8 Legal Health has held Know Your Rights trainings at  
9 the VA Hospital. About 60 veterans would attend each  
10 event, yet at most only one or two women would come.  
11 To combat this, we created a new training  
12 specifically for Women Veterans Legal Stand Down at  
13 the Manhattan VA. Thirty-five women attended the  
14 even, and many stayed afterwards to comment on the  
15 how welcome the training was. I continue to hope  
16 that my clinic and the ones created in its model  
17 since will help to create spaces within the VA where  
18 women veterans feel as though they belong, but  
19 continued work need to be done to shift the culture  
20 at the VA. New York can play a pivotal and highly  
21 visible role in leading the shift by renaming the  
22 Manhattan VA after Margaret Corbin. It would be the  
23 first VA hospital to be named after a female veteran,  
24 and signal our commitment to recognizing the  
25 existence and importance of women veterans. This

2 credible signaling will ensure a more inclusive VA  
3 culture and will aid in the dismantling of harmful  
4 cultural barriers. I appreciate the opportunity to  
5 speak to the Council about this issue, and engaging  
6 in further discussions about women veterans.

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you.

8 MALE SPEAKER: [off mic] Chairman Deutsch.  
9 [on mic] Oh, rain check. Chairman Deutsch,  
10 Chairwoman Ayala and distinguished members of the  
11 joint committee. On behalf of the Iraq and  
12 Afghanistan Veterans of America, and our more than  
13 425,000 members, I would like to thank you for the  
14 opportunity to testify here today. I'm a New Yorker,  
15 a naturalized citizen and a U.S. Army Iraq Veteran,  
16 at the VA I'm a master level social worker serving as  
17 a Senior Veteran Transition Manager with our Rapid  
18 Response Referral Program. I'm a veteran—I'm a VA  
19 Benefit lead, and RRRP is a high tech, high touch  
20 referral service for veterans and their families with  
21 a comprehensive case management component. We assist  
22 veterans of all areas regardless of resource status  
23 worldwide, confronting significant challenges like  
24 unemployment, financial or legal struggles,  
25 homelessness and mental health related issues. [bell]

2 To date RRRP has served over 9,000 veterans and  
3 family members nationwide and over a thousand in New  
4 York City alone providing critical support and  
5 resources to ensure that this city's veterans' needs  
6 are effectively met. Since its beginning, IAVA has  
7 fought for and has been successful in advocating for  
8 policies that are able to meet the needs of our new  
9 generation of veterans on local, state and federal  
10 levels. Our top six legislative priorities for 2019  
11 reflect that. While many of the issues we have  
12 championed have not been populated (sic) in the  
13 beginning, whether it is our stances on Don't Ask,  
14 Don't Tell, combatting the trans and women's role in  
15 the military, additional accountability or accounting  
16 (sic) for vets or updating of changing the IAVA model  
17 to reflect the—the fact that this institution honors  
18 the service and sacrifices of women vets. History  
19 has shown we've been on the right side of these  
20 issues. We stand by the fact that diversity is a  
21 force multiplier for our armed forces, and IAVA is  
22 proud of its record. Despite the ever growing  
23 contribution of women to our national defense, the  
24 American public still does not understand the extent  
25 of their involvement and sacrifice. For years, women

2 served in the front lines despite the Pentagon's  
3 official ban on women in combat. I've seen it first  
4 hand. From machine gunners or IAVs (sic) helping  
5 secure main supply routes, survival supplies to get  
6 where they're going not Navy Explosive Ordnance  
7 Disposal Technicians destroying IAVs, weapon stashes  
8 and blowing off hinges on doors during raids. They  
9 served where needed and went where the mission  
10 demanded. The lack of understanding unfortunately  
11 has also reverberated through the various systems of  
12 care available to them as veterans and has negatively  
13 impacted their post-military condition. The culture  
14 at the VA can seem like an equally unwelcoming place  
15 to women who are transitioning. The VA model mode  
16 does not help. To explicitly—it explicitly excludes  
17 women and their and their survivors from this  
18 mandate, and it reads as outdated. To care for him  
19 who shall have born the battle and for his widow and  
20 his orphan. Women veterans are becoming more  
21 prominent in American culture from the growing number  
22 of women veterans serving in Congress to the highest  
23 leadership positions among service branches, and  
24 veteran service organizations, women are stepping up  
25 and leading. While more women are joining the

2 military ranks, are filling combat roles at an  
3 increasing pace, and assume greater responsibilities  
4 and leadership, veteran services for them must stop  
5 falling behind what is available to their male  
6 brethren. Every woman veteran enters the VA  
7 nationwide and are not recognized for their service.  
8 Every day my sisters in arms are looked past in  
9 favor—in favor of the familiar image of a man serving  
10 in uniform. Until this changes, IAVA's work will not  
11 be done. Almost 250 years after the first woman  
12 veteran received her earned benefits from the U.S.  
13 Government, women veterans are still fighting for  
14 recognition. It is past time for women veterans to  
15 be recognized for their service and sacrifice, and  
16 renaming in the Manhattan V.A. facility to Margaret  
17 Corbin V.A. Medical Center is one step forward in the  
18 larger campaign for that recognition. We still have a  
19 long way to go so that all Americans recognize  
20 veterans come in all shapes, sizes and genders so  
21 this is a step in the right direction. IAVA fully  
22 supports Resolution 568 to rename the Manhattan V.A.  
23 facility to the Margaret Corbin V.A. Medical Center.  
24 Increased reporting and transparency can allow  
25 stakeholders to identify underutilized services and

work towards solutions to connect veterans with those services. The Intro in front of the Committee today titled a Local Law to amend the Administrative Code for the City of New York in relation to making public the Mayor's Office of Operations report on veterans receiving certain city services would increase transparency in reporting within the Mayor Office of the Department of Veteran Services. Because this report would focus on a number of critical services for veterans living in NYC, such as the amount of HUD VASH Vouchers issued and Mitchell Lama Housing Applications, IAVA support this legislation.

Resolution Number 4-844 would officially recognize the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the D-Day, which occurred on June 6, 1944. D-Day was the largest amphibious assault in history led by, yeah, the veterans—to the eventual liberation of Western Europe. According to the U.S. National D-Day Memorial, at least 4,400 Americans—American service members were killed that day. Despite the high number of casualties, the operation was a resounding success and allowed the allied forces to establish a beach head in Europe. IAVA fully supports the resolution and thanks to— thanks the committee for honoring all the men and

2 women that served during D-Day 74 years ago. Members  
3 of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity  
4 to share IAVA's news on these issues today. I look  
5 forward to answering any questions you may have.  
6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, and  
8 thanks for all the support. Thank you.

9 KRISTEN ROUSE: Good morning

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: [interposing] Good  
11 morning.

12 KRISTEN ROUSE: --and thank you to Chair  
13 Deutsch and the Committee for the opportunity to  
14 testify today. My name is Kristen Rouse and I am a  
15 25-year veteran of the United States Army, Army  
16 Reserve and Army National Guard with service  
17 including three tours of duty in Afghanistan. I  
18 present testimony today on behalf to the New York  
19 City Veterans Alliance, a member driven grassroots  
20 policy advocacy and community building organization  
21 that advances veterans and families of civic leaders  
22 and presenting testimony on behalf of our members who  
23 are active stakeholders in our advocacy. Local Law 23  
24 of 2015 was among the first pieces of legislation we  
25 testified strongly in favor of back in 2015 when we



2 were newly formed as a New York City Veterans  
3 Alliance. We did so on the basis of an online survey  
4 of the New York City veterans community, which  
5 reflected strong support for better reporting and  
6 accountability of the services being delivered for  
7 our city's veterans and families. In recent years we  
8 have brought up the lack of transparency in our city'  
9 tracking and reporting of this data. We applaud  
10 Council Member Ampry-Samuel in introducing a bill to  
11 make this data visible not only within city  
12 government, but also to members of the public and our  
13 veterans' community who have sought information about  
14 how our city is serving veterans and families. With  
15 veteran homelessness on the rise, and as veterans and  
16 their families struggle to find affordable housing,  
17 well paying jobs that value their military service  
18 and the quality of life they deserve, we should be  
19 able to see that the city is reporting on and  
20 adjusting its delivery of services based on data.  
21 Yes, as my organization testified back in 2015, the  
22 data called for in Local Law 23 is really only just  
23 the start of ensuring New York City government is  
24 more responsive to the needs of the veteran  
25 community. In the years since, the New York City

2 Veterans Alliance pushed for veterans' veteran and  
3 military status to be included as a protected  
4 category of person in the New York City Human Rights  
5 Law, which we proudly accomplished with the support  
6 of then Public Advocate Tish James and then Council  
7 Member Jumaane Williams and this committee, and  
8 enshrined in Local Law 119 of 2017. Yet data on this  
9 new protected class has not been included in the  
10 mandated annual Mayor's Report on Social Indicators  
11 and Equity. Our call for data on veteran service  
12 members and their families to be included in the  
13 Mayor's report received a detailed mention in the  
14 2018 Report by the Mayor's Charter Revision  
15 Commission and I bring this issue to this committee  
16 for consideration toward making New York City  
17 government more transparent and more responsive to  
18 the veterans and military community. Inclusion of  
19 data in the Mayor's Report on Social Indicators and  
20 in Equity on veterans, service members and families  
21 related to affordable housing, employment, business  
22 ownership and other indicators tracked by federal and  
23 state agencies and prioritized in the past by city  
24 government, which further informed the policies and  
25 programs of city agencies, borough presidents,

2 community boards and other governmental bodies. It  
3 would also have the potential to inform future city  
4 planning and land use policy. This reporting would  
5 also align the protected status of veterans and  
6 military members with other protected classes of  
7 person reported in the Mayor's Report. As we have  
8 seen with Local Law 23 of 2015, it take the whole of  
9 our city government to commit to making veteran  
10 service members and their families an invisible  
11 demographic in our city's policy making and delivery  
12 of services. We urge passage of Council Member Ampry-  
13 Samuel's bill and we further urge this committee to  
14 take on meaningful inclusion of data on what our city  
15 government is doing for our community. We further  
16 urge this committee to take action to protect and  
17 foster growth of the budget for New York City Veteran  
18 Services. The Mayor's initial Budget Proposal  
19 reflected a cut of \$63,000. The Mayor's Executive  
20 Budget now cuts DVS' budget by \$118,000. On behalf  
21 of the members we represent, I state to you that the  
22 New York City Veterans Alliance firmly opposes cuts  
23 to this young and growing agency. New York City  
24 Budget must not be balanced on the backs of veterans  
25 and their families, a population that has been

2 underserved for decades by our city's governments and  
3 that DVS has only begun to reach out to over these  
4 last few years. As we testified in March of this  
5 year, there is much to be done to ensure DVS and  
6 other city agencies are delivering results for our  
7 community, but we cannot afford to take any steps  
8 backward in the funding of this agency. We regret  
9 that there's limited time to address all of the  
10 legislation on the docket for this hearing. We  
11 applaud the forward movement of Council Members  
12 Rosenthal's Resolution in support of federal  
13 legislation to name the Manhattan VA in honor of  
14 Revolutionary War Hero Margaret Corbin, who was  
15 severely injured in combat in Washington Heights  
16 Manhattan in November 1776. We are grateful for  
17 Senator Gillibrand, Senator Schumer, and  
18 Representatives Maloney S.B. Valazquez, and Nadler  
19 for championing this legislation and reintroducing it  
20 in March. I've included with this testimony the  
21 white paper on Margaret Crobin and women's access to  
22 V.A. healthcare that produced last fall, which  
23 precipitated the federal legislation, and I'm also  
24 including the fact sheet we presented to the New York  
25 City Veterans Advisory Board in March to dispel

2 misinformation being spread about my organization's  
3 painstaking work to press forward this initiatives to  
4 make Manhattan the first V.A. campus city-system wide  
5 to be named in honor of a woman veteran. The sheet  
6 also includes statements of support from advocacy  
7 organizations including those sitting here today, and  
8 city and state officials and members of Congress. We  
9 urge this committee and the full Council to pass this  
10 resolution in support of bringing the important  
11 legacy of Margaret Corbin to light, and recognizing  
12 that women have been fighting for our nation since  
13 1776. We further applaud and urge passage of Council  
14 Member Cabrera's worthy recognition of the heroes and  
15 historic actions that took place during the D-Day  
16 invasion 75 years ago. On behalf of the New York  
17 City Veterans Alliance, I thank you for the  
18 opportunity to testify today. Pending your questions,  
19 this concludes my testimony.

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you  
21 Christine. I just want to say thank you for your  
22 support and advocacy on Margaret Corbin renaming,  
23 rededication. I have in my district, I think I  
24 mentioned it to you before, but I have one street,  
25

2 that I rededicated to Margaret Corbin just a few  
3 years ago.

4 KRISTEN ROUSE: I see that.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah. So, any  
6 questions? Comments?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER AMPRY-SAMUEL: Thank you  
8 for your service and thank you for all that you do on  
9 behalf of veterans and their families, and I look  
10 forward to working with you.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Alright, thank-  
12 thank you all for coming here today. Happy Memorial  
13 Day, and-and thanks for all your support throughout  
14 the year. This hearing is now 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 June 13, 2019