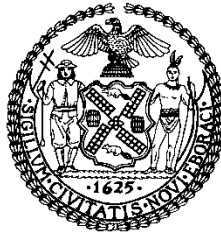


Committee on Veterans
Nuzhat Chowdhury, *Counsel*
Kevin Kotowski, *Policy Analyst*
Peter Butler, *Finance Analyst*
John Russell, *Finance Unit Head*



THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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Jeffrey Baker, Legislative Director
Andrea Vazquez, Deputy Director, Human Services

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

Hon. Chaim Deutsch, Chair

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OVERSIGHT: THE FUTURE OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' SERVICES

INTRODUCTION

On January 21, 2020, the Committee on Veterans, chaired by Council Member Chaim Deutsch, will hold an oversight hearing on *The Future of the New York City's Department of Veterans' Services (DVS)*. The Committee will examine how DVS has changed since replacing the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs (MOVA) in 2015, the lessons it has learned, the new Commissioner's plans for the future, and what goals the agency has to improve upon to ensure that all veterans in New York City (NYC) are properly served.

Witnesses invited to testify include DVS, veteran advocacy groups, veteran service providers, veterans, and other interested stakeholders.

BACKGROUND

There are approximately 19.2 million veterans currently living in the United States (US).¹ In New York State alone, there are more than 718,000 veterans,² and in the NYC greater metropolitan area, there are over one million residents who are either service members, veterans, or a family member of a service member or veteran.³ According to DVS, NYC veterans are distributed throughout the city as follows: 58,815 (27.9% of total) in Queens, 54,178 (25.7%) in Brooklyn, 38,577 (18.3%) in Manhattan, 37,495 (17.9%) in the Bronx, and 21,502 (10.2%) in Staten Island.⁴ In addition, DVS estimates there to be 189,808 service members on active duty and 21,000 National Guard and reservists within the city.⁵ Of the total 210,808 NYC veterans, 6.5% are female, with the total racial makeup of all NYC veterans being: 59% white, 28% black, 3%

¹ United States Department of Veterans Affairs. National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. Veteran Population. *The Nation-Age/Gender*. Available at: https://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran_population.asp.

² United States Department of Veterans Affairs. National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. Veteran Population. *The States-Age/Gender*. Available at: https://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran_population.asp.

³ New York City Department of Veterans' Services. About. NYC Veterans. *Facts & Stats*. Available at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/about/facts-stats.page>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

Asian, 2% two or more races, and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native.⁶ Among the veteran population, 88.1% of NYC veterans are employed, with their median income being \$34,794 for females and \$36,582 for males, with 10.1% of veterans living below the poverty line.⁷

Department of Veterans' Services (DVS)

DVS, formerly the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs (MOVA), was officially created in December 2015 by Local Law 113.⁸ This made NYC the first major city in the US to establish its own agency solely devoted to service members, veterans, and their families.⁹ DVS views veterans as vital members of society who help NYC thrive, and works to match veterans with programs and services to support and enhance the lives of all veterans, regardless of the type, length, era of service, or discharge status.¹⁰ DVS' mission is "to foster purpose-driven lives for this important community through: effective connections in the NYC community; targeted advocacy at a local, state, and national level; and compassionate service, ensuring we (DVS) make it easier to access services and benefits they've (veterans) earned."¹¹

In order to successfully and effectively integrate and support veterans and their family members into civilian life, DVS offers four main program areas. These areas are:

- Engagement & Client Services, which ensures that veterans gain access and have knowledge to navigate educational programs, find fulfilling and sustainable jobs, and create their own business opportunities;¹²

⁶ New York City Department of Veterans' Services. About. NYC Veterans. Facts & Stats. *New York City Veterans Demographics*. Available at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/veterans/downloads/pdf/NYCVeteranDemographics.pdf>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Local Law 113 of 2015 of the City of New York.

⁹ New York City Department of Veterans' Services. *About*. Available at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/about/about.page>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² New York City Department of Veterans' Services. Programs. *Engagement*. Available at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/programs/engagement.page>.

- Housing, which expands and improves housing and social service resources available to NYC veterans and their families, and aids constituents in navigating existing resources, with top priorities to end veteran homelessness and improve access to affordable housing;¹³
- VetsThriveNYC, which provides extensive health services for veterans and their families, ensuring that their mental, physical, and spiritual health needs are adequately met;¹⁴ and
- Careers, which connects veterans with the resources that are needed to succeed, with education, employment, entrepreneurship, and other resources being offered through the Veterans Success Network.¹⁵

Since its creation, DVS has worked to serve the city’s veteran community by connecting veterans, service members, and their families to services and resources in these program areas. The agency has helped lead a citywide effort to house over 4,600 homeless veterans; helped veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder find competitive, suitable employment through the Vets CARE program; and created a comprehensive mental health training program.¹⁶ DVS has also partnered with the de Blasio Administration and other partners to: reduce overall veteran homelessness by over 70% since Mayor de Blasio took office; place over 2,500 veterans and their spouses in jobs through the NYC’s Small Business Services Workforce1 centers; and expand the Veterans Advisory Board by appointing new members to serve three-year terms.¹⁷ In 2019, the agency

¹³ New York City Department of Veterans’ Services. Programs. *Housing*. Available at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/programs/housing.page>.

¹⁴ New York City Department of Veterans’ Services. Programs. *VetsThriveNYC*. Available at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/programs/vetsthrivenyc.page>.

¹⁵ New York City Department of Veterans’ Services. Programs. *Careers*. Available at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/programs/careers.page>.

¹⁶ New York City Department of Veterans’ Services. *About*. Available at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/about/about.page>.

¹⁷ *Id.*

created veterans resource centers in each borough to better connect veterans with resources closer to home¹⁸ and connected over 3,000 veterans and their families with resources.¹⁹

DVS Leadership

On October 3, 2019, Mayor de Blasio announced James Hendon as the new Commissioner.²⁰ Commissioner Hendon succeeded the agency's founding commissioner, Commissioner Loree Sutton, MD, Brigadier General (ret. US Army).²¹ Previously, Commissioner Hendon served as: Director of the NYU Veterans Future Lab, a small business incubator for entrepreneurs who are veterans or spouses of veterans; CEO of the Energy Economic Development Corporation, an organization that helps communities and small businesses utilize energy-related advancements; and COO for BlocPower, a Department of Energy-sponsored company that helps nonprofits, small businesses, and faith centers perform energy efficiency retrofits.²² Prior to entering the civilian workforce, Commissioner Hendon spent seven years in the US Army as an Active Duty Infantry Officer, being deployed as a Mortar Platoon Leader and Battalion Public Affairs Officer to Iraq in 2005; worked as an Admissions Officer for West Point from 2006 to 2007; and served as the Senior Advisor to the Afghan Border Police in Afghanistan from 2007 to 2009.²³

Entering its fifth year of existence, with a new Commissioner, a budget of \$4.6 million, and a staff of nearly forty individuals, DVS is a larger and more present organization than it was at its creation. Going forward, the Committee looks forward to working to bolster the services the

¹⁸ Local Law 215 of 2018.

¹⁹ Department of Veterans' Services. New York City Mayor's Management Report 2019.

²⁰ New York City Department of Veterans' Services. About. Meet Our Team. *James Hendon*. Available at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/about/james-hendon-bio.page>.

²¹ Page 2. New York City Department of Veterans' Services. Assets. *DVS Start-Up Report*. Available at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/veterans/downloads/pdf/StartUp-Report.pdf>.

²² New York City Department of Veterans' Services. About. Meet Our Team. *James Hendon*. Available at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/about/james-hendon-bio.page>.

²³ *Id.*

agency already provides and expand the ways in which it can reach, help, and serve NYC's veterans.

CONCLUSION

The Committee on Veterans would like to learn more about the vision and mission of DVS and the new Commissioner going forward; what the agency has learned so far in its existence; what, if any, fundamental shifts there will be in operational and management vision; and how DVS plans to expand and reach its goals of better serving veterans in NYC.