

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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March 5, 2020  
Start: 2:07 PM  
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway  
Committee Room -16<sup>th</sup> Fl.

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

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

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

James Hendon, Commissioner, New York City  
Department of Veteran Services

Cassandra Alvarez, Associate Commissioner  
for Public/Private Partnerships,  
Department of Veteran Services

Jason Loughran Assistant Director of  
Special Projects, Department of Veterans  
Services

Joe Vitti, Supervisor, Veterans Program  
VNSNY, Visiting Nurse Service of New York

Ryan Foley, Supervising Attorney of the  
Veterans Practice, New York Legal  
Assistance Group, NYLAG

Ashton Stewart, Program Manager, SAGEvets

Amanda Kraus, Founder & CEO, Row New York

Coco Culhane, Executive Director  
Veteran Advocacy Project, VAP

Jody Rudin, Chief Operating Officer,  
Project Renewal

James Fitzgerald, Deputy Director, NYC  
Veterans Alliance

Art Cody, Director of Criminal Programs  
Veteran Advocacy Project



1 COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

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2 (sound check) (pause) (gavel)

3 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Good afternoon

4 everyone and welcome to the City Council Committee on  
5 Veterans Fiscal 2021 Preliminary Budget hearing. I'm  
6 Chaim Deutsch Chair of the Veterans Committee. Today  
7 we'll be hearing from James Hendon the Commissioner  
8 of the Department of Veterans Services or DVS. Thank  
9 you, Commissioner testify before the committee today.  
10 The Department of Veterans Services' Fiscal 2021  
11 Preliminary Budget totals \$6.7 million including \$4.4  
12 million in personnel services, funding to support 49  
13 full-time positions. Established by Local Law 113 of  
14 2015 the department is now its fourth year of  
15 operation. DVS is an important institution with a  
16 mission to ensure that the concerns of New York  
17 City's over 200,000 veterans are heard are addressed.  
18 Now that the agency is up and running it is the job  
19 of this committee to make sure that DVS is making is  
20 the best use of its resources and fulfill this  
21 mission as best as it can be. With this goal in  
22 mind. With this goal in mind we hope to gain a clear  
23 understanding of DVS's efforts to identify the most  
24 pressing concerns for New York City veterans  
25 community and what actions the department is taking

2 to confront these issues. We would like to develop a  
3 better picture of how DVS is collecting and analyzing  
4 data, and how the recent launch of Vet Connect will  
5 impact these efforts. We would like to gain-gain  
6 greater insight on the day-to-day operations of DVS's  
7 community outreach, mental health and homelessness  
8 prevention program areas, and want to learn more  
9 about the work DVS does in the realm of veteran  
10 employment. With their hope, I would like to thank  
11 today's-at today's hearing the Financial Analysts  
12 Dina Barber, Finance Unit Head John Russell,  
13 Committee Counsel Yuzat Sadre; Policy Analyst Kevin  
14 Kiproski; my citywide Veterans Director Joe Bello and  
15 my Deputy Chief of Staff, Tova Chatzinoff. I would  
16 also like to acknowledge the members of the Committee  
17 Council Member Alicka Ampry-Samuel. Thank you again,  
18 Commissioner for testifying before us today, and I  
19 would like to ask now-I'd like to ask the committee  
20 counsel to please administer the oath. Thank you.

21           Legal Counsel: Please raise your right  
22 hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole  
23 truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony  
24 before this committee and to respond honestly to  
25 Council Member questions?

2 COMMISSIONER HENDON: (off mic) I do.

3 (Pause) Good afternoon Chairman Deutsch, members of  
4 the committee and advocates. I would like to begin  
5 by thanking you for the opportunity to discuss DVS's  
6 Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2021. My name is  
7 James Hendon, and I am proud to serve as the  
8 Commissioner for New York City Department of Veteran  
9 Services. I'm joined today by Casandra Alvarez,  
10 Associate Commissioner for Public/Private  
11 Partnerships, and Jason Loughran, our Assistant  
12 Director of Special Projects at DVS. Each new fiscal  
13 presents the to take stock of how far we've come,  
14 examine the city's resources and make decisions that  
15 ensure that we can continue to delivering the support  
16 that our 210,000 heroic veterans and their families  
17 across the five boroughs need, and have to come to  
18 depend on. Veterans are more likely to vote,  
19 volunteer and are most civically engaged in their  
20 communities than their civilian counterparts. In  
21 short, they are one of our city's greatest assets.  
22 We are confident that the upcoming budget discussions  
23 will translate into a sound financial plan that will  
24 enable DVS and the city of New York to provide our  
25 veterans with the necessary services they require

1 further cementing our position as a national model  
2 for how to best locally serve those who depend on our  
3 country and protect the freedoms of that we enjoy.  
4 As the first new agency in the city of New York in  
5 over 15 years, DVS has diligently worked to onboard a  
6 talented, passionate and diverse group of  
7 professionals many of whom are veterans or current  
8 service members to best match resources through peer  
9 support individual veteran needs As we embark on this  
10 new year, DVS is actively endeavoring to fill our now  
11 remaining vacancies with like-minded, talented and  
12 diverse individuals. We strive each day to reach our  
13 authorized strength of employees. In Fiscal Year  
14 2020, \$6.1 million was allocated under the agency's  
15 budget for staffing and programmatic functions. As  
16 we continue our upward trajectory, DVS stands  
17 committed to improving on the success of our notable  
18 programs and services while increasing our outreach  
19 to more veterans in the city to better inform them of  
20 who we are, and how to best access our services and  
21 benefits. To accomplish this, we commit ourselves to  
22 working smarter by effectively managing resources,  
23 staff and time to deliver verifiable evidence-based  
24 outcomes. At the heart of DVS's mission is the  
25

2 foundational goal of fostering purpose driven labs  
3 for our veterans and their families regardless of  
4 era, length of service or additional status. Before  
5 I go into our accomplishments, the successes from  
6 this past year, I think it's important to remember  
7 DVS's origin and charter. With that, I'd like to talk  
8 about Local Law 113. In 2015, through the hard work  
9 of the Council Members in front of me, the advocates  
10 before me, and the leadership of Bill de Blasio,  
11 Local Law 113 was introduced into law. The law  
12 removed the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs and  
13 freed it to the Department of Veterans Services.  
14 Local Law 113 was a call to action for a group of  
15 constituents who have more than earned it, for their  
16 dedication to our country. Our original Charter was  
17 built upon four pillars of veteran services that  
18 create the foundation of the agency that we are now.  
19 Those pillars are? Education and Retraining  
20 services; Health, Wellbeing and Rehabilitation;  
21 Provisions and Benefits Across all Government levels;  
22 Employment and re-employment services. With these  
23 pillars in mind I begin my testimony and continuing  
24 to evolve, understand and serve a constituency that  
25 gives so much back. Someone once said that home is



2 where on starts from. As I often say, without a  
3 strong foundation a house will crumble. Since our  
4 inception DVS has been at the forefront of finding  
5 suitable housing for homeless veterans. We've housed  
6 over 860 veterans in total in just under four years.  
7 In the first four months of Fiscal Year 2020, DVS  
8 housed 54% more homeless veterans than the same  
9 period last year. DVS is on pace to hit a remarkable  
10 milestone over the coming year, housing our 1,000<sup>th</sup>  
11 veteran. While these numbers show the tremendous  
12 growth, pride and expertise found in DVS staff, it is  
13 the lives that we impact that is our greatest win.  
14 Take for example Restored Steve who served in the  
15 Army. He moved here from South Carolina to build a  
16 better life for him and his son. He went through some  
17 hard times including losing an apartment right before  
18 Christmas that he was scheduled to move into due to  
19 problems with a landlord. Through it all he kept a  
20 cheery disposition telling our veteran coordinator  
21 that he knew that that we would find him a safe place  
22 soon. Shortly after that we secured a place for him  
23 and he moved into his new residence in Staten Island.  
24 We continue to follow up with Steve who is ecstatic  
25 that he now has a home base from which he can take

2 care of his family and give back to the community.  
3 Or take Sonya an Army Veteran. She had been living  
4 in a family shelter and had a tough time finding a  
5 unit for her and her disabled son. She was lucky to  
6 get linked to a Mitchell Lama apartment, and avoid a  
7 long-term wait, but unfortunately, the three  
8 apartments that she was offered had a variety of  
9 problems. We worked hard and strategically defined a  
10 suitable apartment for her and her disabled son. She  
11 was finally accepted into a beautiful apartment early  
12 last year. While Steve and Sonya's stories are only  
13 two examples, the care we provided displays DVS'  
14 unwavering commitment to finding suitable housing for  
15 veterans in need across the five boroughs. An  
16 example that shows this dedication to a larger scale  
17 is our is our recent Serve Vets Place a Serve Vets  
18 Partnership with concern for independent living and  
19 Georgia Green Adventure. Serve Vets Place is a brand  
20 new building in Coney Island that only contains  
21 supportive housing for veterans, but also serves as  
22 transition housing for those returning from military  
23 service. Through Serve Vets, we not only assist our  
24 veterans in need, but connect with those who are  
25 transitioning to provide them the supportive services

and assistance to prevent isolation, and further homelessness. As part of Serve Vets we identified 82 homeless veterans for the project and helped them with the Department of Applications in gathering the appropriate documentation that they would need. We began moving veterans in last July and finished in December. The last veteran to move require DVS to collaborate with NYCHA, the Bronx Mental Health Court, our veterans shelter and the Department of Veterans Affairs. Needless to say, this was an all hands on deck moment that our team coordinate seamlessly, and on December 30, 2019, the veteran was successfully moved into his new home at Surfex. DVS is also making measurable strides to when it comes to housing costs. Most recently DVS and NYCHA successfully pushed the Triple—the Allocation of VASH continuing with vouchers to DVS through our Rental Assistance and Case Management for Homeless Families who are disconnected from the VA. In receiving an additional 95 vouchers we continue to drastically reduce the number of veterans who were homeless and begin to assist them to achieve economic success and stability. Further, through this advocacy DVS was able to receive a long-term commitment of utilizing

2 up to 15% of NYCHA's total VASH allotment—allocation  
3 for the coming years. I now would like to like the  
4 topic that has paid for this community, Veterans  
5 suicide. According to the most recent data, veteran  
6 suicide deaths range between .3 and .7% of the total  
7 veteran deaths each year. Veteran status is a target  
8 using information provided from the death  
9 certificate. The informant, usually next of kin,  
10 provides personal information to the funeral director  
11 that is recorded on the death certificate. To  
12 ascertain veteran status, informants are asked if a  
13 descendent ever served in the U.S. Armed Forces. It  
14 is possible that the informant may not know if the  
15 descendent served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Between  
16 2010 and 2017 the average number of suicides were 34  
17 per year, averaging less than three per month. To  
18 further our efforts in understanding the issues  
19 surrounding veteran suicide in New York City, DVS—DVS  
20 and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene  
21 entered into a memorandum of understanding to better  
22 determine the age, race, education level,  
23 contributing causes, and cause of death among other  
24 data points to better understand the situation  
25 aggregated through boroughs. In doing so, DVS would

2 utilize this information to determine effective data  
3 driven policies with the goal of reducing the number  
4 of veteran suicides in New York City. As always, we  
5 encourage any servicemen, veteran or those concerned  
6 about the loved ones to call the Veterans Crisis Line  
7 at 1-800-273-8255 and press 1 to talk with someone.  
8 I'll say it again. 1-800-273-8255 and press 1 to talk  
9 with someone, and I would be remiss if I didn't also  
10 acknowledge NYC Well, which is the city vehicle for  
11 helping those who are either transgenial to mental  
12 health first aid crisis. The number for NYC well is  
13 1-888-NYCWELL. Also those in need can also text  
14 WELL-W-E-L-L to 65173 and that's again text WELL, W-  
15 E-L-L to 65173. Simultaneously to help combat this  
16 epidemic, we held a crisis intercept mapping session  
17 three week ago in Staten Island. At this training we  
18 brough together more than 35 individuals from 20  
19 organizations representing medical, mental health,  
20 city, state and federal agencies to engage in the  
21 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service  
22 Administration Training Session in that borough to  
23 close gaps that will help reduce the number of  
24 veteran suicides in Mission County. It is the first  
25 time that New York City's has held such training

2 focused on lowering veteran suicides. Further, DVS  
3 continues to explore holistic methods in healthcare—  
4 in healthcare space. Take for example our veteran  
5 insurance collaborative, the Veteran Data Initiative.  
6 Through the collaborative DVS, in conjunction with  
7 the DA-VA, Medicaid, Medicare, Tricare, Metro us and  
8 other organizations, seek to increase healthcare  
9 access for veterans starting with affordable  
10 insurance. Our goal is to create one point of access  
11 to information for veterans and most their families  
12 about insurance eligibility for public and private  
13 insurance as well as VA eligibility. Our Data  
14 Initiative is a coalition between DVS, New York  
15 City's Health and Hospitals, and CIVI whose intent is  
16 to explore data in regards to the constituent access  
17 to insurance, care and housing. It is through these  
18 data driver approaches that DVS can effectively shine  
19 light on the issue, and lead in its solution. DVS is  
20 also committed to ensuring veterans and their  
21 families are aware of and have access to non-  
22 traditional mental health services. Since launching  
23 Vet Connect NYC providers such as at the Data Minch  
24 Foundation, Sierra Club Military Outdoors and most  
25 recently Gallup NYC and Catholic Charities have

1 joined or are in the process of joining the network  
2 enabling our veterans to access meditation, equine  
3 therapy, outdoor group activities, caregiver respite  
4 and substance abuse support group services. We  
5 continue to work with our partners at the Institute  
6 for Veterans and Military families to be certain that  
7 this platform evolves based on community needs,  
8 opportunities and strengths. In addition, Thrive NYC  
9 has been a strong partner in addressing the mental  
10 health gaps and issues facing veterans throughout New  
11 York City. Addressing mental health needs is a  
12 citywide commitment whereby advocates, agencies, non-  
13 profits and elected officials work together in the  
14 pursuit of enhancing mental health support and  
15 addressing the mental health needs of our veterans  
16 and fellow New Yorkers. Between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017  
17 and December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019, over 29,000 veterans,  
18 military families and caregivers were engaged through  
19 the Vet's Thrive NYC program. Through our engagement  
20 community services staff, DVS works to connect  
21 individuals--individuals with Social Service and  
22 Mental Health resources. Our outreach efforts also  
23 include spreading the word about Vet Connect NYC,  
24 Mental Health First Aid Training, the Columbia

2 Protocol for Suicide Prevention, NYC Well and Veteran  
3 Copies in Training. Further, through the  
4 reconfiguration of the demographic versus geographic  
5 approach. We anticipate greater engagement with our  
6 constituents. Lastly, as we take care of our  
7 veterans in life we must also be there for them in  
8 passing. In partnership with our sister agencies DVS  
9 stands the model for providing the care and humane  
10 burials to our fellow warriors. On average, DVS  
11 ensures the proper burial of approximately 85  
12 veterans per year. Through these efforts by our  
13 dedicated DVS staff, DVS continues to provide the  
14 support and services across a variety of veteran  
15 issues and needs. As DVS continues to build on its  
16 success and expand services for our most vulnerable  
17 veterans, we are also broadening our efforts to move  
18 our community to a higher place of wellbeing and  
19 professional success. Last fall DVS launched the  
20 first ever Employee Mentorship Program for Veterans  
21 and Americorps alumni called service to service.  
22 Through this program, service minded New Yorkers are  
23 paired with city employee mentors to learn the  
24 intricacies of city government and format. Service  
25 to service also includes educational workshop



2 programming about professional careers in NYC  
3 government. As of the end of January over 30  
4 individuals have been paired with mentors in  
5 departments such as Small Business Services, FDNY,  
6 the Department of Transportation, NYCHA and the  
7 Public Advocate's Office. We recently heard from one  
8 service-service veteran who participated—who shared  
9 the following comment with us about the program: You  
10 did a wonderful job pairing me with my city mentor.  
11 We either email or text almost every day, and she is  
12 diligently been sending me job postings. She's also  
13 revised my resume. In addition to Service to  
14 Service, DVS has experienced favorable outcomes with  
15 veterans' care, a paper success initiative that  
16 improves city employment outcomes for veterans with  
17 service-connected PTSD. Presently, over 70 veterans  
18 spanning different wars, genders and race have been  
19 enrolled in the program. So far, 22 have found full-  
20 time employment in companies such as Amazon and Warby  
21 Parker, and a few of them that range from government  
22 to logistics. One such veteran who entered the  
23 program is Mike a U.S. Army Gulf War Veteran who  
24 suffered from PTDS and was struggling at his job. He  
25 was bullied by his co-workers in the PTSD man. His

2 work atmosphere was loud and unforgiving so he sought  
3 help from Veterans Care. The project matched Mike  
4 with an employment specialist who helped him identify  
5 suitable job opportunities and that matched his  
6 interest, skills and disability needs. Thanks to  
7 Veteran's Care Mike landed a job at federal agency in  
8 a role that will continue his pension and will aid in  
9 his mental health recovery. Veterans Care has been a  
10 pathway to the middle-class for Mike and so many  
11 others and programs like this, strengthening the  
12 agency's goal of economic empowerment and wellness  
13 for our veterans and their families. We all know a  
14 successful career starts with solid education. That's  
15 why DVS committed to ensuring the Administrators at  
16 the schools with schools with the largest student  
17 veteran populations having an established point of  
18 contact with our agency. By bringing together these  
19 administrators who are essentially the boots on the  
20 ground, DVS is in a position to disseminate crucial  
21 information and resources down to the student veteran  
22 population. The Veterans on Campus—through Veterans  
23 on Campus, DVS has created a direct line of contact  
24 between our staff and the schools enabling us to  
25 support and problem solve in real time such as when a

2 VA's basic allowance for housing payments were  
3 delayed in the fall of 2018 and our students were in  
4 need of rental assistance. In addition, just this  
5 past January thanks to a grant that we received—  
6 secured, through the Mayor's Fund, our Veterans on  
7 Campus Initiative sponsored 17 CUNY student veteran  
8 leaders, one from each undergraduate institution to  
9 attend the Student Veterans of America National  
10 Conference in Los Angeles. The SVA-17 is now fondly  
11 referred to by the CUNY Office of Veteran Affairs  
12 learned about on campus Chapter development, best  
13 practices, employment opportunities, mental health  
14 resources and advocacy both at the government and  
15 academic levels. The SVA-17 continue to build upon  
16 the relationship they forged at the conference,  
17 bringing together their schools and campus chapters  
18 in a new unprecedented-in unprecedented ways. In  
19 fact, the students are even exploring the creation of  
20 a university wide CUNY Student Veterans of America  
21 chapter that would unite. I'm pleased to share that  
22 the whole positive Veterans Program has recently  
23 become a part of the Vet Connect NYC platform. The  
24 positive veterans program identifies, trains and  
25 supports veterans of U.S. Armed Forces interested in

2 pursuing bachelor degrees at the top colleges and  
3 universities. Participants receive training prior to  
4 matriculating on campus and mentoring once enrolled.  
5 In addition, college partner colleges provide  
6 veterans in the program with supplemental funding to  
7 cover the full cost of tuition. We're always open to  
8 ne collaborations and ideas that will help veterans  
9 on campus further, reach, serve and empower our  
10 student veteran population. In order to provide  
11 better service-benefits and services, we must first  
12 be able to engage and interact with our constituents.  
13 As many of you know, our constituency is getting  
14 older, and our veteran population is getting smaller.  
15 Right now, over 70% of our population are 55 or  
16 older-or older as our World War II, Korean and  
17 Vietnam veterans continue to age, and less young  
18 people join the military. That population will  
19 continue to decrease. To that end, DBS held its  
20 first partnership convening event on February 6, 2020  
21 to hear first hand how we can build stronger bonds  
22 see many familiar faces here on the Council and the  
23 audience that were there. The event was attended by  
24 more than 160 people from over 75 different  
25 organizations, and it is the first step in what I

2 consider to be a listening tool to better inform us  
3 so that we can provide the most value to our veterans  
4 to the veteran community as well as bring new  
5 veterans into the fold. We've already been examining  
6 the comments and suggestions that were returned to us  
7 and I look forward to hearing more ideas from the  
8 veteran community in the days ahead. Next, to better  
9 interact with our constituents and notify them of  
10 their benefits, DVS has shifted our outreach program  
11 While we will maintain our presence within each  
12 borough, our engagement staff has undergone a  
13 restructuring to better care for those who would  
14 serve based on their unique attributes. Under this  
15 restructuring, DVS staff will oversee portfolios  
16 focused on demographic categories such as women and  
17 LGBGQ veterans, students and those presently serving  
18 as well as the elderly, caregivers, survivors and  
19 spouses. Through this restructuring, we hope to  
20 better engage with organizations, players and key  
21 community leaders to foster ongoing relationships and  
22 better reach our constituency. DVS also seeks to  
23 increase the number of veterans with access to  
24 benefits across all levels. It is estimated that  
25 approximately 10% of the over 210,000 veterans living

2 in New York City holding less than honorable  
3 discharge status spread across all wartime eras.  
4 Discharges under dishonorable conditions have  
5 prevented many veterans from concluding their service  
6 with pride and receiving and receiving benefits  
7 afforded on behalf of their service. While DVS serves  
8 all veterans regardless of discharge, we seek to more  
9 effectively address including engage all pockets of  
10 our constituency. Because this DVS has been hard at  
11 work drafting and negotiating acquisition to award  
12 \$1.7 million over three years to non-profit legal  
13 organizations to address the growing backlog of  
14 discharge cases. In doing so, we hope to not only  
15 remove that backlog, but to return to the recognition  
16 these veterans deserve known as the Discharge Upgrade  
17 Assistance Legal Services or DUALS Program. DVS and  
18 the city of New York continue to address the issues  
19 facing thousands of New York City Veterans. Also,  
20 while we continue to discuss a strategic plan for the  
21 functionality of a contract shop, DVS has begun a  
22 search for a Director of Contracts. In this role,  
23 the Director of Contracts will serve as a subject  
24 matter expert for already existing contracts such as  
25 Vet Connect NYC and Pay for Success all while leading

2 the agency's expansion into contracts like DUALS.

3 Furthermore, as we move forward, the Director of

4 Contracts will serve as the subject matter lead in

5 determining the potential of being an agency for

6 discretionary contracts. Working hand-in-hand with

7 our ombudsman, this Director of Contracts will lift

8 some of the contracts raised by our constituents and

9 allow us to further engage people with the help that

10 they deserve. As we continue to improve and refine

11 our agency direction and fill the remaining roles, I

12 am certain that our committed and talented staff will

13 engage more of our constituency and assist in

14 providing them with the many services that they have

15 earned. In conclusion, as DVS expands its programs

16 and services to better address the need and concerns

17 of our veteran community, I am certain that we will

18 continue to stand as the national model for years to

19 come. Moving into this next fiscal year we hope to

20 continue our tradition of improving with each day to

21 better serve our constituents, and the issues they

22 face. We thank you for the opportunity to testify on

23 this matter and we look forward to any questions you

24 or any other member of the committee of the committee

25 may have. Thanks.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you,  
3 commissioner. Thanks for a very detailed testimony.  
4 So, I want to ask—first, I want to recognize we were  
5 joined by Council Member Mathieu Eugene. We're also  
6 joined by Council Member Paul Vallone. So, I know  
7 that there is—there is another hearing in City Hall  
8 the Department of Health, and that's on the  
9 Coronavirus issue. So, I'm going to ask my  
10 colleagues first to see if they have any questions.  
11 Any questions?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ALICKA AMPRY-SAMUEL: I  
13 don't have any questions, but I'm excited about the  
14 search for the Director of Contracts. I just wanted  
15 to say that.

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Great.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And I just  
18 wanted to say, Commissioner, thank you to you and  
19 your team for coming out to our office and hearing  
20 about these Queens veterans' ideas so that the city  
21 and the borough can take steps. I look forward to  
22 working with you and your team.

23 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Thank you so much.

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. So, in  
25 the Fiscal Year 2021 Preliminary Budget allocates 49



2 full-time positions to departments, and as of this  
3 month only 38 positions have been filled. So, what  
4 is the department's plan to fill the remaining  
5 vacancies?

6 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Mr. Chair, I just  
7 want to—what I'm tracking is it's 49 authorized  
8 positions, and 39 have been filled as of this year,  
9 and our plan is to fill these at a rate of two per  
10 quarter beginning with this fiscal—with this  
11 particular quarter. So, we should see two added as  
12 far as hires made, you know, fully in this month and  
13 Q-3 of this fiscal year, and you'll see others are  
14 made next quarter, and so on and so forth. The next  
15 two to be made will our Director Housing Services,  
16 and our Veteran Peer coordinators, and then in the  
17 following quarter one will be our Director of House—  
18 our Director of Contract Services and then another  
19 one yet to be identified.

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, you know, before  
21 we discuss any specific or more specific questions of  
22 the budgets are there any new needs of the department  
23 requested from OMB and the Virus C funding to report  
24 in the Preliminary Budget?

2           COMMISSIONER HENDON: Right now, we're in  
3 ongoing conversations with OMB as far as we know with  
4 different needs, et cetera. I just want to highlight  
5 that, you know, that's still an ongoing process, but  
6 since the last budget hearing we did have two  
7 positions that were filled and we thank the Council  
8 for that as I'm talking about a program manager  
9 position, and if we need to record a position between  
10 last year's budget hearing and this year's bill. So,  
11 yeah.

12           CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, in the—in  
13 Fiscal Year 2019, the department had a budget of \$5.1  
14 million, and—but only spent approximately \$4.1  
15 million of these budgets, and for Fiscal Year 2020,  
16 the department's budget increased slightly to \$5.4  
17 million at adoption, and is at \$6.1 million as of the  
18 Fiscal Year 2021 Preliminary Budget. The  
19 department's budget continues to grow to \$6.7 million  
20 to year 2021. So, can you explain why the department  
21 didn't spend its entire budget?

22           COMMISSIONER HENDON: It comes back to us  
23 not filling all those vacancies. So, if we would  
24 fill all the vacancies then we would get as far as

2 the personnel services that money that is accounted  
3 for there.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, that-that  
5 difference is for the vacancies that weren't filled?

6 COMMISSIONER HENDON: That is correct,  
7 Mr. Chair.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: That's that again,  
9 and why is the—why has the department's budget  
10 increased this year, and people didn't spend whatever  
11 they wanted?

12 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Well, we—this goes  
13 back into the idea that the two lines, for instance,  
14 and we had to go with the two lines, things actually  
15 we would add as far as that community coordinator and  
16 that program manager. So that then, therefore,  
17 increases the amount that we have for personnel  
18 support, but we still are closing with a skeleton as  
19 far as those vacancies, and then the other piece of  
20 it, forgive me, I—I don't want to put it past  
21 me. So, there is the personnel services aspect of  
22 it. Then there's the other than personnel services  
23 aspect of it, and then there's the other than  
24 personnel services aspect of it. That other than  
25 personnel services aspect of it that's two contracts

2 that we are currently—we're working through, and I'll  
3 defer to Cassandra on that.

4 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER ALVAREZ: Thank  
5 you for the question, Chair Deutsch. So, the  
6 contracts that we have active right now are Vet  
7 Connect NYC, and Veterans Fair Contract. As far as  
8 increased funding in our FY21 Budget, we'll also be  
9 seeing funding for free legal services that the  
10 Commissioner referenced in his testimony in addition  
11 to the non-traditional medical services, which is our  
12 partnership as well.

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Got it. Okay,  
14 does—does the department anticipate under-spending  
15 this coming Fiscal Year?

16 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I think we're on a  
17 glide path right not to keep the hiring plan of two  
18 per quarter right now. So, for us it's really to  
19 continue to meet that piece of it. I'm worried about  
20 saying—saying that because for us it's really about  
21 be thoughtful about who we're bringing on. I think  
22 the Director of Contracts is the perfect example of  
23 something where we took a hard look at the vacancies  
24 and said the is the smartest thing to do with this

2 vacancy. So, we will continue to be thoughtful with  
3 whom we are onboarding with, Mr. Chair.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: What happens with  
5 the—the balance of the difference that the DVS under-  
6 spends?

7 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'll have to get  
8 back to you on that as far as what happened to the  
9 balance.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. The  
11 Administration recently provided us a breakdown of  
12 Thrive NYC funding, and it—it included \$800,000 and  
13 eight budgeted head count for Mental Health Services;  
14 \$600,000 was—is dedicated for its mental health  
15 outreach, and support for veterans, while another  
16 \$200,000 is for non-traditional mental health  
17 services for veterans. Now is this funding on top of  
18 the existing \$600,000 for mental health services in  
19 DVS's budget?

20 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'll have to get  
21 back to you and confirm that. (off mic) Yes, you can  
22 take that.

23 CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: Thank you for the  
24 question, Chair. So, the \$600,000 is intended to  
25 cover the outreach staff and Jason can speak more to

2 that, and then the \$200,000 it's to cover the-the  
3 non-traditional mental health services. So, it's-it's  
4 the-it's not additional. That's-that's what the  
5 number.

6 JASON LOUGHRAN: It is within the numbers  
7 that you're seeing right now.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, it's withing  
9 the numbers--

10 JASON LOUGHRAN: Yes.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --reported by Jason  
12 with-

13 CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: You want to-

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yeah, you want to-

15 CASSANDRA ALVAREZ: --add onto it.

16 JASON LOUGHRAN: Thank you, Council  
17 Member.

18 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

19 JASON LOUGHRAN: There are 15 constituent  
20 facing outreach roles, and their roles are--are to  
21 focus including on housing and engagement within  
22 those eight lines--within those 15 constituent facing  
23 outreach roles, 8 of those lines are funded by  
24 Flight.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Eight of those are  
3 funded by Flight. Okay. Now, does the department  
4 anticipate any problems delivering all these services  
5 with—with a small staff?

6 JASON LOUGHRAN: I'm sorry. I don't  
7 understand the question.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, your—your—your  
9 count is—your undercount is what it comes to. You  
10 don't have the entire 49 people working for DVS. So,  
11 um, based on what you anticipate in bringing services  
12 to the veterans, do you feel that you will be doing a  
13 lot less services to veterans with less staff? What  
14 was the effects the way DVS does the work?

15 JASON LOUGHRAN: I think it's normal  
16 (sic) because we, yeah, it's--it's not that we are at  
17 a point of having 49 filled, and then we lost some  
18 new appointments, but as a new agency we have these  
19 new lines that received. So, you know, right now  
20 with the 39 full-time employees, we are—this about  
21 what we've been at. So, we're continuing to grow  
22 since the other side of it, and that we see ourselves  
23 actually being able to provide much more  
24 thoughtfulness with expanded services. This is why  
25 we are just very careful with what we're doing with

2 each of these as we're filling. So, it's moving  
3 smooth as fast. It's something we say in the  
4 military. That's how we're trying to approach this.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Recently the  
6 Administration stated they helped provide mental  
7 health services to over 20,000 veterans in New York  
8 City through Thrive NYC. However, close examination  
9 of the number suggests this figure is combining of  
10 the value from the PP—the PMMR our veterans and  
11 families that DVS's outreach team has engaged over  
12 the last three fiscal years. How was this number  
13 realized? How did you get this number?

14 COMMISSIONER HENDON: So, when you look  
15 at the—I'll start and Jason will finish off. When you  
16 look at the broad numbers it's, yeah it's two pieces,  
17 two different pieces of the report, and one of them  
18 is you know none of our constituents who we've  
19 engaged since FLAG's (sic) inception, which is where  
20 that 29,000 number comes from the other one is of  
21 those we have engaged how many have we helped  
22 normalize health seeking behavior with, and that's  
23 where other number of ours 8,338. That comes from.  
24 8,383 has come from so. Do you want to add anything?



2 JASON LOUGHRAN: I just want to add that  
3 these folks are—are folk that we've informed or  
4 assisted. So as you know, Council our outreach staff  
5 takes a whole health view on all of our outreach  
6 where we not only refer them to their needs when it  
7 comes to mental health community resources, but we  
8 also take an encompassing approach to the veteran  
9 where we help them with housing or employment and  
10 when doing so we have to better identify the need so  
11 we can engage with them on several different things  
12 along with them.

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. First of  
14 all, I just want to thank you Commissioner, I want  
15 to thank you for your work and—and collaboration also  
16 on the hearings you had in the past with us on  
17 veterans suicide, and we did mention your testimony  
18 and your work with the Medical Examiner. So that is  
19 extremely, too, important and the further thing the  
20 necessary resources for those veterans and this is  
21 something I just want to say on—state for the record  
22 that I commend you for, and—and also how you partner  
23 with our—with the Committee with the Veterans  
24 Committee. So that's a step in the right direction so  
25 I want to say thank you for your partnership in this

2 and we're looking to do great things in the—in the  
3 coming year. So, I want to thank you for that. In  
4 2006, the department conducted a census of how many  
5 veterans are living in New York City by borough. In  
6 2016, it estimates—the estimate suggested that there  
7 are approximately 210,000 veterans in New York City.  
8 This January the New York State Division of Veterans  
9 Affairs released a report estimating that the New  
10 York City veteran population was at about 165,000  
11 which is roughly 55,000 less than the census DVS  
12 released nearly five years ago. So, are these  
13 numbers and mythologically differences that would  
14 explain the discrepancy between the studies?

15 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Yeah, I want to  
16 clarify. That number doesn't include people like me  
17 who's a reservist whose current drilling, and so the  
18 delta is really those are guardsmen, those who are  
19 reservists, and those are in active duty within New  
20 York City, and that's the reason for the difference,  
21 Mr. Chair.

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: How does the  
23 department currently estimate the number of veterans  
24 in New York City?

2           COMMISIONER HENDON: We have to get back  
3 to you with the details. I know that we currently  
4 use Vet-Pop as a source for it as far as data or  
5 something that is made available through the VA, but  
6 we can get back to you with more details of how we  
7 break that out, Mr. Chair.

8           CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And what does that—  
9 how does the department work with the states of the  
10 Federal Veteran's Administration to ensure that there  
11 is an accurate count, and what are you plans in the  
12 future to make sure we have a more accurate count on  
13 the veterans.

14           COMMISSSIONER HENDON: We'll get back to  
15 you with a through plan, but I know I've been really  
16 thick, you know, tied at the hip with my counterpart  
17 at the state level Jim McDonald as we discuss these  
18 and other issues as far as what the plan will be and  
19 this type of outreach and we'll get back to you with  
20 a more thorough response to those.

21           CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, taking notes,  
22 though. Okay. What does DVS do when a veteran or  
23 family member expresses mental health needs, and what  
24 is the process? I know you mentioned there was a  
25 number. You—you mentioned the numbers there.

2                   COMMISSSIONER HENDON: So, the VA has its  
3 own Veteran crisis number, but we--

4                   CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Is that the number  
5 that--?

6                   COMMISIONER HENDON: That was the one  
7 that's in the testimony, and the other one I said is  
8 NYC Well for those who are local in New York City as  
9 far as two things that are in real time, but I wanted  
10 to put Jason on. You want to speak?

11                  JASON LOUGHRAN: Council, our outreach  
12 staff for those folks that do claim that they need  
13 mental health services are provided direct assistance  
14 and--and how that works is that many cases the  
15 referral is made Vet Connect or made directly to the  
16 Mental Health Partners that are members of the Vet  
17 Connect platform.

18                  COMMISIONER HENDON: I have to add a lot  
19 of this stuff and it speeds up. In the course of  
20 having a relationship with someone you're assisting,  
21 as one of our community coordinators things come up,  
22 and we can help and each case is so unique. It could  
23 be on one hand dealing with someone whose husband  
24 just passed away, and the husband is a veteran,  
25 Council Member. On the other hand, it could--I met

2 someone who is—who is in the avenue at the shelter.  
3 The Veterans are assisting him with getting housing,  
4 or then you could have just met someone at a local  
5 veterans event, and they talked to you about an  
6 important issue. It comes in so many different ways.  
7 I just want to highlight that, Mr. Chair.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. Let's  
9 talk about the veteran homelessness. First of all,  
10 the number that you gave me for that 888 number. Did  
11 we ever try calling someone by pushing 1?

12 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Oh, for the Veterans  
13 Crisis Assistance.

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes.

15 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I, moving back, I  
16 personally have not dialed and pushed 1. I know that  
17 we have someone on staff that has dialed and pushed  
18 1, and I'm certainly with 888 NYC Well also you look  
19 as far as--

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Do you get a live  
21 person on this?

22 COMMISSIONER HENDON: Yeah, and I want to  
23 mention this, too. This came up when we had our  
24 crisis intercept mapping session back in Staten  
25 Island a few weeks ago, this as the topic that came

2 up as far as this thing worked, and that's why I'm  
3 just putting that out as someone having said it  
4 there.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, so I had my  
6 staff pull up the number, and someone answered within  
7 45 seconds. Very good. Thank you. Can you specify  
8 and also on homeless vets—veteran homelessness. How  
9 many veterans are estimated to be homeless in New  
10 York City and many are located in shelters?

11 COMMISIONER HENDON: So, right—as of a  
12 point in time count, we, you know, time to what we  
13 report annually on this at the federal level. The  
14 point in time count is 684 as far as those who are in  
15 shelters, and then those who are street homeless that  
16 number is six right now, Mr. Chair.

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, six street  
18 homeless and do we know exactly where—who they are  
19 and where they are?

20 COMMISIONER HENDON: Yes, Mr. Chair.

21 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And based on your—I  
22 mean who does the outreach for those six needing  
23 help? (sic)

24 COMMISIONER HENDON: So, this falls under  
25 our Veteran Peer Coordinator Team, which is under our

2 Housing Supportive Services Lab as far as the folks  
3 we have who having that piece of outreach.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, which are—are  
5 these six?

6 COMMISIONER HENDON: I'm sorry, we'll  
7 hear Jason. (sic)

8 JASON LOUGHRAN: Well, Council I just  
9 wanted to add there that we work in conjunction with  
10 the Department of Homeless Services on street  
11 outreach. They've had a specific unit for veterans  
12 street-veterans street homeless population, and most  
13 of the time we work in conjunction with them because  
14 they have resources to be out in the field with their  
15 vans to identify these folks.

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, if you only  
17 have six-six people living in the street who are  
18 veterans, do we know number one what borough they're  
19 from and what the reasons are that they—they are not  
20 going to shelter?

21 JASON LOUGHRAN: Council, we don't have  
22 that information on us, but we can—we can follow up  
23 with.

24 COMMISIONER HENDON: We know exactly  
25 where to get it. So, yeah, on the street.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: I just want to ask  
3 you Commissioner if you want us to go out with you  
4 for those six--those six homeless veterans, and let's  
5 find out why they don't want to go into shelters, and  
6 see if we can orchestrate?

7 COMMISIONER HENDON: Absolutely look  
8 forward to it. I mean someone who did a headcount,  
9 Jason did the additional, Jason did it. You know,  
10 I'm completely with you on that.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: We'll have to try  
12 that another time.

13 COMMISIONER HENDON: That sounds good,  
14 Mr. Chair. It sounds good.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, the 684 do you  
16 know what shelters that--is that the Borden Avenue  
17 Shelter the 684 homeless people that are mentioned?

18 COMMISIONER HENDON: Councilman, the  
19 majority of them do--

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: As you say.

21 COMMISIONER HENDON: --the majority of  
22 them are in Borden Avenue, but Borden Avenue doesn't  
23 single handedly have the--the--the space for all 684.  
24 So, the majority of them are in Borden, and then the  
25 rest of them are scattered throughout other shelters.



2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, you did mention  
3 that you put over 80 veterans in Coney Island in that  
4 new housing. So, the count is at 684 who remain and  
5 who still need housing, facility permanent housing.  
6 So where do these people—where do they—where do they—  
7 where do these veterans come from? Because I know  
8 that last year I think the number was at 500 and  
9 something. So, we—we keep on taking these veterans  
10 out of the shelter and we have—we have more veterans  
11 coming in, but do we have—do we know where they're  
12 coming from? Like what states?

13 COMMISIONER HENDON: Chair I would—I would  
14 say that we would have to engage with the address  
15 because they're—they're intake process and—and the  
16 tracking system that we utilize to collect that  
17 information is run by them, but we would be happy to  
18 bring that information back to you.

19 JASON LOUGHRAN: Also, I want to point  
20 out this is an example where it's no mistake that  
21 this month we're bringing on a Director of Housing  
22 Services, and an additional Veteran Peer Coordinator  
23 to continue to attack this problem, Mr. Chair.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, is that  
3 something you're looking to take a look to have a-to  
4 have those figures?

5 COMMISIONER HENDON: Sure.

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Do you feel it's  
7 important to have those figures to see where they're  
8 coming from? Because I know the mayor just announced  
9 that he wants to reconnect people who are homeless  
10 who are in homeless shelters to family members. So,  
11 is that part of the Mayor's announcements to  
12 reconnect homeless veterans?

13 COMMISIONER HENDON: I can't speak to the  
14 Mayor's announcements on connecting those folks, but  
15 I know that our Aftercare Unit spends a significant  
16 amount of time analyzing information on where these  
17 homeless veterans originated from, and they also  
18 spend a significant amount of time ensuring that  
19 those folks stay in their home. So, every area that  
20 we can collect data like you're referencing, makes us  
21 smarter and more efficient in doing our job.

22 JASON LOUGHRAN: And this goes to  
23 something I said during the last hearing, too, Mr.  
24 Chair and that it's important to us for that value to  
25 entire bell curve of our veterans. So, if we focus on

2 the entire bell curve, we are really doing to catch  
3 more folks and employees in the housing security and  
4 that's why it's so important to have this demographic  
5 approach to things that they can get in front of  
6 folks, and get the word out that we are here, and  
7 that we can help them and connect them with different  
8 services that we can to, you know, make sure that we  
9 try to pre-empt this situation.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Well, when--when the--  
11 when the Mayor makes an announcement about homeless  
12 about homelessness about the veteran homeless  
13 population, it's part of that population as well. So,  
14 doesn't VHS--I mean if the Mayor makes an announcement  
15 obviously VHS knows about it. So, you know the  
16 conversation that you've had over the last few weeks  
17 since the Mayor's announcement with DHS in regards to  
18 the Mayor's future plan on reducing or thinking of a  
19 five-year plan on reducing homelessness?

20 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We have not yet, but  
21 we--we look forward to determining a viable plan to  
22 work with them to--to ensure that that executed.

23 JASON LOUGHRAN: Also, coordination like  
24 this is one of those things that our Director of  
25 Housing Services will tackle head-on as well, back to

2 who we're putting on the table, what we see them  
3 doing so we can make sure that we are all hands on  
4 deck with this. Mr. Chair.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, in Fiscal Year  
6 2020 the city allocated \$40 million to perform census  
7 outreach—outreach ahead of the city's enumeration  
8 with the objective of improving the New York City's  
9 historically low self-response rates. This will be—  
10 this will be—is achieved by the equipping the public  
11 especially those that serve the under-counted  
12 communities with accurate information about the  
13 census and how they can be counted. As part of the  
14 city's plan to ensure complete counts, the city  
15 agencies are asked to partner and to get out the  
16 count drive by either forming a plan of their own or  
17 by incorporating census outreach in their existing  
18 programs and/or services. Has DVS paid the get out  
19 the count plan in collaboration the New York City  
20 Census of 2020?

21 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We'll have to get  
22 back to you on that, Mr. Chair. I know that we are  
23 very much in support of what the Mayor's Office is  
24 doing with the two census outreach and that we've  
25 gone out of our way prior the Veterans Advisory Board

2 hearing to make sure that someone who is representing  
3 a veteran from the census on the outreach that I was  
4 able to speak so the veteran community can know to  
5 make sure you stand to count.

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay, I just want  
7 to go with some question from the January hearing.  
8 So, I think we already went over what is the current  
9 veteran suicide rate, which I want to thank you and  
10 some of the folks who are working with you on that.  
11 How many veterans receive services from Vet Thrive  
12 NYC? You know the question that wasn't able-or  
13 wasn't--

14 COMMISSIONER HENDON: I'm sorry, did-is  
15 this what we just covered as far as the 8,383 number?  
16 So, I think it's 8,383, yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: 8,300--

18 COMMISSIONER HENDON: 83.

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: --and 83. So  
20 that's how many veterans who seek services through  
21 Thrive NYC. How many veteran addictions have  
22 occurred in the following year: 2017, '18, '19 and  
23 '20?

24 COMMISSIONER HENDON: We'll get back to  
25 you on the veteran information. I just want to

2 comment that something that you mentioned in both,  
3 you know, in the hearing—outside of the hearing, was  
4 this issue of having a political (sic) veteran passes  
5 away when they're in supportive housing. How do you  
6 make sure that that vacancy can be filled right away  
7 with another veteran in need of housing. I just  
8 wanted to, you know, report that there are two  
9 different measures we take and to tackle this issue.  
10 One is on the aftercare piece of this. Another is on  
11 the actual housing specialist piece. For our housing  
12 specialists we've directed her to make sure that when  
13 you're reaching out to landlords, and asking them to  
14 accept our people who are receiving HUD Vouchers that  
15 you report to us if there are any issues where it  
16 happens that—that tenant passes away so we can be  
17 notified right away. On the aftercare side of that  
18 that is the aftercare coordinating or something  
19 similar. Aftercare responds to the time the veterans  
20 who are currently place. So, we make sure that not  
21 only who she's working with but the families know and  
22 that the landlord who is existing in the system  
23 knows. We want to do what we can to shorten the  
24 timeline through which someone who's receiving  
25 supportive housing that housing comes available that

2 it can be made available to the next veteran. So,  
3 thank you so much, Mr. Chair for your leadership  
4 there.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you and you  
6 have 684 homeless veterans. That's—I want to go back  
7 to the same question as the discussion that we just  
8 had before on this 684. So, if you could just take a  
9 look at that to see how many of those veterans, you  
10 know, are transitioned from another state coming into  
11 New York City and how many end up at the shelter  
12 because of an addiction. So, is that something that  
13 the information that you could get and where it is?

14 COMMISIONER HENDON: We'll look into it.  
15 You actually--

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: For veteran is  
17 coming through the shelter base obviously you have to  
18 give them some type of information.

19 COMMISIONER HENDON: Uh-huh. We'll look  
20 into it. I don't want to speak out of turn. I want to  
21 make sure we've done out homework on this, but with  
22 that I'm sure I can—the idea of the 684 how many  
23 folks of these are folks from another state? How  
24 many of these are folks with an addiction situation?  
25 Yes.

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. So, once you  
3 identify a veteran at the border, avenue or homeless  
4 shelter how is it—how long does it take them to place  
5 the veteran and get them housing? Like what is the  
6 process and what is the timeline for that?

7 COMMISIONER HENDON: Council, we—we get  
8 that—that individual under 90 days, but every case is  
9 unique.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Alright. So,  
11 I'm going to conclude this. Folks, I'm going to run  
12 across the street after the hearing. So, I also want  
13 to ask you if it possible for you to stick around  
14 because we have eight people testifying so I just  
15 wanted to know if you could stick around just a bit?  
16 There are those—the people that came through  
17 department to be able to testify, if you don't mind.

18 COMMISIONER HENDON: Our team will be—  
19 definitely will make sure we have someone here to  
20 listen to this testimony. Okay, sure.

21 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Alright, thank you.

22 COMMISIONER HENDON: Thank you. (pause)

23 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Joe Vinny, Ryan—  
24 Ryan Foley from NYLAG, Astin Stewart, Amint Kraus and  
25 Coco. Alright, we're going to try to get five people



2 up there at a time. Just squeeze them. We have just  
3 three mics so we'll take one. (pause) And we are  
4 joined by Council Member Alan Maisel. Alan, do you  
5 have a question?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: (off  
7 mic/inaudible)

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: anybody have an  
9 answer?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: (off mic) Nobody  
11 knows.

12 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: We'll go clockwise.

13 JOE VITTI: Good afternoon. (off mic)  
14 Sorry about that. Good afternoon Chair Dromm, Chair  
15 Deutsch and members of the New York City Council  
16 Committee on Veterans. My name is Joe Vitti. I'm the  
17 Supervisor of the Veteran-of-of the Veterans Program  
18 for VNSNY, Visiting Nurse Service of New York. I  
19 served in the Army as Battalion Intelligence Officer  
20 for Field Artillery Unit. I want to thank you all for  
21 the opportunity to testify and speak about VNSNY  
22 Veterans Outreach programs for which we are  
23 requesting \$150,000 in Council funding. VNSNY is the  
24 largest not-for-profit home and community-based  
25 healthcare organization in the U.S. providing care to

more—to more than 44,000 and healthcare members every day. We began serving immigrants in the Lower East Side. It was done by traditional medical institutions, and since then we have continued to provide critical home and community-based healthcare services to more populations. Our hospice is now the eighth largest in the U.S. and the largest hospice provider to veterans in New York State. Last year in 2019 we conducted 876 veteran and patient admissions. We are and VNSNY Hospice is a Level 5, the highest level for the We Honor Veterans program that has led and collaborated by the National Hospice and Care Organization in the Department of Veteran Affairs and this recognition recognizes a high level of care to veterans and expertise in in VA healthcare and benefits, its execution and the education on the population's needs of providing culturally sensitive care. We are also proud to be a community contract—a community care network provider under the newly implemented VA Mission Act, and one of the preferred vendors for our VA hospitals here in New York City including the New York State Veterans Home at Saint Albans. Of the approximate 22.5 million veterans in America today, 18 million are over the age of 65

2 where approximately 25% of the deaths that take place  
3 in the U.S. today are veterans. That's approximately  
4 1,600 veterans every day, and 96% of all those deaths  
5 are occurring in our community with the 4% occurring  
6 in the VA facility so sort. So, with the—with-this  
7 community has a diverse and complex fiscal and mental  
8 health—and mental health needs that the VA addresses  
9 with a multitude of services and benefits. However,  
10 because of the complexity of the VA system and  
11 systemic poor health literacy among veterans, many  
12 veterans never fully access nor utilize the benefits  
13 that they deserve. As New York City's veterans  
14 population continues to get older, we—we have seen  
15 that of our—of our 876 patients, approximately 26% of  
16 them are over to 20% are Korean War Veterans; 18% are  
17 Vietnam and approximately 36% are composed of the  
18 other war years or peace time, cold war, O-I-F O-E-  
19 F, et cetera. So, it is becoming more important to  
20 conduct this outreach so that they know about their  
21 full VA benefits, which can cover homecare, hospice  
22 or long-term care services. Our Outreach Program  
23 currently has three veteran liaisons that serve all  
24 five boroughs with most of our veteran patients going  
25 from Manhattan, Queens and in Brooklyn. With this

request of \$150,000 in city funding we wish to expand the Visiting Nurse Service of New York's Hospice Program to serve more than—to serve more veterans throughout New York City. We have implemented cultural sensitivity training for our staff as well as within our Healthcare Informatic—Informatic practices. This collection of data has enabled us to assess areas of opportunity to help address the veterans in our community. It helps us to see the current health landscape of veterans in New York and to ensure positive patient experiences during this era of value-based care. This funding of—this funding will support additional staff resources with a focus in Brooklyn specifically to help with (1) educate and improve New York City veterans' community access to their VA benefit. (2) Expand our partnerships with veterans hospitals and groups, and (3) provide education to community-based organizations and providers for veterans' special needs and end of life care. A quick patient story: With the—up in the Bronx this past Veterans Day there's—in the testimony we have a reference to it. It was covered in the news. The veterans have an approximately 70% higher chance than non-service members to develop A-L-S,

2 and we had a patient up in-up in the Bronx who was  
3 referred to us from the Bronx via he was a Marine  
4 during Desert Storm and suffered from A-L-S  
5 unfortunately, and who had trouble accessing some  
6 additional support service while in the hospice care  
7 for his-for his wife, and they were having trouble  
8 accessing the survivor benefits, and struggling to  
9 know how his family was going to survive following  
10 his passing. Our-one of our liaisons up there whose  
11 son knew-she's an Army veteran, and served as a medic  
12 in Afghanistan. She was-she was so invaluable to  
13 this case where she helped this patient and the  
14 family access these benefits, and-and helped  
15 alleviate that stress. So when this patient was able  
16 to access all these benefits as they have encountered  
17 throughout the years so while in our hospice service  
18 they got the care, but they also got access to these  
19 additional resources that we were able to provide  
20 this education internally to them. So, in closing, I  
21 would really like to thank all of you up here for  
22 strategizing and trying to formulate with all of our  
23 community partners and our city partners in how we  
24 can better serve our veterans here in New York City

2 and I look forward to working with all of you. Thank  
3 you. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Joe.  
5 That was a great Council speech.

6 JOE VITTI: I appreciate that. Thank  
7 you.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And I know you put  
9 in an application for funding. So, I'm going to take  
10 a look at that.

11 JOE VITTI: I appreciate it. Thank you  
12 so much.

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And didn't know I  
14 got an A-O-S from the Veterans and more come through.  
15 (sic)

16 JOE VITTI: Yes, we're-you know, there's-  
17 there's a-the DOD and the Department of Veteran  
18 Affairs they're still researching. There's two  
19 speculations as to why it's occurring. Some of it is  
20 one of the speculations again--none of those things  
21 is-is concluded yet. One of the speculations is how  
22 they administer the immunizations to us when you go  
23 to boot camp or basic training or Officer Candidate  
24 School, and then-and how you would immediately go  
25 into physical and mental stressful activities after

2 you get those shots, and the second one is the  
3 lifestyle of. You know, when I was—and many of us  
4 here were obviously in the military, and you're  
5 averaging what? Four or five hours a night if that  
6 (laughs)and then you're doing very physical and  
7 mental stressful things as well. So, and you're doing  
8 that for a few years. So, they're thinking that  
9 that's also another factor of why they are developing  
10 A-O-S. So as soon—as soon as a veteran has A-O-S  
11 even if that second person did one second of military  
12 service in the Guard or Reserve or active duty,  
13 they're eligible for substantial VA benefits, and  
14 this is only one example of—of—of an area that many  
15 veterans are not aware of. So, we help them access  
16 that. It's a terrible—it's obviously a very terrible  
17 disease, and during that time with healthcare being  
18 the number one reason for bankruptcy in America, this  
19 was one area of population health that we seek to  
20 mitigate.

21 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Do we know how many  
22 veterans here in the city are fatal?

23 JOE VITTI: I'm sorry. What was that?

24 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Do you know how  
25 many veterans within New York City--?

2                   JOE VITTI: I can certainly run a report.  
3 You know that's part of the data case that we track X  
4 amounts of this--of this veteran population that have  
5 A-O-S, cancer or Parkinson's, that's slide 2. (sic)  
6 So I can certainly find that information if you think  
7 that would be valuable to you.

8                   CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes, we would like  
9 that, sir. Thanks, Joe.

10                   Chair Deutsch, Council Members and staff,  
11 good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to  
12 speak to the Veterans Committee about the Fiscal Year  
13 2021 Budget. My name is Ryan Foley and I am the  
14 Supervising Attorney of the Veterans Practice at the  
15 New York Legal Assistance group, NYLAG a non-profit  
16 law office dedicated to providing free legal services  
17 in civil matters to low-income New Yorkers.  
18 Understanding the unique needs and challenges that  
19 exist among the diverse group of veterans that call  
20 New York City home, NYLAG operates two veteran  
21 specific programs: NYLAG's Legal Help, Veterans  
22 Initiative holds weekly legal clinics within the  
23 Bronx and Manhattan VA Medical Centers as well as the  
24 Northport VA on Long Island. These clinics provide  
25 an opportunity for NYLAG attorneys to work closely



2 with the medical professionals to address the non-  
3 medical needs of low-income veterans with serious  
4 health problems. In addition to the medical legal  
5 partnership NYLAG has with the Department of Veteran  
6 Affairs, we also have a community-based veteran  
7 program. NYLAG's Veterans Practice, which is funded  
8 by the City Council's Legal Services for Veterans  
9 provides comprehensive services to veterans and their  
10 families regardless of whether they use or can use  
11 the VA Healthcare system. With only 30% of veterans  
12 seeking care from a VA medical facility and  
13 approximately 15% of veterans receiving less than an  
14 honorable discharge, which can impact eligibility for  
15 VA healthcare access. NYLAG Veterans Practice looks  
16 to reach this large population of under-served  
17 veterans by work with other agencies and community-  
18 based organizations focused on assisting veterans.  
19 NYLAG's Veterans Practice has close referral  
20 relationships with dozens of non-VA organizations and  
21 offices of elected officials. We are a network  
22 provider within Vet Connect NYC, and we accept direct  
23 referrals through phone and email requests.  
24 Recognizing that it can be very difficult for  
25 individuals to seek help especially veterans NYLAG

2 provides multiple avenues to receive that request and  
3 answer the call. Veterans deal with all the same  
4 legal issues as civilians, but also run into issues  
5 unique to their veteran status. Both of NYLAG's  
6 Veterans' Programs placed the main focus on those  
7 veteran-specific issues, the legal issues rarely fall  
8 neatly into one category. This makes NYLAG's team of  
9 nearly 300 attorneys, paralegals and financial  
10 counselors a powerful resource for every veteran we  
11 touch. A veteran seeking help accessing medical care  
12 will not only be screened for VA healthcare  
13 eligibility, but also for Medicaid and Medicare,  
14 which are crucial to obtaining long-term care for New  
15 York City's aging veteran population. A veteran  
16 seeking help with an eviction will work with  
17 attorneys, but will be provided trainings not only on  
18 housing benefits specific to veterans, but also on  
19 military and veteran cultural competency, and  
20 veterans seeking help obtaining VA disability  
21 benefits are screened for all available public  
22 benefits including Social Security and SNAP benefits  
23 To ensure that they are receiving all of the  
24 resources they are entitled to uses combination of  
25 experienced veteran attorneys both inside the VA and

2 in the community working within a large and  
3 knowledgeable organization dedicated to social  
4 justice, which enables NYLAG to provide the highest  
5 quality assistance to the veteran population. The  
6 crucial and comprehensive work that NYLAG does on  
7 behalf of veterans would not be possible without the  
8 legal services for veteran initiative funding. As  
9 such, NYLAG strongly urges the Council to continue  
10 and expand legal services for Veterans Initiative to  
11 allow us to help even more New York City veterans.  
12 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We  
13 look forward to engaging any further discussions  
14 about serving our veteran community, and improving  
15 their access to critical legal services and other  
16 resources. I would be happy to answer any questions.

17 ASHTON STEWART: Good afternoon. Thank  
18 you, Chair Deutsch, members of the Committee on  
19 Veterans, advocates and allies and for holding this  
20 hearing focused on veteran services. My name is  
21 Ashton Stewart and I'm the Program Manager for  
22 SAGEvets. SAGE is the country's first and largest  
23 organization dedicated to improving lives of lesbian,  
24 gay, bisexual, and transgender older people. Founded  
25 in New York City in 1978, SAGE has provided

2 comprehensive social services and programs to LGBTQ  
3 older people for four decades. SAGE Vets is one of  
4 SAGE's programs and, in fact, is the only program in  
5 New York City designed for older LGBT veterans. New  
6 York is home to approximately one million men and  
7 women who served in their country—served the country  
8 in the armed forces many of whom are LGBT. New York  
9 State and New York City are among the top ten cities  
10 with the highest concentrations of gay and lesbian  
11 veterans both in number and in per capita and, in  
12 fact, the Urban Institute estimates that there are  
13 over 38,000 lesbian and gay veterans living in New  
14 York City—New York State with 17,000 residing in New  
15 York City. According to a statewide survey by the  
16 LGBT Health and Human Services Network or New York  
17 State, 56% of LGBT New Yorkers who identified as  
18 veterans were over the age of 50. Many LGBT older  
19 veterans and New Yorkers are struggling and yet not  
20 accessing the services they need, and the needs are  
21 deep among LGBT elder veterans. Consider that older-  
22 elder LGBT veterans served in the military at a time  
23 when discrimination against LGBT people—people was  
24 rampant and a matter of official government policy.  
25 For transgender people serving in the military is

2 still not a resolved issue. Older LGBT veterans have  
3 a unique set of needs that stem from discrimination  
4 and harassment and, therefore, have been reluctant to  
5 engage in VA and other veteran services that they  
6 might be eligible for hearing ignorant and inferior  
7 treatment from providers because of an individual's  
8 sexual orientation or gender identity. Furthermore,  
9 older LGBT veterans live in isolation and usually do  
10 not have family caregivers to rely on when their  
11 health begins to deteriorate, and just to share a  
12 little story just to qualify that, just yesterday we  
13 were part of the TDF Veterans Theater Going Program,  
14 which is a terrific program and part of you  
15 initiative. Thank you very much for that, and we  
16 want to see the Columbian Rock Band, which is  
17 fantastic, and one of the veterans who lived close  
18 the theater we've been trying to communicate with him  
19 and get him to sign a document we need to get access  
20 to his confirmation of service. He was a National  
21 Guardsman. So, I invited him. We walked together.  
22 We had some lunch, and he was just telling me a story  
23 of about he hasn't talked to his brother in 15 years  
24 because he's homophobic. He had a really close  
25 relationship with his father who died. His partner

died. He had a really terrible situation. He said,  
But SAGE makes me feel comfortable with who I am, and  
I can talk about being gay and it's not a problem.  
He's staying at the Woodstock Senior Center over on  
42<sup>nd</sup> Street. Or 43<sup>rd</sup> street, and it was just a  
marvelous day, and he had a wonderful afternoon. So  
did I. So, I've got a lot of stories, but just to  
carry on with my testimony, SAGE Vets is the only  
program in New York City that serves LGBT people over  
the age of 50, and as a trusted LGBT organization,  
SAGE's reputation and commitment to the LGBT people  
helps instill trust among them and once that trust is  
established we are able to get them the information  
they need, and make the referrals to service  
providers because we understand their unique needs,  
and we also work with the providers to make sure that  
they understand their unique needs as well. And  
thanks to the generous support of that we received  
from the New York City's Council's Committee on  
Veterans in Fiscal Year 2020. We had the most  
predictive-productive year to date, and thanks to  
this funding we raised the issue of visibility of  
elder LGBT veterans across the city, and we have  
also got a SAGE Vets staffer. We've been presented

2 and engaged with communities, forged and nurtured  
3 valuable partnerships including VA, VSOs like the  
4 American Legion and the VFW. We've also produced  
5 programs for older LGBT veterans in each of the five  
6 boroughs all while offering life saving and valuable  
7 case assistance to individual veterans in need. Last  
8 year we did a partnership program with Black Veterans  
9 for Social Justice to address LGBT issues for people  
10 of color. It was amazing, and then this coming month  
11 we're celebrating Women's History Month, and we're  
12 doing something with the National Association of  
13 Black Military Women, the National President is  
14 coming. We also have a lesbian veteran from the  
15 Hudson Valley coming down to share her story about  
16 getting discriminated, which led to her discharge.  
17 It's going to be powerful. You are certainly invited  
18 to come, and as an extension of SAGEvets' impact in  
19 New York State and to further the above, SAGE's  
20 ongoing advocacy helped usher in the recent passage  
21 of the Restoration of Honor Act, which was signed by  
22 Governor Cuomo the day after Veterans Day. Thanks to  
23 SAGE and our partners' advocacy work along with the  
24 leadership of Senator Brad Hoylman, the Restoration  
25 of Honor Act will enable LGT veterans who receive a

2 less than honorable discharge due to the sexual  
3 orientation or gender identify to access veteran and  
4 supports at the state level. SAGE is now advising the  
5 New York State Division of Veteran Services and the  
6 implementation of this new legislation and the launch  
7 is expected this spring, and wit the help from our  
8 legal partner, the Veteran Advocacy Project, we just  
9 had our very first successful discharge upgrade with  
10 several others pending. Less than honorable  
11 discharge is fairly common among elder LGBT veterans,  
12 and with the passing or the Restoration of Honor Act,  
13 SAGEvets will leverage its unique position to support  
14 LGBT older veterans through an increased number of  
15 discharge upgrades once the New York State Division  
16 of Veteran services begins accepting applications.  
17 We're already seeing an uptick in inquiries both from  
18 individuals and legislator. I just had a quick  
19 story. NYLAG helped us out with a Green Baret  
20 veteran from Vietnam who called me literally a week  
21 before he was going to be evicted or he had already  
22 been evicted. He was going to lose all these  
23 archives from LGBT Veteran memorabilia he had been  
24 saving. Well, thanks to NYLAG they worked miracles.  
25 They got him his keys back to his apartment. He's



2 worked out a deal with HASA to pay back the-the  
3 arrears he owes. We saved his archives and we're  
4 working to State Division of Veteran Services to get  
5 them entered into the New York State Veterans Museum,  
6 and also recently SAGE worked closely with Mayor Bill  
7 de Blasio's team providing data and support of the  
8 Discharge Upgrade Initiative that would fund legal  
9 service providers who assist veterans seeking a  
10 discharge upgrade at the federal level. This  
11 initiative was enacted by Mayor as Commissioner  
12 Hendon was discussing earlier. Another thing we did  
13 recently is to discuss and do some research on  
14 minority veterans including LGBT and people of color.  
15 We were one of the 23 people that were interviewed,  
16 and also provided a focus group. It's great data in  
17 here. I'll share the electric-the electronic copy to  
18 be seen, but just to like cut to the chase, we would  
19 love to continue doing this work at this level of  
20 support and we're respectfully requesting the  
21 restoration of the grant that we had last-this  
22 current year to perform outreach, and address the  
23 veteran related needs of the LGBT older veterans.  
24 Council Members, thank you for your veteran related  
25 needs of the LGBT older veterans. So, Council

2 Members, thank you for your continued—continued  
3 support of SAGE. We look forward to partnering with  
4 you and continue this work.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you, Ashton  
6 and you can count on that, and I'm the one you have  
7 time to slate.

8 ASHTON STEWART: (laughs) I find it  
9 somehow, but thank you guys. It's been a raise  
10 sitting here. Thank you so much, Chair Deutsch.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. If  
12 you've got some time you can go to Row New York.

13 ASHTON STEWART: Probably will.

14 AMANDA KRAUS: Yeah that's it, but you  
15 have to talk again. (laughter) This would be great  
16 an LGBTQ Veterans rally organization. My name is  
17 Amanda Kraus. I'm the Founder and CEO of Row New  
18 York. Thank you Council Member Deutsch and other  
19 council members and everyone, allies in the room. I'm  
20 always so inspired hearing all the stories of  
21 everyone's work. I started Row New York with the  
22 vision of bringing competitive rowing and academic  
23 support to under-served youth New York City and we  
24 added a veterans program about five years ago. About  
25 seven years ago we started adaptive rowing for New

1     Yorkers with disabilities with cognitive and physical  
2     disabilities so that entrance of veteran's rowing  
3     program came somewhat naturally to us, and we are so  
4     grateful to the support of our Veterans Rowing  
5     Program from the Council. The Veterans Rowing  
6     Program provides opportunities to experience the  
7     sport of rowing for hundreds of New York City's  
8     veterans. The program is designed to help veterans  
9     and military service members avoid poor health  
10    outcomes such as obesity and depression by offering  
11    land-based and on-water workouts led by experienced  
12    rowing coaches. Veterans build strength, speed and  
13    endurance and mobility and benefit from the  
14    opportunity to compete on the team, belong to  
15    supportive community and experience New York City's  
16    waterways. All three of our on-water locations are  
17    actually located in New York City parks.

18    Recreational and competitive programs take place at  
19    the Peter Desharpo House in Manhattan and the World's  
20    Fair Boat House in Queens. Where New York proudly  
21    serves veterans with disabilities at our boat houses  
22    in Manhattan and Queens, VA centers and we partner  
23    with veteran service organizations. Since 2013 when  
24    Row New York was certified by the U.S. Olympic  
25

2 Committee as a US Para Olympics Sports Club, the only  
3 club of its kind in New York City we have continually  
4 worked to expand the reach of our adaptive  
5 programming and build relationships with other  
6 organizations dedicated to expanding athletic  
7 opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The  
8 design of our program ensures that any veteran with a  
9 disability can choose an appropriate level from a  
10 one-time demonstration to regular competitive  
11 practice. I should note that not all of our veterans  
12 have disabilities. Some do and some do not, physical  
13 and cognitive. Our Veterans Rowing Program  
14 encompasses the following: There's the Competitive  
15 Adaptive Program where veterans meet three days a  
16 week to practice for competitive races including the  
17 C.R.A.S.H-B indoor rowing championships in Boston,  
18 which took place last weekend and the Mid Atlantic  
19 Erg Sprints in Virginia, but we also create  
20 individualized training plans for each rower based on  
21 his or her goals and needs. The recreational program  
22 involves veterans learning the fundamentals of rowing  
23 and building technique, improving mobility, enjoying  
24 outdoors—outdoor and indoor workouts. We also  
25 provide indoor rowing instruction at local VA centers

2 like Bronx, Manhattan and Queens throughout the year.  
3 I would say that my one quick story is from a race we  
4 had on the Harlem River last spring where one of our  
5 fairly new people who had been rowing with us about a  
6 year, a veteran approached me at the course and, you  
7 know, he—he said I really appreciate this program,  
8 Amanda, and I said well, we feel privileged to  
9 provide it so you don't really need to thank me, and  
10 he said, no, you don't understand what this means,  
11 and I thought, you know, I'm sure you all have  
12 experienced this when you run something and then  
13 people start telling you all about what's, you know,  
14 why it's valuable. Yes, that's why I do it. I  
15 understand it, but he said no, you don't understand  
16 what this means to me and to my teammates, and I  
17 said, what is it—so what do you mean? And he said, I  
18 have not felt that I have been a part of a team since  
19 I was in combat and that was 25 years ago, but this  
20 is not a young man. And he said I finally feel like  
21 I'm a part of something again, and I'm a part of a  
22 team, and we're out on that river together, and it's  
23 so meaningful to me, and that I thought was really  
24 meaningful to hear, you know, that this—these  
25 individuals have this opportunity to be a part of

2 something and work towards something together.

3 That's really positive. Sa, I loved to—we're always  
4 looking for more partners, too, and we're certainly  
5 so grateful to the—to the Council, the City for the  
6 really invaluable support of the program, and come  
7 visit us. You already have.

8 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes.

9 AMANDA KRAUS: So, thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: And definitely get  
11 together with Ashley.

12 AMANDA KRAUS: Again.

13 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Yes. She's ready  
14 to go, yeah. (laughter) Thank you. (pause)

15 COCO CULHANE: Hi, I'm Coco Culhane  
16 Executive Director of VAP, Veteran Advocacy Project,  
17 and so we spun off from the Urban Justice Center this  
18 year and we are now an independent non-profit. We  
19 are a more efficient machine, and instead of you I  
20 won't go through all of our initiatives. They're  
21 rather familiar. So, we won't waste anyone's time,  
22 but I did want to highlight that we're really trying  
23 to move towards being as holistic a legal provider as  
24 possible, and in doing that we have launched our  
25 criminal defense practice with Captain Art Cody who

2 was the key about that in detail, but it's really  
3 been a terrific addition and I wanted to share just  
4 one story that kind of exemplifies all of these  
5 different aspects and how they come together. We're  
6 working with the Veterans Justice Outreach from the  
7 VA. They told us about veterans at Rikers who needed  
8 our help. We started going out there regularly. We  
9 met a Marine who had come back. He had spent 10  
10 years in prison, came back, tried to go contact SSVF  
11 providers, tried to get job programs. He wasn't  
12 getting through to anyone, right? He wasn't getting  
13 his calls back soon enough. He eventually, you know,  
14 went back to what he knew how to do, which was  
15 selling drugs. That's how he ended up at Rikers  
16 where we met him. So, we sat down with him and  
17 basically just pleaded with him like we can maybe cut  
18 through some of that red tape for you. Can you just  
19 stick it out? And what happened was the re-entry  
20 organization he was working with assigned him to a  
21 Methadone program that is not familiar with PTSD.  
22 They didn't really know how to work with him, and got  
23 kicked out. The clinic was nowhere near where he  
24 lived. Things fell apart, right, and so our intake  
25 advocate tracked him basically just kept saying:

2 We're here, we're here and we've got detox for you if  
3 you want it. When you call add a couple of weeks  
4 from the link station, and finally he said, you know,  
5 I'm done. I'm ready, and so he came in. We got him  
6 hooked up to the detox program and he went to  
7 Samaritan Village, and I'm just—we're working on his  
8 character of discharge. He was—there was an  
9 attempted rape in the Marines. He since started  
10 using drugs. He went directly to a dishonorable  
11 discharge, and his life was just—he really defaulted  
12 (sic) some friends. So, we're working on all these  
13 different issues. We're working advocating on his  
14 housing, and actually just texted me this morning a  
15 picture. He got married and they have VASH Continued  
16 Voucher and he's like, you know, he's really started  
17 his life over, and some of that—most of that is not  
18 legal, but it's all coming together and that's—that's  
19 where I think that our work really can make the  
20 difference, and I just want to revisit a topic,  
21 which, you know, when we're kind of—we're talking  
22 about Vet Connect and referrals and how someone can  
23 refer that, to just remind everyone that there are  
24 really long waiting lists for the claims appeals and  
25 discharge upgrades, you know the city bar and ours—



2 we've actually had to just turn off line our entire  
3 intake line is just gone now because we cannot handle  
4 the volume, and finally, I just wanted to say that,  
5 you know, that because we're so grateful for  
6 everything that this committee has done, and  
7 expanding that legal initiative money, and we just  
8 hope that they're used for veterans law. Those  
9 dollars go to our unmet needs. I mean there is just--  
10 there is so many vets needing and it's really hard  
11 when they call and you have to just say, you're on  
12 the list and we're trying. So, we hope that those  
13 dollars are really dedicated towards those needs--  
14 legal issues. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay. Alright,  
16 thank you, Panel. Okay. (laughter) (pause) Oh, okay,  
17 Jody Rudin. Alright, Arts, Jody? James Pachow and  
18 Towaki. (pause) Alright. So Towaki, you went first  
19 last time so now we'll have another one, right?

20 JODY RUDIN: Good afternoon Chair Deutsch  
21 and fellow city Council Members. Thank you for giving  
22 me the opportunity to testify here today. My name is  
23 Jody Rudin, and I'm the Chief Operating Officer at  
24 Project Renewal, a New York City homeless service  
25 non-profit. For more than 53 years Project Renewal

2 has empowered individuals and families who are  
3 homeless or at risk of homelessness to renew their  
4 lives through critical programs focused on health,  
5 homes and jobs. Each year we serve nearly 15,000 New  
6 Yorkers including hundreds of veterans. We are  
7 grateful to Speaker Johnson, Chair Deutsch and the  
8 City Council for their generous support of Project  
9 Renewal's Homelessness Prevention Services for  
10 Veterans, support that has been crucial for us to  
11 help veterans across all of our programs. In Fiscal  
12 Year 2019 we provided healthcare to over 140 veterans  
13 at our mobile medical vans and shelter-based clinics  
14 and through our Psychiatry and Substance Use Disorder  
15 programs, and we successfully placed more than a  
16 quarter of the veterans living in our homeless  
17 shelters into permanent housing. In the past two  
18 years over 87% of the veterans we have admitted to  
19 our housing program have successfully maintained  
20 their housing thanks to our ongoing support, but what  
21 I want to focus on today is the life changing impact  
22 that our Workforce Development Programs have had on  
23 the veterans we serve. We believe that the  
24 individuals who have served our country deserve  
25 sustainable employment and a living wage. A 33-year

2 old Staten Islander named Chavon is the perfect  
3 example of how Project Renewal's comprehensive  
4 services help veterans overcome the complex  
5 challenges they face. After serving in the Army,  
6 Chavon had trouble finding a stable career, a problem  
7 that far too many veterans face in our city. She  
8 experienced homelessness and struggled to support her  
9 young children. Then Chavon enrolled in Next Step,  
10 which is one of our Workforce Development programs.  
11 In Next Step we prepared her for a career in social  
12 services. Chavon received training and non-violent  
13 crisis intervention and an opioid overdose prevention  
14 as well as in financial literacy. Today, Chavon is  
15 employed full time as a Case Manager. Her inspiring  
16 story motivates her clients to overcome their own  
17 challenges. We want to continue renewing the lives  
18 of veterans like Chavon. With further support from  
19 the City Council we have an opportunity to expand  
20 our Workforce Development Programs, and ensure that  
21 more veterans achieve the economic stability they  
22 need to live independently. I'm sorry. I was trying  
23 to be efficient, and I skipped down a little bit.  
24 I'm now towards the tail end of the testimony. I  
25 wanted to just express that we're ready to work with

2 each Council Member to ensure their veteran  
3 constituents are being served, and never forgotten,  
4 and we remind all present that Project Renewal is a  
5 resource their office can call upon any time. Thank  
6 you for the opportunity to testify.

7 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you. Thank  
8 you, Jody.

9 JODY RUDIN: Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Anyway, I like your  
11 stories. Yeah, today is like story day. (laughter)  
12 We've been hearing a lot of success today.

13 JODY RUDIN: Well, we're transforming  
14 lives and we wanted you to hear about it. We really  
15 appreciate your support.

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you.

17 JAMES FITZGERALD: Thank you, Chair and  
18 Council Members for this opportunity. Before I begin  
19 my official testimony, I would like to bring up an  
20 issue about a communication between whatever entity  
21 within the Council sends our communications for the  
22 hearings just to relook at efforts to ensure that  
23 community stakeholders get communications about any  
24 new scheduling. Us at the NYC Veterans Lives got no  
25 notification about this upcoming hearing. It just so

2 happened through our due diligence of checking the  
3 Council website and making sure that we're up to  
4 speed on the actions of the Council that we were able  
5 to make it here today, but unfortunately, I was able-  
6 I was unable to provide the additional copies of my  
7 testimony so I apologize for that, but I would just  
8 like to re-examine efforts for communication from the  
9 Council to our community stakeholders.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Alright. We'll  
11 definitely find out how you could sign up and get  
12 back to you.

13 JAMES FITZGERALD: Thank you, Chair.

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: For a little bit of  
15 notification.

16 JAMES FITZGERALD: Thank you. Good  
17 afternoon and thank you to Chair Deutsch and  
18 Committee members for this opportunity to testify  
19 today. My name is James Fitzgerald, and I'm the  
20 Deputy Director of NYC Veterans Alliance a member  
21 driven grassroots policy, advocacy, and community  
22 building organization that advances veterans and  
23 military families as civic leaders. We work with  
24 more than 150 community organizations across the New  
25 York City Metro Area to promote events for veterans

2 and families posted online and ourveterans.nyc. Our  
3 year-round online resource hub visited by more than  
4 4,000 users each month. We also remain the only  
5 organization dedicated to local level advocacy for  
6 veterans and families here in New York City. I  
7 greatly appreciate the opportunity to present  
8 testimony before you today. The New York City  
9 Veterans Alliance was a key advocate for the creation  
10 of the Department of Veteran Services to support our  
11 city's approximate population of 210,000 veterans  
12 about one-fourth of our state's veterans plus and  
13 estimated 250,000 caregivers and family members  
14 connected to those veterans. Our membership strongly  
15 supports our continuous efforts to set high  
16 expectations for the role of DVS in New York City and  
17 beyond, and there is much to be optimistic as we look  
18 at the future of DVS. When it comes to the testimony  
19 presented by Commissioner Hendon, we were greatly  
20 pleased to see their increased efforts towards  
21 outreach, and taking away the geographic component  
22 and looking more towards the demographic. So, we're  
23 looking forward to working with the Commissioner on  
24 increased efforts to improve the services that are  
25 rendered. In that respect when it comes to outreach

2 we would like to continue to put the pressure on the  
3 Council to put the pressure on the Council to create  
4 a budget line for an agency chief contracting  
5 officer. It was delightful to hear about the  
6 Director of Contracting, but one piece that was  
7 lacking from that description of the position was  
8 oversight on Council discretionary funds, which is a  
9 vital component of that position not only to look at  
10 the contracts that the Department of Veteran Services  
11 currently has under their belt, but also the  
12 discretionary funds that are going out to veteran  
13 service organizations to ensure that those services  
14 are being rendered to standard and proper oversight  
15 is rendered inside the agency. So, I'll continue on.  
16 DVS meets the ability to manage and monitor their  
17 significant contract with Northwell for Vet Connect  
18 NYC as currently overseen by DCAS and the agency does  
19 not have the fluency or cultural competency with  
20 backing (sic) services. The contracting and  
21 procurement expertise can enhance the agency's  
22 ability to provide crucial oversight for  
23 discretionary funds from the Council to organizations  
24 that provide services to veterans and their families,  
25 as well as managing its own request for protocol

2 processes. Oversight of city funds one of Veteran  
3 Services is a basic agency responsibility and would  
4 at last bring DVS into alignment with the State and  
5 Federal counterparts. We urge the Council to ensure  
6 DVS has no further delays on establishing and  
7 managing contracts and procurement going forward as  
8 this is a necessary function for DVS to truly operate  
9 and an independent agency. We strongly also urge  
10 that DVS establish in-house capability to provide  
11 consultation on and direct filing of DVS claims.  
12 NYC's Veterans Alliance, you know is completely on  
13 board and thankful for New York State Division of  
14 Veteran Services for providing New York City DVS with  
15 VA accreditation training. So, we're hoping that  
16 that training can continue down to the community  
17 level so we can spread this information around to  
18 ensure that it's reaching veterans at the community  
19 level. It is incumbent on local government to step  
20 up with VA accredited staff who do have this  
21 capability. DVS' Community Outreach staff are  
22 currently not able to offer direct assistance with VA  
23 claims so the service is referred out. With increased  
24 funding projected for the next fiscal year we strong  
25 urge the Council to support DVS in being able to



2 provide these essential services to our community.

3 One of the court issues also that was discussed today

4 was about our homeless veteran population, and the

5 figure was given of 684 currently utilizing the

6 shelter system. The key word inside of that that I'd

7 like to emphasize for the Commissioner, for the

8 general public is it's a homeless shelter. So, those

9 684 veterans are homeless. So, like understanding

10 that they are within the homeless shelter we should

11 be looking at how we can get them towards an outcome

12 of stabilized housing and out of the shelter system

13 completely. Along with that, DVS's core services and

14 accomplishment should be accurately reflected in the

15 Annual Mayor's Management Report, and it should also

16 be transparent about areas where more support for

17 improvement is needed. The MMR also shows the number

18 of community members engaged and given assistance,

19 but the definition for these metrics I feel are

20 lacking, and I think we can do a much more

21 sophisticated reporting when it comes to the story

22 behind the outcomes of the veterans that are

23 currently inside the shelter system but are currently

24 homeless by DVS' definition. We look forward to

25 improved reporting of DVS' impacts in future years,

2 and improved transparency about—about further support  
3 DVS needs. Thank you for this opportunity to offer  
4 testimony today. Pending your questions, this  
5 concludes my testimony.

6 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: (off mic) Yes, I  
7 agree with everything you said. (sic) Okay. Thank  
8 you.

9 ART CODY: As Coco mentioned—my name is  
10 Art Cody, I'm the Director of Criminal Programs in  
11 the Veteran Advocacy Project. I welcome the  
12 opportunity to testify before you today on the needs  
13 of our veterans and the justice systems and how VAP,  
14 Veteran Advocacy Project is uniquely designed to meet  
15 those needs, but I think perhaps more importantly I  
16 come before you today as a 34-year veteran of the  
17 Armed Services. My most recent combat tour was  
18 Afghanistan. What was particularly distressing to me  
19 and I think in all sincerity a better word is  
20 heartbreaking to me was what our troops particularly  
21 our young enlisted soldiers our National Guards and  
22 in particular go through. The—it can't be  
23 understated the amount of danger, fear sometimes  
24 abject terror and in many cases death how much of  
25 this our troops are seeing on a likely a daily basis.

2 None of our troops come home the same way they went  
3 over, none of them. There is an old expression in  
4 the Army that in war there are no unwounded soldiers,  
5 and I found that to be absolutely the truth both when  
6 I was over there as well as in my-my veteran advocacy  
7 upon my return to the United States. I find, though,  
8 that when they return we as a society don't always  
9 give them the therapy and the treatment that they  
10 need to reintegrate, and I think this is most  
11 pronounced with respect to post-traumatic stress  
12 issues. Now some veterans are very-are able to cope  
13 with the stress with the trauma better than others.  
14 In many of our veterans' cases they had mental health  
15 issues prior to their deployments, and I can tell  
16 you, and I don't think it will be any surprise  
17 neither Iraq nor Afghanistan are particularly  
18 therapeutic environments. So, when they come home  
19 they have significant issues and what happens is  
20 veterans commonly encounter the criminal justice  
21 system when they're trying to reintegrate back into  
22 civilian society, and most of the time when they're  
23 trying to do that, they either have little or no  
24 mental health supports. Typically and this is  
25 particularly true in what I found in the case of New

2 York Army National Guards. The Army understandably  
3 wants to get them off the federal payroll as quickly  
4 as possible. So, they are rapidly discharged into  
5 society with really no follow-on care plan, and  
6 they're trying to get back into a family, into a job  
7 into a social circle. With rare exception, none of  
8 these groups are able to understand what the veteran  
9 has gone through. Now if we use the VA statistics,  
10 roughly one-third of our veterans either Afghan, Iraq  
11 Era Veterans are suffering from mental health issues,  
12 and to define those, we're really talking about post-  
13 traumatic stress issues, traumatic brain injury,  
14 major depression, substance abuse issues. We are  
15 looking at literally countless veterans in New York  
16 City. One of the common charges that I see in the  
17 courts are weapons possessions, and part of the  
18 underlying reason why veterans are getting weapons  
19 possession charges is because guns are so part of  
20 what they do every day. I mean literally they are  
21 part of a prescribed uniform: Socks, shoes, belt,  
22 gun. They are literally used to carrying it around  
23 so and what—what happens is you have a veteran who  
24 was—what he was required to do say in February in  
25 Afghanistan that is have a loaded weapon will get him

2 3-1/2 to 15 years in August when he comes home. So,  
3 I—I think one of the most important things I can do  
4 with a veteran is to point out to the court that  
5 often if a—if a veteran has a weapon—I'm not saying  
6 to make weapons charges, but I think it's a good  
7 example of the kind of thing, the kind of trouble  
8 that you can get in. Commonly, it's either because  
9 the veteran didn't—was not aware of New York's gun  
10 laws or if a veteran is contemplating suicide,  
11 commonly they will have their weapon in their car to  
12 enable them to do that. Recently I've had both those  
13 cases. Only about 7% of the population of the United  
14 States is veterans. One of the most important things  
15 I do is to explain in depth to a prosecutor, a judge  
16 or jury about the veteran's experience. To translate  
17 this strange, traumatic experience so as to foster  
18 the understanding of a district attorney so maybe the  
19 charges change, to foster compassion, to engender  
20 compassion to get that vet the—to get that vet the  
21 treatment he needs, and how I do this is primarily  
22 and I think it's commonly at Riker's Island and other  
23 facilities in New York is I will sit down and I will  
24 talk to this veteran in a—in a vet-to-vet  
25 conversation to understand what—what—where this vet

2 has been. I will gather the records. I will  
3 decipher all the acronyms. I will reach out to his  
4 colleagues. I will build the brief. I'll submit the  
5 brief and I will orally argue it in court. What I  
6 find happens is once that's done and the veteran's  
7 story has been told because that's one of my missions  
8 is to tell that veteran's story. Commonly the  
9 disposition goes from well, we were going to give him  
10 five years in prison because that's—it's relatively a  
11 light sentence for that particular crime. It goes  
12 from five years in prison to six months of treatment.  
13 In both the case I just mentioned to you, the—  
14 bringing the weapon because of ignorance of the law  
15 as well as the suicidal path, that's exactly  
16 happened. The vet went from looking at five years in  
17 prison to six months in—six months in treatment. What  
18 we find in the Veterans Advocacy, the Veteran  
19 Advocacy Program, our project is vets don't suffer  
20 from a single issue. Very commonly the veterans I  
21 work with also have housing issues. They have  
22 education issues. They have discharge upgrade  
23 issues. One of the real advantages to the Veteran  
24 Advocacy Project is we have the resources on board.  
25 While I am working on the criminal disposition, we

2 have the resources on board to help that veteran get  
3 into housing to get that discharge upgrade to put  
4 that veteran into education. So, I ask your  
5 assistance in funding the Veteran's Advocacy Project  
6 particularly in the new re-established criminal  
7 programs to help us to continue to serve our  
8 veterans, and I am happy to answer any questions that  
9 you may have.

10 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you so much.  
11 Thank you, Art.

12 MALE SPEAKER: Mr. Deutsch, you and I  
13 first had a conversation where you gave me a person's  
14 card of someone who lived in my building to reach out  
15 to you. I don't know if they did.

16 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: No.

17 MALE SPEAKER: So, I gave them a business  
18 card to somebody in my building. About two months  
19 ago, someone passed away in my building. She went to  
20 the hospital, came back and she collapsed in the  
21 lobby. There is a security guard in the lobby. She  
22 asked that person for assistance getting back to her  
23 apartment. He refused. So, um, ultimately someone  
24 assisted her back to her apartment. Over the weekend  
25 shed passed away. The landlord of my building is

2 Urban Pathways. I think I told you about them  
3 previously. I asked you some questions for HUD  
4 because they suggested to me do a bait and switch  
5 with the lease I signed with HRA where HRA actually  
6 fraudulently changed my lease two days after I signed  
7 it. I've asked HRA to give me records about what  
8 they've done in response to my complaints dating back  
9 to March 2016. Steven Banks and I we've had  
10 conversations. He told me that he won't comply. So,  
11 I guess the bottom line is all the government  
12 contracts are financed by taxpayers. So, why should  
13 taxpayers have to continue funding contracts with an  
14 entity that is causing people like me to have to  
15 continue punch to strike on the temple because if we  
16 get a concussion when we walk into an interview our  
17 cognitive capabilities aren't in order such that we  
18 don't get the job interview for something that would  
19 have paid us \$450 a day. Because yeah the was some  
20 discussion about HRA earlier today. I also  
21 previously prevailed in litigation against that same  
22 slumlord. They made a decision that a judge issued,  
23 in November of last year but then they filed a new  
24 loss against me where they're claiming that a valid  
25 recent decision were not had. So in terms of the



2 discussion that has been discussing here today about  
3 legal assistance, how much funding can you I guess  
4 earmark for a military veteran such that if they have  
5 to go against HRA that actually provides for me to  
6 legal organizations there is no conflict of interest?  
7 And I can have a judge issue a subpoena against HRA  
8 to find out how many other people it has committed  
9 fraud against, and what has been the repercussions of  
10 that fraud.

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: So, I'm actually  
12 won't ask any questions today. Do you have a  
13 testimony.

14 MALE SPEAKER: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: We could speak  
16 afterwards or you can email me with your questions,  
17 but if you have any testimony I'd love to hear it.

18 MALE SPEAKER: Sure.

19 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: If you have any  
20 questions of anyone, we only want to mention  
21 beforehand any issue they should email me directly  
22 and they will be handled. So far I haven't received  
23 any emails or any other things that you were  
24 discussing and more.

25 MALE SPEAKER: And I guess to close out--

2 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: But if you have  
3 any—if you have any testimony I'd love to hear it.

4 MALE SPEAKER: Okay.

5 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: If you have any  
6 questions you could just submit them.

7 MALE SPEAKER: So, with regards to I  
8 guess budget issues and this is really a budget  
9 hearing for Veteran Services. If HRA is issuing  
10 proposed contracts for veterans—

11 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: If it's a question  
12 then I'm not answering it.

13 MALE SPEAKER: I'll rephrase it.

14 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: If you want to have  
15 testimony, you could give testimony. Otherwise we  
16 have many organizations that offer legal services  
17 that are funded.

18 MALE SPEAKER: Sure, um, I guess I'll  
19 leave for a private conversation.

20 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Okay.

21 MALE SPEAKER: Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON DEUTSCH: Thank you all very  
23 much and I want to thank all the advocates for coming  
24 down today and giving of their time, and we're  
25 looking forward to a good year working together with

2 you and also with the DDS Commission and James  
3 Hunting. So thank you all very much and God bless.  
4 You all God bless the United States and I wanted to  
5 bless you. The meeting 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 March 22, 2020