

NEW YORK CITY VETERANS ADVISORY BOARD 2020 ANNUAL REPORT



**NEW YORK CITY VETERANS ACHIEVEMENTS
AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

*“With malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, **to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan**, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”*
– **Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865**

Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255, press 1)

The Crisis Line, mandated by the Joshua Omvig Veteran Suicide Prevention Act of 2007, provides immediate support to veterans, service members and their families.

December 31, 2020

Mayor Bill de Blasio and Council Speaker Corey Johnson:

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a difficult challenge for all. When the pandemic took hold, we advised the Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) to combat the consequences of the virus in any way possible. This advice was met with DVS focusing on three key programs:

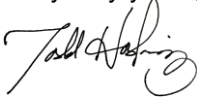
- **Food Security and COVID Response:** DVS coordinated with the NYS Division of Veterans Services, government agencies, Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) and other non-profits with the goal of ensuring that no veteran goes hungry. It created partnerships with GetFoodNYC, the Campaign Against Hunger, HelloFresh, Craig Newmark Philanthropies and Black Veterans for Social Justice and have secured over 25,000 meals for veterans in need since July. DVS also secured 40K masks from Boomer Naturals; as well as funding grants from community-based organizations and companies like the Home Depot and Lyft, which DVS distributed to VSOs which lost significant income due to the pandemic.
- **Mission VetCheck:** Along with ThriveNYC, DVS launched Mission VetCheck, a program that contacted those who received services in the past. In 2020, over 24,000 supportive phone calls were made to proactively identify veterans in need; these calls resulted in over 1,000 service requests. We believe this is a unique program across city government.
- **Mission Home:** DVS continued its quest to end veteran homelessness, having successfully placed 183 veterans in housing in 2020, an 18% increase over 2019. In February 2021, the 1,000th homeless veteran was housed. Veteran homelessness remains less than one third of the overall rate in New York City, with much of this effort funded by federal resources.

While the priority has been to focus on the impact of COVID-19, the Veteran's Advisory Board (VAB) has continued to advocate for longer-term investments. We have identified the following items, which we believe present a great opportunity for the city:

- **DVS is Under Resourced:** DVS has one staff member to over 14,000 constituents. This staffing level is wildly under resourced particularly when you consider the level of outside resources (Federal, State and non-profit) that veterans bring into the city.
- **Continued investment in Veterans on Campus:** Nearly 12,000 veterans receive GI Bill benefits in NYC and each of those who complete a four-year degree bring over \$250,000 of economic impact to the city between GI Bill tuition assistance and housing allowance alone.
- **Assistance for veterans to obtain benefits:** This year DVS started to provide direct assistance to veterans by helping them complete VA disability claims for any Federal benefits to which they may be entitled. New York City benefits from these activities as these federal benefits are then spent locally.
- **NYC contract preferences for veteran owned businesses:** Federal, State and most large businesses offer a preference to contract with veteran owned businesses; however, New York City makes no such effort. We urge the administration to align with state and corporate precedents and adopt this initiative as they do for many other constituencies.

Last year we noted that for the next phase of the agency's evolution, the new Commissioner should narrow the number of initiatives in the portfolio and improve operational effectiveness and we have seen great strides made in this direction. The pandemic has made this need more apparent as city budgets will remain challenged for some time. While difficult, the pandemic is one that both veterans and New Yorkers can and will overcome.

Very truly yours,



Todd Haskins
Chairman

NEW YORK CITY VETERANS ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

As of December 31, 2020, nine of the eleven members had current appointments. One member's term has been verbally extended by the Council; and a fifth appointment by the City Council remains unfilled.

Board Member	Borough	Email (@gmail.com)	Term Expires	Appointment
Joe Bello Secretary	Bronx	JBelloVABNYC	Council extended	Council
Jennifer Kamrowski	Manhattan	JKamrowskiVABNYC	February 17, 2024	Mayor
Todd Haskins Chairman	Manhattan	THaskinsVABNYC	February 17, 2024	Mayor
Charles Hernandez	Bronx	CHernandezVABNYC	March 31, 2021	Council
Peter Kauffmann	Queens	PKauffmannVABNYC	August 23, 2023	Mayor
Wendy McClinton	Brooklyn	WMcClintonVABNYC	June 4, 2021	Council
John Rowan	Queens	JRowanVABNYC	November 19, 2021	Council
Andrew Walcott	Brooklyn	AWalcottVABNYC	August 23, 2023	Mayor
Mercedes Elias	Queens	MEliasVABNYC	February 17, 2024	Mayor
Paul Dietrich	Staten Island	PDietrichVABNYC	August 23, 2023	Mayor
VACANT	TBD		TBD	Council

Recommendation to Expand the Board

In last year's report we recommend the City Council expand the size of the board from its current number of 11 to 13. We made this recommendation to include two important constituencies not only the Board, but the community. These two representatives would be identified as either a spouse of a veteran or deceased veteran, a Gold Star parent or child; or a bona fide registered caregiver of a veteran as defined by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). We recommend one individual be appointed by the Mayor and one by the Speaker of the City Council. This recommendation highlights the importance of spouses and caregivers to the veteran's experience and we believe having this perspective represented on the VAB would enhance future policy recommendations. We have discussed this recommendation with the City Council; and are awaiting legislation to be introduced.

RATIONALE FOR LOCAL VETERAN POLICIES AND RESOURCES

As a result of the pandemic, this year reinforced the importance of good policies, as the city was able to access several resources targeted towards veterans. Had we not been organized, we believe these resources may have been deployed to other cities, depriving New York of important assets.

Why Should the City Support its Veterans?

We believe that New York City, as well as the non-profit and private sectors, have both moral and economic imperatives to support our veterans. New York City benefits from these investments:

- **Freedom and Security – the Moral Imperative:** All residents of New York benefit from the freedom and security provided by our armed forces. The Federal Hall National Memorial reminds us of the observation of our first President, George Washington who noted that *“the willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by our nation.”* In our order to ensure our continued success it is critical that we support those who have served.
- **Federal Spending and Tourism – the Short-term Economic Imperative:** New York City also benefits disproportionately from federal spending and tourism. Activities such as Fleet Week, New York’s July Fourth Celebration, New York City Veterans’ Day Parade (*“America’s Parade”*), the Intrepid Sea Air and Space Museum, and the Canyon of Heroes all are connected to our nation’s military veterans and produce significant commerce. Additionally, many of New York City’s programs qualify for federal funding, which makes them more effective and economically efficient for the City. Lastly, as the economic capital of the world, many Veteran Service Organizations (VSO’s) and veteran-focused non-profits have either chosen to call New York City home or host significant operations and events here, which also adds to the commerce and culture of the city. All this provides a compelling rationale to support strong local veteran policies.
- **Veterans Make Great Citizens – the Long-Term Economic Imperative:** Veterans and their families are this country’s greatest renewable resources and attracting them to New York City supports our continued success. Veterans tend to have higher earnings and lower unemployment than non-veterans once their transition is complete. Veterans also tend to be more civically active and have lower incarceration rates than non-veterans. Increasing our veteran population will continue to add to the vibrant fabric of culture in the city.

These moral and economic imperatives provide a sound rationale for investment in local veteran policies and programs particularly since many of these provide a direct and measurable positive economic return for New York City.

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE: SUPPORT VETERANS' CONTINUED SERVICE AS CITIZENS

To provide discipline in prioritizing resources, the VAB has worked with DVS to establish a guiding principle through which all potential investments should be considered and prioritized. All programs should be viewed through the lens of how they **support veterans' continued service as citizens**. This aligns with the long-term economic imperative that veterans make good citizens and the city benefits by attracting them in larger numbers.

We recognize that some veterans face unique challenges related directly or indirectly to their service. However, veterans are not victims. They actively chose to serve and providing support to allow them to continue their service as citizens is an important investment. Prioritizing based upon this principle has the added benefit of reinforcing the fact that all New Yorkers benefit from these programs, regardless of veteran status.

Wherever possible we should seek programs that reinforce and support this principle. For example, the city should partner with non-profits and VSOs, for which this is a central tenet of their mission. Further, the city should invest in programs and resources which will help veterans improve, such as education, employment or entrepreneurial support; along with programs that support personal self-improvement.

SUMMARY OF VAB ACTIONS OF IN 2020 AND PLANS FOR 2021

Below is a summary of the key activities for 2020:

- ✓ **Advised the Commissioner on the Pandemic Response:** The VAB was actively involved in engaging with DVS to help shape the pandemic response.
- ✓ **Conducted 8 Meetings:** This year with the pandemic impacting the city, we hosted additional meetings to support the goal of giving a voice to the public. These were all hosted virtually. Interestingly, we observed a higher level of attendance virtually than in-person meetings hosted prior to the pandemic. Of the 8 meetings, 1 did not have a quorum.
- ✓ **2021 Meeting Schedule:** We have tentatively scheduled the 2021 VAB Meetings on the following dates. All meetings will be held virtually until further notice bearing in mind health and safety concerns relating to the pandemic:

Date	Borough
Thu March 25	Brooklyn (virtual)
Thu April 29	Bronx
Wed June 17	Staten Island
Thu September 15	Queens
Thu November 18	Manhattan

- **Convened Government and other Leaders to Connect Veterans with Services:** At each of the VAB meetings, the staff of DVS, except for our December meeting, as well as representatives from the VA and other government and non-government organizations were present. This created an opportunity to connect veterans directly with the services they provide.
- **Engaged with DVS, City Council and the Veteran Community on Strategic Priorities and Policies Relating to Veterans in New York City:** The VAB actively engaged with all three of its key stakeholders to help prioritize resources and raise issues. This included meetings with several elected officials as well as members of the veteran community. We also met with members of the Speaker's staff to review our recommendations. We would like to meet directly with the Speaker to share our recommendations as well.
- **Future Objectives:** A key objective for 2021 and beyond will be to work with DVS to develop better reporting and verification of key performance indicators. This will allow the board to not only verify information provided by DVS in our Annual report; but help the board provide more effective advice on how to best support veterans in New York City.

HIGHLIGHTS OF EVENTS AND MILESTONES IMPACTING VETERANS IN NEW YORK CITY IN 2020

At the early stages of the pandemic, DVS's primary objective was immediately reoriented to focus on addressing veteran' needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. As this impacted everyone, veterans' needs were the same as everyone in the city and two of the most significant areas of focus were accessing medical resources, including the VA Health system and food insecurity.

Mission VetCheck:

As veterans are dispersed throughout the five boroughs, assessing needs during the pandemic was particularly challenging. DVS partnered with ThriveNYC and several non-profits and VSOs to launch Mission: VetCheck. Utilizing a team of volunteers, the objective was to call every veteran who received services over the past year to assess their current situation. The program is in process and has shifted to an ongoing effort. Through year-end 24,040 service calls were made of which 9,133 were answered and 1,002 service requests were generated. We are not aware of any other government agency that has undertaken an effort to connect with all of those who have received services in the past.

Addressing Food Insecurity:

Highlighting how local veteran policies can bring resources to New York City, DVS helped coordinate the donation of food grants; as well as food disbursement through several VSOs. GetFoodNYC, the Campaign Against Hunger, HelloFresh, the Craig Newmark Foundation, and others provided thousands of dollars' worth of food targeted at veterans in need. Black Veterans for Social Justice (BVSJ); along with a several other organizations, volunteered to assemble the donated food and assisted in distributing over 25,000 meals throughout the city since July.

In addition, the Mayor's Office of Operations has provided the 2019 Veteran Services Report pursuant to Local Law 23 of 2015 which follows the DVS summary.



James W. Hendon
COMMISSIONER

Dina Simon
Chief of Staff
Senior Advisor

December 31, 2020

To the Chair of the Veterans Advisory Board,

This past year has presented challenges to our city, state, and country, unlike any in recent memory. Throughout this period, the Veterans Advisory Board provided insightful feedback to The New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS). It supplied regular updates to the Veteran community through virtual meetings, ensuring that they were apprised of vital information. DVS would like to extend its thanks for the work that the board has done to improve veterans and their families' lives. To assist with your year-end report, we also wanted to provide you with information about DVS' achievements as we reflect on our organizations' accomplishments in 2020 and look forward to the future.

Overview of DVS Accomplishments: 2020

Year in Review

2020 marked a pivotal year for DVS. Under the leadership of Commissioner James Hendon, the agency continued to build on core services while providing crucial new programs for New York City's 210,000 Veterans, proactively responding to the changing demands of constituents due to the fast-moving COVID-19 crisis.

In early February, the agency convened over 75 Veteran Service Organizations to strengthen ties with the local Veteran community and gather critical knowledge about how the agency could better provide services. Shortly after that, DVS co-hosted a meeting with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in Staten Island, bringing together essential partners to fill in gaps in their crisis intercept network to reduce the number of Veteran suicides in that borough. As the agency worked to implement new programs and initiatives in March, Mayor de Blasio declared a state of emergency. DVS pivoted to create a Continuity of Operation (COOP) Plan and developed the technical infrastructure so that staff could work remotely during the pandemic and seamlessly provide services.

As the pandemic intensified, DVS began its food outreach efforts to Veterans in need and distributed free masks to Veterans across the five boroughs. During this challenging time, the agency continued to house homeless Veterans holding virtual showings and in-person viewings when safety permitted. Over Memorial Day

weekend, DVS launched several new programs to reduce social isolation, including Mission: VetCheck and the Veteran Voices Project (VVP). Both provide volunteers an opportunity to connect with Veterans in a meaningful way during challenging times. VVP captures stories to build an oral history archive that preserves the unique experiences of local Veterans. At the same time, Mission: VetCheck leverages volunteers' support to place supportive wellness check calls to Veterans and their families. On July 5th, DVS, in partnership with the New York State Division of Veterans' Services (NYS DVS), began to process VA Claims to help Veterans receive the benefits that are due to them. As Veterans Day 2020 approached, DVS took over the care coordination center operations of VetConnectNYC to provide Veterans with more seamless connections to service providers in the city. The agency also launched a microgrant initiative to help struggling Veteran Service Organizations that were losing income due to not renting out their facilities. DVS ended the year providing turkeys and toys to Veteran families during the holidays.

As we move forward into the new year, the agency will continue to implement Commissioner Hendon's vision and stands ready to fill in gaps that may emerge due to the pandemic and the resulting economic aftermath.

Agency Initiatives

Food Outreach

DVS has been working hard to ensure that vulnerable Veterans are getting enough to eat during the COVID-19 crisis. Starting in June – DVS, NYS DVS, and the Campaign Against Hunger partnered to provide meals to Veterans across the five boroughs. By the end of December, DVS had distributed over 41,000 meals through that effort. As part of its Bronx food distribution effort, DVS has distributed 11,900 food boxes so far. These are only a few components of the agency's food outreach efforts. Early in the pandemic, DVS sent 5,600 meals to local VSOs. DVS Staff also trained with the City's #GetFoodNYC initiative to help vulnerable, food-insecure Veterans get food directly to homebound Veterans in need. DVS also partnered with the Bob Woodruff Foundation and Italians Feed America to deliver 400 pounds of sandwich meat to Veteran food pantries and hundreds of boxes of cooking ingredients. Through its efforts with the Bob Woodruff Foundation, DVS distributed free turkeys to Veteran Service Organizations in time for Thanksgiving.

Ending Veteran Homelessness

The DVS Housing and Support Services team continued moving Veterans into safe housing even during a national crisis of unprecedented proportion. Since DVS stood up its Housing and Support Services in 2015, the agency has housed over 993 homeless Veterans, including 149 since January 2020. Over the summer, the Housing and Support Services team provided a wellness check on all these formerly homeless Veterans to see what additional services they made need. DVS Veteran Peer Coordinators also reached out to 529 previously homeless Veterans to inform them about the NY State HCR Rent Relief Program for rental arrears. Additionally, the number of Veterans receiving a VASH Continuum voucher through DVS and NYCHA increased with 54 new vouchers issued to Veteran households in 2020, bringing the total number of active vouchers for the program to 242.

Mission: VetCheck

Mission: VetCheck was launched on Memorial Day to bridge the social isolation gap created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Mission: VetCheck aims to provide resources and information about public services through supportive wellness check calls placed by dedicated volunteers through a partnership with New York Cares and The Mission Continues. Veterans are referred to DVS for additional support such as housing, benefits, or healthcare needs. The initiative has placed over 23,000 calls with a 19% answer rate. Some of the most common service requests have been for food assistance, COVID testing locations, and emergency financial assistance.

Veteran Affairs Claims

Over 6,500 Veterans living in New York City are eligible for but do not receive their Veteran Affairs benefits. To alleviate this issue and get these Veterans the benefits they earned, DVS launched a four-person Veteran Affairs Claims team on July 5th. The VA Claims team can assist and file a claim on behalf of eligible Veterans seeking an earned benefit such as education, survivorship, or disability. As of December, DVS has received 76 inquires, 37 appointments, and 22 claim submissions, the vast majority of which involved a claim of disability. DVS estimates that this program will return an average of \$272,222 per month to recipients and their families in full swing.

Veteran Voices Project

The Veteran Voices Project is an oral history project launched in May 2020 and was designed to capture and share NYC Veterans' stories, bridge generational gaps, lessen social isolation during the pandemic, and preserve our City's rich military history. DVS has captured 35 oral histories so far and built an online archive for listeners to hear these stories. These oral histories span from World War II through the present day. The Veteran Voices Project has also hosted three live virtual storytelling events on Facebook Live, including one in partnership with the Library of Congress.

Employment

DVS continues to develop and implement initiatives to address the economic impact of the pandemic. The agency has leveraged external partnerships with the private sector to bridge access to crucial resources, including working with the GI Go Fund to help them launch the Empire Vets job portal to connect Veterans with jobs during the COVID-19 crisis in industries that are still hiring despite the pandemic. Since launching, the portal has posted over 5,200 positions across all sectors and engaged over 4,000 unique users. The DVS team is also well-versed in other employment resources through our existing relationships—especially in the new VetConnectNYC in-house care coordination center model, where DVS can connect job-seeking Veterans to providers such as WorkForce, America Works, and the Institute for Career Development, to name a few.

VetConnectNYC

On October 1st, the VetConnectNYC site transitioned internally to DVS, resulting in an in-house model of providing care coordination services. To staff this, DVS has established a Care

Coordination Center (CCC), resulting in improved efficiency, direct connection with the community, and cost savings. The DVS staffed VetConnectNYC will continue to serve as a resource that bridges the divide between looking for a service and knowing where to go as well as creating an opportunity for our outreach team to directly engage and serve the Veteran community and analyze community needs so that the agency can respond and plan accordingly.

Communications

The DVS Communications team proactively developed a new communications plan at the start of the pandemic. Within a week of the "state of emergency," DVS published its COVID-19 resource page geared towards the Veteran community. The Veteran Guide to COVID-19 webpage was updated daily from March through the end of November with the most current information from local, state, and federal agencies. DVS also launched a weekly COVID-19 specific newsletter for Veterans, providing vital information on protecting and taking care of themselves. Since the beginning of the year, DVS's traditional social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have seen a 20% increase in followers from last year. The open rate of the newsletter has also increased by over 50%.

Select Highlights & Milestones Impacting Veterans in 2020

Feb. 6 - DVS hosts a partnership convening with Veteran Service Organizations and advocates at the NYPD Youth Community Center in Brooklyn. The convening brought together over 75 organizations and 125 individuals to collaborate and explore ways to address NYC's Veterans and their families' needs. The event included breakout sessions and networking opportunities with key stakeholders.

Feb. 11 – DVS hosts Crisis Intercept Mapping Training for suicide prevention among Veterans at Fort Wadsworth in Staten Island, facilitated by SAMHSA. It included members of ThriveNYC and other experts and health officials from that borough. The teams mapped local crisis intercept systems and developed an implementation plan to improve the Veteran community's crisis services.

Mar. 15 – DVS drafted its Continuation of Operation Plan (COOP), and the staff went fully remote due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the following days, DVS configured its technical systems so that staff are fully operational and able to supply the same quality of care that NYC Veterans have come to expect from the agency.

May 25 – DVS launches Mission: VetCheck and the Veteran Voices Project on Memorial Day. Additionally, DVS announces its partnership with the Empire Vets job site. Commissioner Hendon takes part in several virtual and in-person events to commemorate the holiday.

June 1 – DVS begins to distribute 40K face mask coverings donated by the Boomer Naturals company to Veteran Service Organizations throughout the city.

July 5 – DVS begins to process Veteran Affairs claims and help New York City Veterans receive the benefits they earned due to their service.

Sept. 9 – The DVS Veteran Service Organization Microgrant Initiative launches. The program offers small relief grants to VSOs suffering from a loss of rental income due to their closed facilities during the pandemic.

Nov. 11 – Commissioner Hendon participated in the UWVC Veterans Day Parade events, including a motorcade through downtown and a wreath-laying on the Intrepid. DVS staff participated in several virtual and in-person events across the city with various Veterans Service Organizations throughout the day.

Dec. 15 - Lyft donated \$5K-worth of discount codes to DVS to provide more affordable rides to New York City Veterans for essential service trips throughout the holiday season.



Jeff Thamkittikasem
Director

TO: Corey Johnson, Speaker of the City Council
James Hendon, Commissioner of the Department of Veterans' Services
Todd Haskins, Chair of the Veterans Advisory Board

FROM: Jeff Thamkittikasem

DATE: October, 2020

SUBJECT: Local Law 23 Veterans Services Report for 2019

Attached please find the 2019 Veterans Services Report pursuant to Local Law 23 of 2015. As you may be aware, Local Law 23 requires the Mayor's Office of Operations to collect and report specified data from a certain set of agencies that provide services to veterans, by category of benefit available to veterans and by veterans' borough of residence. If you have any questions about this report, please feel free to contact Mariana Alexander at MAlexander@cityhall.nyc.gov or 718 913 6281. Thank you.

Attachment

**Veterans Services
Calendar 2019**

Agency	Indicator Name	CY2015	CY2016	CY2017	CY2018	CY2019
DCA	Applications for general vending licenses submitted by veterans	499	427	372	373	330
DCA	General vending licenses issued to veterans	348	297	227	227	240
DCAS	Civil service examination applications received from applicants claiming veterans' credit	1,887	2,843	5,539	2,175	2,315
DOHMH	Fee-exempt mobile food vending licenses issued to veterans (active)	398	357	354	324	381
DOHMH	Food vending permits issued to veterans (active)	190	181	200	204	251
HPD	Mitchell-Lama housing applications received from veterans, or their surviving spouses, who have identified themselves as heads of household on their applications	76	95	133	143	138
HPD	Approved Mitchell-Lama applications for veterans, or their surviving spouses, who have identified themselves as heads of household	73	88	120	143	138
HPD	Veterans residing in rental units who use US Department of Housing and Urban Development/US Department of Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) vouchers administered by HPD (snapshot)	96	122	135	163	204
NYCHA	Veterans residing in housing operated by NYCHA who use HUD-VASH vouchers administered by NYCHA	353	469	572	651	617
NYCHA	Veterans residing in rental units who use HUD-VASH vouchers administered by NYCHA	2,236	2,228	2,150	2,169	2,263

Veterans Services CY2019**By Applicant's Borough of Residence****DCA****General vending license applications from veterans**

Borough of Residence	Approved	Rejected	Total
Bronx	39	18	57
Brooklyn	65	28	93
Manhattan	39	11	50
Queens	61	18	79
Staten Island	12	5	17
Outside of NYC	24	10	34
Total	240	90	330

DCAS**Civil service exam applicants claiming veterans' credit**

Borough of Residence	Applicants
Bronx	384
Brooklyn	508
Manhattan	177
Queens	534
Staten Island	147
Outside of NYC	565
Total	2,315

DOHMH**Licenses and permits issued to veterans**

Borough of Residence	Mobile food vending licenses	Food vending permits
Bronx	75	57
Brooklyn	104	55
Manhattan	65	38
Queens	92	73
Staten Island	18	9
Outside of NYC	27	19
Total	381	251

HPD**Mitchell-Lama applications from veterans/surviving spouses heads of household**

Borough of Residence	Approved	Rejected	Total
Bronx	19	0	19
Brooklyn	42	0	43
Manhattan	45	0	45
Queens	30	0	30
Staten Island	2	0	2
Total	138	0	138

HPD**Use of HUD-VASH vouchers administered by HPD**

Borough of Residence	Used in rental units
Bronx	131
Brooklyn	26
Manhattan	29
Queens	11
Staten Island	7
Outside of NYC	0
Total	204

NYCHA**Use of HUD-VASH vouchers administered by NYCHA**

Borough of Residence	Used in NYCHA housing	Used in rental units
Bronx	101	1,189
Brooklyn	343	509
Manhattan	158	213
Queens	4	259
Staten Island	11	63
Outside of NYC	0	30
Total	617	2,263

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations are organized in two parts: (1) Policy and Legislative Recommendations for the Mayor and City Council and (2) Strategy and Program Recommendations for DVS.

Recommendations for the Mayor and City Council

Expand the Board and Include Two Spouses, Caregivers or Gold Star Parents or Children: In recognition of the importance of spouses, caregivers, Gold Star parents and families, the VAB voted unanimously to expand the size of the board to 13 and include two members from this important constituency to the Board, one appointed by both the Mayor and the Speaker of the City Council. These two representatives would have to be either a spouse of a veteran or deceased veteran, Gold Star parent or bona fide caregiver of a veteran or deceased veteran as defined by the US Department of Veterans Affairs.

This change would require action from the City Council to modify the construct of the board. We believe this perspective would allow the VAB to better advise the Mayor, Speaker and Commissioner of DVS on the fulfillment of DVS's mission to foster purpose driven lives for NYC service members, veterans, and their families.

The Department of Veteran Services is Under Resourced: We believe that the DVS is under resourced relative to the value it provides the city. There are approximately 210,000 veterans in the city and including their families approximately 630,000 residents are directly impacted by the DVS. They have an authorized strength of 44 implying that each staffer supports over 14,000 constituents. When compared to other departments such as the Department of the Aging, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and the Department of Youth and Community Development closer to 1:5,000. Are our veterans less important than other constituencies? Further, the federal resources that our veterans can attract (GI Bill, Veterans Benefits, Homeless Support, the VA Health System, Trade and Tourism) make supporting veterans much more cost-effective as a large portion of the cost to support these residents are offset by the additional resources they attract. The Administration and City Council should have a real conversation about the appropriate staffing level for the DVS.

Establish a Preference for New York City to Contract with Veteran Owned Businesses: The Federal Government, State Government and most major U.S. corporations maintain preference programs to contract with veteran-owned businesses and yet New York City does not. While the city has taken a few steps to address, this continues to send a wrong message to our veterans. We believe the administration, or the Council should change this. The cost to administer such a program would be minimal as it could be administered through the existing Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprise ("MWBE") program. Veterans come from all backgrounds and as such many veteran owned businesses qualify for the MWBE program. For New York City to be a national leader in local veteran policies it must

find a way to support veteran entrepreneurship and veteran owned businesses through a contracting preference.

Provide Greater Funding and Resources for Veterans on Campus: Progress continues to be made since the May 2017 launch of Veterans on Campus and the administration's quick action to support student veterans receiving the GI Bill in the wake of the October 2018 VA basic allowance for housing error highlights the importance of this program. We believe New York City can further benefit from this program by expanding the program to actively recruit veterans to study in New York City after they leave the service. This would brand New York City as a "veteran-friendly city" and allow the city to benefit even more from the student veterans GI Bill benefits.

Add Resources for Contracting Capability for DVS: This has been a top priority of the VAB for each of the past three years and it continues to be an issue today. One of the most fundamental aspects of a city agency is having direct control over contracting resources. We believe the lack of this ability has hampered DVS's effectiveness. As excited as we were about the launch of VetConnectNYC, it was delivered nearly a year behind schedule in part due to the lack of contracting authority. We recognize DVS was on the verge of obtaining ACCO capability prior to the pandemic but as the results of budget cuts, DVS is again not funded or staffed to allow for this capability. Currently, all contracts to local Veteran Service Organizations or non-for-profits that provide direct service to veterans are currently executed through multiple city agencies. In addition to prioritization, there are unique contracting attributes that VSOs often carry, such as not being a 501(c)(3), which confuse and slow down the completion of contracts and disbursement of funds when centralized through DCAS. We believe this should be rectified in the budget process this year.

Providing Personnel Support for the VAB: We again ask for some form of part-time operational support from either DVS, another city entity, or some form of paid internship would aid with the board's record keeping and continuity.

Invest in Resources to Evaluate and Document the Impact of Our Programs: Our vision statement includes reference to the *most effective* local veteran policies. These words were chosen carefully, and we are committed to recommending policies and programs focused on veterans that benefit all New Yorkers. To accomplish this, we believe DVS must be provided with the appropriate resources.

As such, we call upon the administration and the City Council to provide additional funding specifically dedicated to evaluating and documenting programs, including:

- Document benefits and efficiency: We believe New York City has created extremely effective veteran programs and these are a model for the country. Documentation will allow us to prove that we have been good stewards of resources and attract

additional State and Federal resources. Further, documentation will highlight the value that these programs provide to all New Yorkers.

Document lessons learned: The veteran population in New York City is a relatively small one compared to other constituencies. Documenting the lessons learned from our programs could allow us to scale them to larger populations, thereby benefiting all New Yorkers. This model is already being applied to our veteran homeless and treatment court programs. We are encouraged by the opportunity to share our successes with other populations in the City.

Conduct a Veteran Census: To create better, thoughtful policies, we must better understand our veteran population. Towards that end, we recommend that NYC Census 2020 include a Veterans Census or another form of population study in its overall plan. This is in addition to resources focused on evaluating our programs.

Advocate for the Consistent Application of Policies for Veteran Treatment Courts:

Work with the city's District Attorney's Office's and the Office of Courts Administration to create consistency throughout the boroughs for Veterans Treatment Courts. This would provide equal treatment to veterans in all five boroughs, reduce costs to the criminal justice system, and reduce crime given the favorable recidivism statistics experienced through these programs. We must also acknowledge and request supportive assistance to those veterans volunteering as mentors for veterans going through the VTCs.

Support the Restoration of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument on the

Hudson: Since 1902 the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument has towered over the Hudson on the Upper West Side of Manhattan as one of the most significant memorials to the Union Soldiers who served from New York in the Civil War. It serves as a constant reminder of the sacrifice made by New Yorkers during the civil war. The monument has fallen into disrepair and requires approximately \$25 million in improvements to make it viable. We recommend that our elected officials continue to work with State and Federal officials to find funding to save and preserve this historic monument. We commend the efforts of Manhattan Borough President, Gail Brewer and others who have been leading these efforts and encourage continued support.

DVS Strategy and Program Recommendations

Develop a Comprehensive Veterans Outreach and Communication Plan: This has been an issue highlighted on many occasions, including at oversight Council hearings. As a result, we are pleased with the renewed efforts DVS has undertaken to enhance and expand its communication and outreach capabilities, especially during the pandemic. We continue to believe in the need to expand that communications and outreach. DVS is building good programs and their effectiveness is directly impacted by the awareness of those eligible for the programs. Therefore, communications and outreach infrastructure remain critical.

Expand Veterans on Campus-NYC: New York City is the nation's largest importer of college students, with 110 colleges and nearly 600,000 students. This supports both the positive migration of educated citizens to the city and has the added benefit of attracting Federal to the City as most transitioning veterans have access to the Post 9/11 GI Bill. Each veteran who obtains a four-year degree in the city provides more than a quarter of a million dollars of economic activity with the majority of this in the form of direct federal spending on the Basic Allowance for Housing.

Recommit to Mission Home, New York City's Fight against Veteran

Homelessness: New York City has been an innovative leader in its fight against veteran homelessness. It remains important that we consolidate our gains and continue to make progress towards functional zero. It should be noted that New York City has continued to make progress in fighting street homelessness among veterans after having been declared free of street homelessness by the US Housing and Urban Development with the formal PIT count in 2019 identifying only 6 street homeless veterans each of whom declined support.

Specific recommendations include:

- ✓ Continue to work towards Functional Zero: We commend the DVS, HRA and all New York City agencies and partners involved in the fight against veteran homelessness and call upon them to continue the bold objective of reaching functional zero.
- ✓ Build a Comprehensive Prevention Plan: Programs to prevent veterans from becoming homeless are already underway but these should be expanded and the lessons-learned captured and tracked in order to share best-practices. Prevention is almost always less expensive than the cost of someone becoming homeless.
- ✓ Document our Success: DVS, along with DHS should spearhead an inter-agency effort to document the success of Mission Home. The report would include existing and innovative strategies that were used, details on how city and private resources were used to leverage federal dollars, and what strategies are being used to maintain this success in the long term. DVS should also work with the Mayor's Office of Budget and Management, New York City Independent Budget Office, or other relevant independent econometrists to conduct an economic impact study of

the programs and include this in the report. It will also be critical to highlight the aggregate state and federal dollars we have attracted to our city so that the public better understands the benefits that our veteran programs bring to New York City. It will also be important to demonstrate to state and federal officials that we have used these resources wisely.

✓ Share our Success Across the City: As a relatively small population in the City with access to federal and state resources, we have been able to find new pathways to success in our fight to eliminate veteran homelessness. For example, in 2016 on average an individual in the New York City shelter system was homeless for 355 days. Among the veteran population, that was a median of 79 days and we can use these lessons learned to help the broader system.

✓ Share our Success with other Cities throughout the Nation: Continue to meet with federal and state officials to highlight the successes New York City has had and ask for more resources to advance this worthy cause. Highlight that we have been good stewards of their resources where possible. Since New York City began its fight against veteran homelessness in 2011, we have realized an approximately 90% drop in homelessness, which compares very favorably to the 47% drop nationwide since 2010, according to HUD.

Invest in Resources to Encourage and Support Veteran Engagement in the Political Process: While engagement has been highly successful at the national level, New York City has not fared as well with only (now) one sitting City Council Member having served in the military. Consistent with our guiding principle of supporting veterans' continued service as citizens, DVS should invest in programs that support veteran engagement in the political process. They should do so by partnering with existing organizations supporting this mission.

Build-Out VetsThriveNYC: As part of the pioneering ThriveNYC mental health initiative, 2016's landmark legislation created funding to provide support for specific mental health initiatives for veterans in need. DVS' ThriveNYC team successfully implemented the VetsThriveNYC Whole Health and Community Resilience Program which includes citywide targeted outreach to engage veterans, military families and caregivers through education, connection to services, and resources tailored to the specific needs of the individual. With the administration's current revamping of the ThriveNYC program, we expect these programs to be re-evaluated to become more effective as they are fully resourced with the implementation of VetConnectNYC.

Develop a Plan to Celebrate Veterans throughout History: A critical part of the mission of the DVS is celebrating veterans and what they have brought to our nation and to New York City. We are in the midst of a series of landmark anniversaries including last year's centennial of both the end of World War I and the first Veterans Day Parade (dubbed "*America's Parade*") and the fifty-year anniversary of various milestones of the Vietnam War. There have also been early discussions of a monument to celebrate New York City veterans who served in the global war on terror in the wake of 9-11.

Employment and Entrepreneurship: Stable employment is a critical element of supporting veterans continued service as citizens. Whether something as simple as paying taxes or more significant such as volunteering actively or engaging in the political process, stable employment is required.

Towards the end of ensuring that our veterans remain employed in well-paid jobs, we recommend the following:

City Employment: The government is the largest employer in the city, and it should lead by example. Additionally, there are many City and State agencies that face potentially acute labor shortages, such as the MTA, where a large proportion of its skilled labor is eligible for retirement over the next five years. Transitioning service members could be a cost-effective pipeline for talent. The city should develop a citywide veteran employment program. These include classifying veterans as a protected class where appropriate so that they can be provided with a hiring preference, supporting agencies creation of veteran employee support networks, and recruiting initiatives for attracting transitioning veterans to various city employment opportunities. We should seek collaborative commercial and non-profit leaders to develop programs to such as those run by the Home Builders Institute which trains transitioning veterans for careers in the homebuilding industry.

Private Employment: Critical to supporting veterans continued service as citizens is supporting their stable employment. New York City does not control private employers; however, it can act as a facilitator to private companies who want to hire veterans. These programs can potentially be revenue-neutral through Federal government employment programs for veterans, such as the Work Opportunity Tax Credits (WOTC) program, which can provide businesses up to \$9,600 in tax credits per eligible veteran hired if those tax credits are then redeployed in the city.

- Create a Private Employment Support Program: Create a comprehensive private employment support program to educate and support private employers in New York City in establishing veteran hiring initiatives. This could include actions such as creating a veteran employment program handbook highlighting the benefits of a veteran hiring program, as well as actions required and resources available to execute such a program, hosting periodic training sessions on this topic and promoting the benefits of hiring veterans, and veterans connecting veterans to vetted and specialized non-profit and free resources available. Many of the country's leading experts on veteran employment programs and coalitions of employers are active in New York City including the Veteran Jobs Mission, Veterans on Wall Street, the Arcadia Group and Miligistix. We recommend that DVS continue to seek opportunities to convene and collaborate with these groups.
- Track Outcomes: Establish policies to track outcomes for long-term unemployed veterans who have obtained employment, WOTC credits for employers, and other key performance indicators.

Entrepreneurship: Entrepreneurship is the lifeblood of the America. According to the Small Business Administration from 2012 Census Bureau Data, veterans own 9% of small businesses, while only comprising 6.7% of the population. Nationally, veteran owned firms generated \$1.14 trillion in receipts annually and employed 5.03 million people. State and Federal government provide a great deal of support to small businesses in the forms of training, contract support, financing and other benefits. As such, New York City should support its veterans who seek to become entrepreneurs through a comprehensive program. The program should include, among other attributes, the following three specific items:

- Establish a Veteran Preference in Contracting with New York City: Federal and State governments and as well as most large businesses have a preference in contracting for Veteran owned businesses, and yet New York City does not offer such a preference. New York City has an existing infrastructure for the MWBE programs, and these efforts should be expanded to veteran-owned businesses.
- Connect Veteran Entrepreneurs to Resources: In order to support and encourage entrepreneurship, programs should be created to connect veteran entrepreneurs to resources. Specialized resources are active in New York, including: The Coalition for Veteran Owned Business (CVOB) through the Institute for Veteran and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University, Veterans Future Lab at NYU, Bunker Labs and more.
- Support the Tradition of Veteran Vendors: New York City has a tradition of supporting veterans interested in operating as street vendors going back to the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. To ensure that veterans who choose to vend excel, DVS should, in conjunction with other agencies and with input from current veteran vendors, develop a training program to ensure that veterans are educated on the regulations and can ply their craft with professionalism. DVS should also partner with private industry to create programs for veterans to finance and acquire equipment which will support their success. Further, the Department of Consumer Affairs and Workers Protection should give due consideration to veteran status in awarding licenses.

Veteran Treatment Courts: We are proud that Veteran Treatment Courts (VTCs) have now been established in each of the five boroughs and we believe these are tremendous programs for both veterans and taxpayers. According to the Vera Institute of Justice the average cost to incarcerate a prisoner in the State of New York is \$60,076, the most expensive state in the country nearly twice the national average of \$31,286. Further, as of the first three years of existence, the Buffalo Veteran Treatment court has a 0% recidivism rate. While we would not expect that to be sustained, it has clearly been more successful than other such courts.

Regarding VTCs, we recommend the following three actions:

Consistent Application across the Boroughs: For the City to benefit most from the program, we ask that the policies be applied consistently throughout New York City. Veterans should have equal protection and application of the law throughout all of New York City's Criminal Courts. We urge the five NYC District Attorney's Offices work with the Office of Courts Administration to create guidelines for which offenses should be referred to treatment courts.

Measure Outcomes: In order to ensure that the City gets the maximum benefit from these programs, we recommend that outcomes be measured and that each of the VTCs have a standard set of reporting data, which should be provided at least to DVS in its coordinating function and the New York City Council Committee on Veterans in its oversight capacity. A working group should be convened to determine which data should be collected, but it should include at least number of cases referred, outcomes, recidivism rates, costs, and key lessons learned in the application of the program so we can validate that it continually improves.

Share Lessons Learned: Anecdotal evidence suggests that VTCs have had more favorable outcomes as measured by recidivism rates than the other treatment courts, potentially due to the peer support model employed. If true, lessons learned in the success of the VTCs should be shared with the other treatment courts so that all New Yorkers benefit from these investments in programs for veterans.

Create Innovative Funding Strategies: While many of the resources and funding for the services that DVS provides will be provided from the budget and other government sources, there are times that the most innovative public policy will require other sources. New York City as the financial capital of the world should be at the forefront of innovation in funding and establishing public / private partnerships.

DVS should actively investigate the following potential funding strategies:

501(c)(3) or 501(c)(19) Funding: New York City has been at the forefront of establishing opportunities for government collaboration with private citizens via 501(c)(3) non-profit funding mechanisms. DVS may also qualify for the establishment of a Veteran Service Organization under 501(c)(19) which could allow it to access different pockets of funding for veteran focused programs. All should be considered and evaluated.

Social Impact Funding: The **VeteranCARE** employment program, which was launched in 2019, did not achieve the utilization levels required by private financiers to continue program funding. Despite this program not achieving its full potential, we recommend DVS continue to explore various innovative funding models in the future.

Real Estate: The availability of long-term affordable housing is a clear chokepoint in the fight to end veteran homelessness. New York City is home to many of the most powerful real estate firms in the world, and we should seek opportunities to collaborate with the real estate community to create long-term housing solutions.