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**MAYOR DE BLASIO, JOINED BY SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO AND COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH, SIGNS LEGISLATION CREATING DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' SERVICES**

*Creation of department comes during de Blasio Administration's unprecedented efforts to dramatically improve services and support to city's veterans and their families*

*Mayor previously quadrupled funding and staff in support of Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs, pledged to end chronic veteran homelessness, expanded employment opportunities for veterans and their families*

**NEW YORK**—Mayor Bill de Blasio, joined by Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Council Member Eric Ulrich and advocates, today signed legislation into law creating a Department of Veterans' Services. The creation of the department comes during the de Blasio Administration's unprecedented efforts to improve and strengthen veteran services and resources in New York City. In the past two years, the Mayor and City Council have quadrupled funding and staff in support of the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs, pledged to end chronic veteran homelessness, dramatically expanded employment opportunities for our veterans, launched an IDNYC veteran designator, and brought veterans' mental health services to the forefront.

"The brave men and women who selflessly served our nation deserve access to all the services and support they need to return to civilian life. Every veteran in New York City should know where they can access vital services, and this department will help make this goal a reality," said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. "Commissioner Sutton has been a strong leader for the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Services, and I look forward to working with her as we build up this City's Department of Veterans' Affairs. I want to thank City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Council Member Eric Ulrich, the entire City Council, and the tireless veterans' advocate community for their support in pushing forward this department for our city's brave veterans."

"I'm thrilled that with the signing of this bill, New York will finally have a citywide department dedicated to the more than 225,000 veterans in New York City," said **Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito**. "When veterans come home, we have a duty to provide them with the best services possible to help them in returning to civilian life. With this department, that is exactly what we are doing. I'd like to thank the de Blasio Administration and my colleagues on the Council, particularly Veterans Committee Chair Eric Ulrich."

Under Mayor de Blasio, the Administration took the unprecedented steps of quadrupling funding in support of the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs' efforts and quadrupling the number of staff working on MOVA's efforts and initiatives, as well as expanding and appointing new members to the City's Veterans' Advisory Board in conjunction with the City Council. The Mayor's efforts to support our city's veterans include his pledge to end chronic veteran homelessness by the end of the year, a major commitment in his State of the City in 2015. The Administration invested \$1.5 million for additional staff and resources to meet this goal, and helped more than 1,800 previously homeless veterans find permanent housing over the last two years.

The Administration has also made employment opportunities for veterans and their families a top priority, placing nearly 2,300 veterans and their spouses in jobs through the City's Small Business Services Workforce centers. And as part of the City's IDNYC program, the Administration launched a veteran designator to facilitate access to veteran-specific services and benefits for veteran New Yorkers. Veterans' mental health has also played a large role in First Lady Chirlane McCray's Mental Health Roadmap, earning praise from veterans' mental health leaders and advocates.

DVS will continue to focus on the Administration's goals of connecting our city's veterans to permanent housing, expanding job opportunities for our veteran community, and ensuring our veterans and their families have access to services and support from the City's agencies and federal partners. DVS will be located at One Centre Street on the 22nd floor, where the prior Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs' recently moved in October. The department's budget and staff will be determined in collaboration with the Council through the budget process.

"Under the visionary leadership of Mayor Bill de Blasio, I am extraordinarily proud to serve as the Commissioner of the new Department of Veteran Services. I'm thankful to Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Council Member Ulrich, the City Council, and the city's strong veteran advocates, who have all joined with this Administration to make this department possible," said **Veteran Affairs Commissioner Loree Sutton**. "During this historic transitional period of unprecedented gains, NYC is poised to lead the way in demonstrating its unwavering support and heartfelt gratitude for those who have served on our behalf. We look forward to establishing an agency to help meet the needs of NYC's over 225,000 veterans and their families."

"Veterans are such an important part of the fabric of our great city," said **Council Member Eric Ulrich, Chair of the Veterans Committee**. "By elevating the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs to the department level, the City of New York will lead the nation in honoring the military service and selfless sacrifice of our large and diverse veterans' community. With the stroke of his pen, Mayor de Blasio will establish the Department of Veterans' Services which will improve our ability to help and empower veterans throughout the five boroughs. I want to thank Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and all my colleagues in the Council who co-sponsored this bill and championed its passage. I also want to thank Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Sutton for their support and friendship. This historic day would not be possible without the help and guidance of our veterans advocates who work tirelessly on behalf of this cause. Together, we will usher in a new era for veterans' services in New York."

"As a member of the Committee on Veterans, it quickly became clear that MOVA lacked the budget and operational scope to truly provide the level of service that our city's veterans need and deserve," said **Council Member Paul Vallone**. "This legislation is a monumental and historic step towards fulfilling our commitment to the veterans who have sacrificed so much on our behalf. Now that Mayor de Blasio has signed the bill into law, we can tell our city's 200,000 veterans that they finally have an agency they can call their own and that we as council members and elected officials have stood together with them in this fight to make sure they had this day."

"America's military veterans are a national treasure and 100 percent deserving of our unfailing support," said **Kenneth Fisher, Fisher Brothers Senior Partner and Intrepid Air & Space Museum Co-Chairman**. "Thanks to Mayor de Blasio and his actions today, a vital new avenue of service and support has opened up for the hundreds of thousands of heroes and their families living in New York City."

"The establishment of the NYC Department of Veterans' Services demonstrates a concerted effort by City government and an active, persistent and responsible network of advocates, membership organizations, volunteers, and families. We especially remember our Gold and Blue Star Families on this historic occasion," said **Dan McSweeney, Incoming President of the United War Veterans Council**.

“The Mayor’s signature on this bill is a turning point for veterans in New York City,” said **Paul Rieckhoff, IAVA Founder and CEO**. “Today will be remembered as a moment that changed not just this city, but the entire nation. Gaining Mayor de Blasio's support for this bill was welcomed by the city’s 230,000 veterans and their families, and we are pleased to stand here today aboard the iconic USS Intrepid ready to turn over a new leaf with the Mayor. The veterans community is grateful for the leadership of individuals like Council Member Eric Ulrich, Chair of the Veterans’ Committee, and Public Advocate Letitia James who fought to get this bill introduced, supported and unanimously passed by the Council.”

“We are proud to be a part of history here in New York City. The establishment of the NYC Department of Veterans’ Affairs is a clear example of what veterans can do when we come together to make our community better. But this is just the beginning. Through The Mission Continues and other post-9/11 veterans groups, veterans across our city will be leading efforts to make our neighborhoods stronger,” said **Aaron Scheinberg, Executive Director Northeast at The Mission Continues**.

"Thanks to Mayor de Blasio, Speaker Mark-Viverito, Veterans Affairs Committee Chair Ulrich and the entire City Council, the veterans of the City of New York and their families finally have an agency devoted to serving them and their needs. Also, the veteran service organizations who receive funding from City Council members will be able to access their grants without going through third parties, thereby losing some of their funds. Furthermore, the Department of Veterans’ Services staff will enable veterans to obtain U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs disability compensation bringing addition funds to the city's economy," said **John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America**.

This is a new and exciting time in New York City, with the emergence of a Department of Veteran Services that is long overdue and certainly beneficial for the many veterans that reside here, who surely welcome any additional assistance which will help improve their quality of life,” said **James Maillard, President of the New York Metro Chapter of the National Montford Point Marine Association**.

“As the national benefit provider for IDNYC with Veteran Designation, Veterans Advantage applauds Mayor de Blasio for his landmark decision to significantly expand services to our city’s veterans – who deserve nothing less. And no one is more qualified than Commissioner Sutton to assume these new responsibilities,” said **Scott Higgins, CEO and founder of Veterans Advantage**.

"We at Unite US appreciate New York City's commitment to Veterans and their families. This is a monumental moment for New York City, and we are proud to support Mayor de Blasio and General Sutton's efforts to expand the city's scope of service to this community,” said **Taylor Justice, Co-Founder of UniteUS.com**, a technology reinventing the delivery of human services.

“The Headstrong Project, a non-profit partner of Weill Cornell Medicine, is very excited to be working with the new Department of Veterans’ Affairs to provide world class mental healthcare to our returning veterans. This is a great opportunity for New York City to continue its legacy as one of the best cities in America for military veterans,” said **Jack Iscol, Founder of The Headstrong Project**.

“The pride I feel today, having served in the Armed Forces, is unparalleled. The work I do as Director of Human Resources and Veteran Affairs at Fountain House, a holistic community mental health organization in NYC, is a reflection of my continued commitment to service: ‘once in service, always in service.’ I am thrilled that Mayor de Blasio is signing the bill for the establishment of a Department of Veterans’ Services that will open up doors to ensure proper funding and allocation for veteran services. And for that, Mayor de Blasio, I thank you!” said **Jennifer Rivera, Veteran and Director of Human Resources and Veteran's Affairs at the Fountain House**.

“The NYC Veterans Alliance is proud to have supported this bill’s passage, and our members and partners made a strong, compelling case for why an independent agency serving our city’s veterans and family members

was the infrastructure needed to streamline and coordinate veterans' services across the City's over 100 agencies, as well as between state, federal, and nonprofit agencies serving our veterans community. We thank Council Member Eric Ulrich for his steadfast commitment to moving this legislation forward, and we thank Speaker Mark-Viverito, Public Advocate Tish James, Mayor de Blasio, and Commissioner Sutton for their vital support in ensuring its passage. We believe this has the potential to position NYC as the nation's leading veteran-friendly city, attracting veterans just as it does aspiring artists, writers, entrepreneurs, and leaders – and we hope to see veterans of all eras continuing to rise together to make this city greater, stronger and more vibrant than ever. With the support of the NYC Department of Veterans' Services and continued prioritization of veterans by our city government, we can make this a reality," said **Kristen Rouse, Founder of NYC Veterans Alliance.**

"NYC, in creating the Department of Veterans' Services, shows our City's recognition of, commitment to and support of a community that has gone above and beyond to serve our nation. Today I'm especially proud to be a New Yorker," said **Gerry Byrne, Veteran, Founder of Veterans Week NYC and Vice Chairman of the Penske Media Corporation.**

"I'm proud to be part of this historic step forward, the greatest step forward since MOVA was founded in 1987. This Mayor's work with the Council has taken us further than anyone from Koch thru de Blasio!" said **Charlie Greinsky of the Jewish American War Veterans.**

"On behalf of the many American Legion members who call New York City home, I like to thank Mayor de Blasio, Speaker Mark-Vivento, Chairman Ulrich, Members of the City Council, and Commissioner Sutton for their great work in making this dream come true. We celebrate and honor our returning heroes one day each year on November 11, "Veterans Day," with a big parade. While parades are nice, the creation of the NYC Department of Veterans' Services is even better. Now every day is veterans' day as we have a department dedicated, with the proper budget and mission to take care of the needs of 250K veterans of all wars in this great city. I'm excited and proud to be part of this great historic moment and look forward to support and work with the DVS to improve the lives of veterans and their families citywide," said Fang Wong, National President of the American Legion.

"Black Veterans For Social Justice, Inc. supports the creation of the Department of Veterans' Services. Forward Ever, Backwards Never!" said **Wendy McClinton, CEO of Black Veterans For Social Justice, Inc.**

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