



BRIEFING PAPER FOR NYC COUNCIL MEMBERS

February 2017

PURPOSE

This briefing paper urges Members of the NYC Council to take action on existing policy and legislation impacting NYC veterans, military members, and their families in 2017.

ACTIONS REQUESTED

1. **PROTECT** the budget for the NYC Department of Veterans' Services by ensuring funding is not reduced and appropriate investments are made in future growth
2. **REINTRODUCE** and **PASS** Int. 1259-2016 to Add Veteran & Military Status to NYC Human Rights Law
3. **REINTRODUCE**, **FUND**, and **PASS** Int. 1304-2016 to Implement the Alternative (School Tax) Exemption for Veterans
4. **AMEND**, **REINTRODUCE**, and **PASS** Res. 1196-2016 to Support Complete Passage of "Fairness for Veterans Act" Provisions
5. **AMEND** Int. 1303-2016 to Provide Appropriate Protections for Veteran Street Vendors in "Street Vending Modernization Act"

BACKGROUND

Budget for NYC Department of Veterans' Services

- FY 2017 – \$2.9 million allocation for 35 staff members to launch NYC's newest agency
- FY 2018 – Mayor's initial budget proposal cut one staff member and \$318k; his office has since walked this back to keep funding and staffing levels the same, which includes growth in information technology.
- **In Brief:** Funding for Veterans' Services **MUST NOT** be reduced, and **MUST** show investments in modernizing and expanding interagency coordination, program management, outreach, and data management until such time as it can be demonstrated that NYC's veterans, military members, and their families have achieved a sustainable state of wellness.

Int. 1259-2016 – Adding Veteran & Military ("Uniformed") Status to Human Rights Law

- Sponsor: Jumaane Williams
- Introduced: 8/16/16; Last Action: Referred to Committee on Civil Rights on 8/16/16
- **In Brief:** This bill will enshrine past or present military status (summarized as "uniformed" service) as a protected status in NYC's comprehensive human rights laws. Veterans and military reservists are frequently discriminated against by employers and landlords fearing impediments from military service, or call-up to military duty for reservists, or other service-related issues. While this violates federal law, the individuals discriminated against have little recourse other than to hire a lawyer or send a complaint to Washington, D.C. Once passed, this bill will ensure that veterans, military members, and their families will have local-level recourse for contending with discrimination in housing and employment, giving them another avenue to obtain relief when their rights are violated, and also give NYC government the responsibility of educating city agencies and citizens about the legal duty to protect them. This bill will not only provide legal protection, but also serve as a clear statement of values by our

The NYC Veterans Alliance is a member-supported, 501(c)(4) grassroots advocacy organization that serves veterans, military members, and their families in the NYC Metro area.

Learn more at www.nycveteransalliance.org

city and its government. The cities of Chicago, Boston, Miami, and Seattle have already included uniformed service status in their human rights laws. This bill must be top priority for passage this year.

Int. 1304-2016 – Implementation of Alternative (School Tax) Exemption for Veterans

- Sponsor: Steven Matteo
- Introduced: 10/13/16; Last Action: Laid Over by Committee on Veterans on 12/16/16
- **In Brief:** This bill will extend the real property tax exemption for veterans to include school taxes. NYS and NYC tax policy has exempted eligible veterans and elderly individuals for some time, but they are not currently exempt from paying school taxes, which have ballooned by 60% since 2003. Aging veteran homeowners in particular have paid school taxes for decades, yet increasingly are squeezed financially to the point where many feel “priced out” of the city they call home, and this is part of what is forcing veterans out of a city that should be attracting them. The G.I. Bill of Rights assures veterans that they can easily achieve the dream of home ownership when they come home; our city must do its part by ensuring that veterans can not only own homes, but can afford to continue living in them throughout their lives. Last year the city’s assessed property tax value (including existing exemptions for veterans and the elderly) went up by \$17.6 billion. The estimated cost of this exemption would be \$39.6 million. This is a small price to pay—especially in a time of dramatically increased revenue—to provide long-overdue tax relief for NYC’s veteran homeowners.

Res. 1196-2016 – Resolution Supporting Passage of “Fairness for Veterans Act”

- Sponsor: Andy King
- Introduced: 9/14/16; Last Action: Laid Over by Committee on Veterans on 10/28/16
- **In Brief:** This bill will make the strong statement that the NYC Council supports federal reforms of policies that have barred 13% of all veterans discharged since 9/11, and in earlier peacetime and wartime periods, from VA healthcare. Administrative “bad paper” discharges have disproportionately pushed servicemembers struggling with the effects of PTSD, brain injuries, and sexual assault out of the military, and the discharge review process has overwhelmingly ruled against these veterans who are most at risk for homelessness, joblessness, substance abuse, and suicide. “Fairness for Veterans” proposes substantive reforms that will enable veterans to have a fair review to determine whether they can access VA services. A highly informative hearing on this resolution was held on 10/28/16, and in December, some provisions of “Fairness for Veterans” were included in the National Defense Authorization Act. Key provisions, however, such as ensuring fairness for pre-9/11 veterans and wording of “presumption in favor of the veteran” were excluded. This bill should be amended to call on Congress to pass all provisions of “Fairness for Veterans” and hold hearings on “bad paper” discharges so that Members of Congress are at least as informed on this issue as Members of NYC Council.

Int. 1303-2016 – Expanding Availability of Food Vendor Permits

- Sponsor: Mark Levine
- Introduced: 10/13/16; Last Action: Laid Over by Committee on Consumer Affairs on 10/26/16
- **In Brief:** Comprehensive “Street Vending Modernization Act” legislation proposes, in part, to expand the number of permits to vend food on streets and sidewalks, and streamline regulations to better support food vendors and customers. This bill, as currently written, states that there is a 5% set-aside for veteran street vendors. Veteran street vendors have been the heart and soul of NYC’s veteran entrepreneur community going back to 1894, when New York State established a law that assured disabled Civil War veterans free and unrestricted access to selling goods on the street. Today, veteran street vendors comprise approximately 15% of the street vending population. In order to ensure that veterans remain a protected and preferred class in perpetuity, this bill, if reintroduced, must be amended to ensure a minimum set-aside of 15% for veteran vendors.

The NYC Veterans Alliance is a member-supported, 501(c)(4) grassroots advocacy organization that serves veterans, military members, and their families in the NYC Metro area.

Learn more at www.nycveteransalliance.org