



2018 Action Agenda

Housing Stability for NYC Veterans & Families

- Expanding & Protecting Affordable Housing for Veterans
- Removing Barriers for Using VA Home Loans
- Expanding Veterans Property Tax Exemptions

Ensuring Quality & Access in Veterans' Services

- Ensuring Women Veterans Can Access Care and Services
- Establishing NYS Board of Visitors for VA Facilities
- Improving Automated Referrals of Veterans for Services
- Professionalizing & Improving Veterans Treatment Courts

Crediting Vets in Education, Entrepreneurship & Employment

- Expanding Veteran Tuition Award & Academic Credits
- Improving Hiring & Retention of Veterans by City Agencies
- Prioritizing Veteran-Owned Businesses

Defending Democracy

- Easing Access to Register, Vote & Receive Absentee Ballots

Expanding & Protecting Affordable Housing for Veterans

Action Items:

- **Protecting Federal HUD-VASH Funding.** Last December, VA Secretary David Shulkin proposed dramatic changes to this Obama-era program that has provided millions of dollars for veterans entering permanent housing in NYC. After outcry by veterans organizations, consideration of these changes was pushed to FY 2019. NYC's Congressional delegation must commit to protecting this essential source of funding that drives and maintains NYC's success in placing veterans into permanent housing and preventing further homelessness.
- **Implementing Veterans Preference in Affordable Housing Lotteries.** As Mitchell-Lama housing did for generations, newer affordable housing lottery programs for low and moderate income applicants must prioritize veterans in order to open more available housing stock for both homeless veterans waiting to use HUD-VASH vouchers and moderate income veterans and their families.
- **Incentivizing Veterans Preferences in Land Use Applications.** As NYC Planning and communities and officials consider land use proposals for upzoning, veterans preferences should be an option for inclusion alongside affordable housing incentives.
- **Outreach on NYC Programs & Protections.** City agencies must do a better job of publicizing protection of veterans and military members against discrimination in housing, to include source of income discrimination for those receiving VA educational, disability, or pension payments. Outreach must also be done to ensure low-income veterans with service-connected disability ratings may be eligible for rent freeze or other programs.

Background:

- **Housing & Home Ownership is Integral to Veteran Status and Success.** Attainable, stable housing has been a promise made to America's veterans since the G.I. Bill of Rights was passed in 1944. This foundational investment made by a grateful nation allowed welcomed veterans home with resources to reintegrate into their home communities and that empowered them to rise as leaders, entrepreneurs, civil servants, artists, and changemakers to become what we now refer to as the Greatest Generation.
- **Historic NYC Efforts on Veterans Housing.** In the 1940s, New York City built housing for thousands of veterans returning home from World War II, including Peter Cooper Village and St. Nicholas Houses. In 1955, a signature piece of Mitchell-Lama legislation to incentivize construction of moderate income housing in New York State was the designation that veterans would receive top preference in applications.

- **Today's Housing Landscape for Veterans & Families.** Although advocates have succeeded in making changes at the federal level in more recent generations, there has not been the similar local response to reintegrate and invest in veterans as leaders to continue building and strengthening our city and nation. Mitchell-Lama buildings still exist but have been vastly reduced by opt-outs. Subsequent affordable housing programs have not included veteran preferences, and veterans take their place in lists they have less than a 1 in 1,000 chance of winning.
- **NYC Must Protect and Continue Progress on Veteran Homelessness.** Since 2011, veteran homelessness has decreased 90% in New York City because of focused action by city agencies and nonprofit—backed by federal funding programs. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) funds HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) vouchers—subsidies to qualifying low-income homeless veterans in NYC that allow veterans and families to pay approximately 30% of their income toward rent.¹ Additional funding for homelessness prevention is distributed through the VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program.² Seven nonprofit agencies in NYC have contracts with the VA worth millions of dollars, a large portion of which goes toward veterans' rental arrears. SSVF also provides vital services designed to support housing stability for veterans and family members. The proposal to radically reshape this funding, made last year and which may be under consideration for the federal FY 2019 budget, must not come to pass.³ **Federal funding to address veteran homelessness must be protected⁴** and NYC agencies must continue to advance the work of ensuring those who have served our nation are able to attain permanent housing along with other services to support their stability and success.
- **Outreach to Prevent Housing Discrimination.** Last November, Local Law 119 went into effect to protect veterans and military members from discrimination in housing, employment, lending, and public accommodations. City agencies must adequately message to both landlords and veteran tenants that it is illegal under NYC law to discriminate against military reservists as well as against veterans because of their status, to include source of income discrimination for those receiving VA educational, disability, or pension benefits.
- **Outreach on Disability Rent Increase Exemption for Veterans.** Veterans receiving any rating percentage for service-connected disability by the VA and who otherwise meet income and rent-stabilized or rent-controlled apartment criteria are eligible to have their rent frozen. This is not well-publicized to veterans as a community, and city agencies must do more to ensure veterans are aware of this program.

¹ <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dhs/permanency/hud-vash.page>

² <https://shnny.org/blog/entry/supportive-housing-providers-reduce-veteran-homelessness-in-new-york>

³ <http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/va-sneak-attack-homeless-veterans-article-1.3722019>

⁴ http://www.nycveteransalliance.org/hud_vash_vouchers

Removing Barriers for Using VA Home Loans

Action Items:

- **Eliminating Guaranty Amount Caps.** The existing VA Home Loan guaranty amount set for NYC is \$679,650, thereby placing a majority of NYC real estate, especially in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens, out of reach. Legislation should be passed to set guaranty limits based on percentages rather than dollar amounts that quickly become outpaced by changing markets.
- **Restoring VA Home Loan Usage for Co-ops.** For six years, federal legislation permitted purchase of co-op apartments using the VA Home Loan. Yet due to other barriers, veterans were unable to utilize this opportunity. As part of a broader effort to remove barriers to VA Home Loan usage in NYC, this legislation must be restored.
- **Preventing Discrimination.** Co-op buildings in particular have the ability to refuse buyers without the requirement to disclose reasons that may be in violation of fair housing laws or NYC human rights law, which bans discrimination against individuals based on gender, race, and other criteria including veteran and military status. Any effort to remove barriers to using VA Home Loans must include transparency and disclosures that prevent unlawful discrimination.
- **Easing VA Approval Process.** The process for approving buildings for purchase using VA Home Loans can take place when the building is constructed, as well as with a non-intrusive inspection and completion of required documentation. Often the barrier to completion is in information rather than a restrictive process.

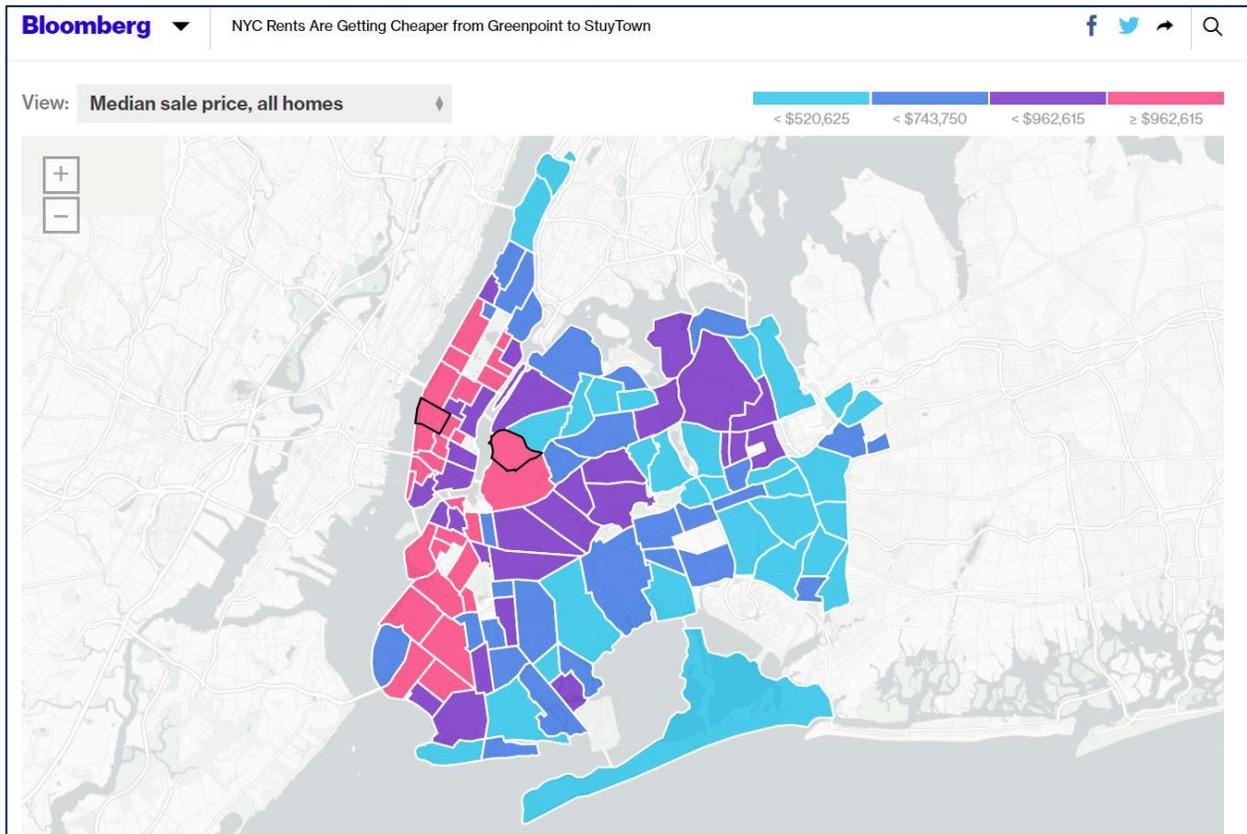
Background:

- **NYC is Central for Veterans.** The events that took place in New York City on September 11, 2001, ushered in a new era of war without any end in sight. New York has likewise been a focal point for our post-9/11 era of veterans, with thousands who either returned home following their service or were inspired to come here and make New York their home. It is incumbent on local government to ensure all veterans—past, present, and future—are able to use their VA Home Loan in the city they call home.
- **Eliminating caps.** In 2015, Rep. Lee Zeldin (Long Island) introduced a bill⁵ to eliminate guaranty amount caps. The bill, H.R. 1187,⁶ garnered bipartisan support but was not passed. This legislation should be revisited with the full support of NYC legislators and the NYC veterans community to remove outdated limits that pose a significant barrier to using VA Home Loans in NYC and high end housing markets

⁵ <https://zeldin.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rep-zeldins-veteran-loan-guarantee-bill-passes-house-representatives>

⁶ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/1187>

across New York and the nation. The illustration below shows current median sale prices in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens in the last quarter of 2017, much of which exceed the \$679,650 guaranty limit:



Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens Real Estate at a Glance, Quarter Ending December 31, 2017, Bloomberg⁷

- **Preventing Discrimination.** A vital part of ensuring veterans are able to purchase homes in NYC using their VA Home Loan is enacting regulatory safeguards to prevent discrimination based on veteran or military status, or other factors that violate NYC human rights law or fair housing laws. Requiring co-op boards to disclose the reason for refusal of applicants, for example, would be key to this. Council Member Brad Lander has introduced legislation in past years,⁸ and this issue remains a current discussion in NYC politics.⁹

⁷ <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/property-prices/nyc/>

⁸ <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/10/nyregion/new-bill-seeks-to-curb-discrimination-by-co-op-boards.html>

⁹ <http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/pro-segregation-progressives-article-1.3754142>

Expanding Veterans Property Tax Exemptions

Action Items:

- **Adopting Cold War Tax Exemption – Intro. 0775-2018.** The property tax exemption currently offered by New York State is long overdue for adoption into city law, thereby eliminating confusion between state and city tax law and ensuring eligible veterans receive maximum tax relief permitted by state and city law.
- **Outreach on Implementation of 2017 Tax Exemption Expansion.** This year's implementation of 2017 tax exemption expansions for veteran homeowners has been fraught with unclear messaging and limited availability of NYC Department of Finance staff to resolve confusion. Outreach with clear messaging and assistance with calculating final tax bills is needed.

Background:

- Last year, NYC Council passed needed legislation that expanded the Alternative Tax Exemption and Eligible Funds Tax Exemption for veteran homeowners to include exemption from school tax, providing tax relief for thousands of veterans, a large number of whom are aging and living on fixed incomes.¹⁰ Since 2003, school tax in NYC has increased by more than 60%, causing financial strain for these veteran homeowners.¹¹ Further legislation is still needed to streamline NYC's tax laws and provide relief for veteran homeowners.
- Currently, the Cold War Tax Exemption is offered by New York State to veteran homeowners who served on active duty between 1945 and 1991,¹² but it is not recognized in NYC law. This is an inconsistency that has confused and excluded veteran homeowners who meet New York State eligibility criteria for tax savings but have not been able to navigate between city and state rules and oversight.
- Passage of **Intro. 0775-2018** will correct this discrepancy and provided needed consistency and relief for eligible NYC veteran homeowners.¹³
- As new exemptions have gone into effect, messaging on the Notice of Property Value for veteran homeowners has caused unneeded alarm and confusion. Overall, property taxes are going down for this population, but messaging has given the appearance that tax obligations have gone up. The NYC Department of Finance has not adequately been able to correct this messaging.

¹⁰ http://www.nycveteransalliance.org/property_tax_exemption

¹¹ http://www.nycveteransalliance.org/property_tax_exemption_discussion

¹² <https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property/exemption/coldwarexempt.htm>

¹³ <https://laws.council.nyc.gov/legislation/t-2018-0775/>

Ensuring Women Veterans Can Access Care & Services

Action Items:

- Appoint the Manhattan VA Medical Center to be named for the first woman veteran of the United States Armed Forces to receive pay and pension for her wartime service and wounds in the battle of Fort Washington in Manhattan in November, 1776. **This would be the first VA hospital named for a woman veteran.**
- Co-sponsor / pass resolution in support of the **Deborah Sampson Act** (H.R.2452 / S.681), a bipartisan bill with more than 80 co-sponsors that proposes to welcome women veterans to VA facilities with a gender-inclusive wording and close current gaps in service.

Background:

- Women have served in combat in every conflict since the American Revolution, yet still women veterans are asked at VA hospitals, “Are you here with your husband?” or otherwise have their military service questioned. Despite VA reforms and improvements of services for women veterans, there yet remain significant gaps in services and points of access to these services.¹⁴
- A recent essay¹⁵ for the Center for a New American Security by Navy veteran Andrea Goldstein examines the pervasive lack of recognition of women as veterans, even by other veterans. Meanwhile, the U.S. military still contends with deeply rooted gender discrimination¹⁶ and violence.¹⁷
- In November 1776, **Margaret Corbin** distinguished herself as the last cannoneer firing on British and Hessian forces from a hilltop in what is now Washington Heights in Manhattan. She suffered catastrophic wounds and was left for dead by enemy troops, only to be later discovered and given medical aid, then granted a modest pension and a home as part of the Invalid Regiment at West Point. She spent the rest of her life at West Point, disabled by her wounds but in the company of her fellow veterans. She was the first woman veteran in U.S. history to receive pay and a pension for her wartime service and the wounds she incurred in battle.¹⁸
- In recognition of the longstanding service of women veterans, and in honor of the historic patriotism, valor, and sacrifice of Margaret Corbin in the Borough of Manhattan in 1776, we propose that the Manhattan VA Medical Center be reappointed as the **Margaret Corbin VA Medical Center**. It is also fitting that this will be the first VA hospital named in honor of a woman veteran.

¹⁴ <https://iava.org/she-who-borne-the-battle/>

¹⁵ <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/women-are-the-most-visible-soldiers-and-the-most-invisible-veterans>

¹⁶ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/hoes-hoin-website-sharing-explicit-photos-of-marines/>

¹⁷ <https://www.hastingsconstitutionallawquarterly.org/s/Campbell-Vol-45-Issue-1.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1991/05/26/remembering-margaret-corbin-daughter-of-the-american-revolution/fec00963-7e7a-4a98-865c-61ce69fb2161/>

Establishing NYS Board of Visitors for VA Facilities

Action Item:

- Establish a Board of Visitors to observe and report on VA medical centers in order to impartially represent the interests of local veterans and maintain visibility of local VA performance. A formalized body tasked with oversight may be able to identify problem areas before a new scandal can arise and can monitor improvements following corrective action.

Background:

- The U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs is our nation's second-largest bureaucracy that has undergone a number of reforms in recent years to more adequately serve our nation's veterans, including "MyVA" advisory bodies and public town halls. Yet despite these reforms, scandals continue to plague VA facilities, from evasion of the VA's ratings system at a VA hospital in Oregon¹⁹ to reports this month of atrociously poor care at the Washington, D.C. VA hospital²⁰ and an untreated patient left to die at the Buffalo, NY, VA hospital.²¹
- In a state where private healthcare is unprepared to serve veterans,²² more must be done by state and city officials to ensure that VA facilities are fulfilling their obligations to provide care to New York's veterans.
- Similar to the current Board of Visitors appointed to observe and report on hospitals and veterans facilities operated by New York State,²³ a Board of Visitors should be appointed to observe, inspect, and report on VA medical centers across the state, which can act as advocates and intermediaries between VA, the veterans it serves, and legislators and officials who can intervene when problems are identified. Appointees should be nominated by local veterans organizations and be available to receive communications and feedback from patients via email for review.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/01/us/at-veterans-hospital-in-oregon-a-push-for-better-ratings-puts-patients-at-risk-doctors-say.html>

²⁰ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/03/07/va-veterans-affairs-failures-left-patients-danger-washington-dc-hospital-years-investigation/396914002/>

²¹ <http://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/buffalo/news/2018/03/14/ig-report-shows-missteps--improper-treatment-of-patients-at-buffalo-va-center->

²² <https://www.stripes.com/news/us/study-private-sector-medical-providers-in-new-york-unprepared-to-treat-veterans-1.514402>

²³ <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/PBH/423>

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ADVANCING VETERANS & FAMILIES AS CIVIC LEADERS



Improving Automated Referrals of Veterans for Services

Action Items:

- Enact VetsConnect (S1100) for New York veterans and military reservists to receive benefit information upon applying for or renewing drivers license.
- Support effective implementation of VetConnectNYC / NY Serves into NYC Department of Veterans' Services operations and interoperability with other referral systems for veterans services and public assistance.
- Pursuant to the research mandated by Local Law 060-2018, implement tech industry best practices to establish single-source referrals for veterans services and public assistance for which they are eligible.

Background:

- New York City has the opportunity to lead on ensuring access for all residents to public assistance using digital solutions. Programs, benefits, and services based on demographic, financial, and other quantifiable eligibility data should be fully and instantaneously made available to veterans and family members, as well as all New Yorkers. Reaching veterans and military reservists at the point where they apply for or renew their drivers license poses an effective strategy for reaching individuals who may not be aware that federal, state, and city benefits and services may be available to improve their lives. This is an effective strategy that should be enacted by the NY State legislature.²⁴
- Currently the NYC Department of Veterans' Services is in the process of bringing the NY Serves referral network for veterans and families in house as NYC's VetConnectNYC program. NYC Council must fully support the integration and effectiveness of this contract with appropriate contract and project management staffing.
- Local Law 060-2018 directs the Mayor's Office of Operations to produce a study by December 31, 2018, regarding the feasibility and cost of utilizing city administrative data to determine individuals who are likely eligible for public assistance and to provide notice to those individuals of their likely eligibility. The study would include all forms of public assistance for which an individual can apply through the City.²⁵ Prior military service of individuals and family members should be included in any screening or referral system for New Yorkers to receive information on public assistance eligibility. Federal and state funds and benefits for veterans and families are otherwise being left on the table that could otherwise be of benefit to families and local economies in NYC.

²⁴ <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2017/s1100/amendment/a>

²⁵ <http://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=2386580&GUID=4BCF2F59-387A-430D-8529-7B21EDF70884>

Professionalizing & Improving Veterans Treatment Courts

Action Items:

- Standardizing eligibility of individuals and cases to maximize access to Veterans Treatment Courts for justice-involved veterans in NYC.
- Outreach and resourcing to strengthen peer mentoring program components of Veterans Treatment Courts.
- Ensure systemic data collection on Veterans Treatment Courts in all five boroughs to build the base of evidence for effectiveness of this diversionary model in NYC, New York State, and nationally.

Background:

- First implemented in Buffalo, NY, in 2008, Veterans Treatment Courts seek to connect veterans in the criminal justice system as a result of untreated mental health conditions with treatment, benefits, and support to rehabilitate them.²⁶ Since 2016, VTCs have been fully operational in all five boroughs of New York City, with Manhattan²⁷ and Staten Island²⁸ being the final additions.
- Veterans Treatment Courts have been cited as effective diversionary programs that have been shown to decrease recidivism, improve outcomes, save costs, and give a second chance to those who have served our nation. The NYC Veterans Alliance strongly advocated for expansion of VTCs in all five boroughs.²⁹
- New York City has the unique opportunity to lead the nation in strengthening and standardizing the accessibility, performance, and positive outcomes of its Veterans Treatment Courts. We are aligned with the New York State Health Foundation in calling for continued progress and growth in this vital alternative to incarceration.³⁰

²⁶ <http://justiceforvets.org/what-is-a-veterans-treatment-court>

²⁷ <http://www.manhattanexpressnews.nyc/manhattan-veteran-treatment-court-lend-hand-ex-gis-running-afoul-law/>

²⁸ <https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20161109/st-george/staten-island-veterans-court-opens>

²⁹ <http://www.nycveteransalliance.org/establishing-veterans-treatment-court-in-manhattan>

³⁰ <https://nyshealthfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/veterans-treatment-courts-new-york-state-roadmap-1.pdf>

Expanding Veteran Tuition Award & Academic Credits

Action Items:

- Expanding Veteran Tuition Award to all veterans and reservists who have served in designated duty areas on federal and state active duty.
- Standardizing award of academic credits from military transcripts for institutions of higher learning operating in New York State by passing S3674.

Background:

- Legislation must be passed to expand the Veteran Tuition Award to veterans and military reservists who have served on federal or state active duty in response to domestic emergencies and at risk to their personal safety in locations across the world that are currently excluded from eligibility.³¹ This would require changes to current law.³²
- Currently institutions of higher learning operating in New York state often accept the military transcript as a source of transfer credit, such as the recommendations made by the American Council on Education.³³ The law should be clarified to state that they shall **always** accept those courses which are certified by ACE as credit-worthy to ensure standardization and protect veterans from inconsistent application of credits.³⁴

³¹ <https://www.hesc.ny.gov/pay-for-college/financial-aid/types-of-financial-aid/nys-grants-scholarships-awards/veterans-tuition-awards.html>

³² <https://law.justia.com/codes/new-york/2016/edn/title-1/article-14/part-2/sub-part-2/669-a/>

³³ <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Military-Guide-Frequently-Asked-Questions.aspx>

³⁴ <https://nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2017/s3674/amendment/b>

Improving Hiring & Retention of Veterans by NYC Agencies

Action Items:

- Establishing standardized human resources training and requirements at all NYC agencies to ensure understanding of and full compliance with protections in city, state, and federal law for veterans and military reservists.
- Ensuring that disability disclosures are not penalized in civil service applications.
- Implementing hiring incentives for veterans and military reserves by FDNY.

Background:

- New York City government is not only the largest employer in the city—it is also the largest employer of veterans and military reservists. As such, NYC has the opportunity to standardize and ensure robust recruiting and retention policies designed to make NYC government the best employer of veterans and reservists in the city.
- NYC agencies must implement standardized training and requirements for human resources personnel and agency executives to ensure employees who are veterans and military reservists are fully ensured all protections and benefits provided in city, state, and federal law. Training needs to cover non-discrimination, protected time off for reserve/guard duty, advancement of career during duty absences, and protection of service-connected disabilities.
- In offering a 10-point incentive for civil service applicants with service-connected disabilities, NYC must ensure that applicants are not subsequently penalized in hiring because of the disclosed disability.
- FDNY in particular is in need of the diversity in gender, race, and ethnicity³⁵ that veterans and military reservists under the age of 30 bring to civil service. Ways to build a troops-to-firefighter “pipeline” include offering credits for military training and experience, and building relationships with the New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs (DMNA) to recruit directly from National Guard units based in NYC.

³⁵ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/fdny-aims-to-boost-women-minorities-in-its-ranks-1518134520>

Prioritizing Veteran-Owned Businesses

Action Items:

- NYC government should set a **goal of 3%** for contracts with veterans who are service-disabled—the mandated minimum for federal contracting—and work toward reaching that goal as it currently does with M/WBEs. If veterans who are service-disabled do not currently own businesses, or their business is not viable to contract with the city, then outreach can and should be made by SBS and DVS to increase the number of viable businesses owned by veterans who are service-disabled.
- NYC government should commit to working toward an overall **goal of 6%** for contracts with all veteran-owned businesses, to encompass the goal of 3% for veterans who are service-disabled. Veteran-owned businesses are proven to have higher success rates and are worthy investments for NYC government to establish and work toward contracting goals.
- The NYC SBS website and other outreach materials should include information specific to businesses owned by veterans who are both service-disabled and non-disabled, including accessible permitting and regulatory information on rules specific to **veteran street vending** provided by DCA and DOHMH.

Background:

- **Contradictory Data.** In 2014, SBS and then-MOVA jointly produced a report (at a cost of \$200,000 to city taxpayers) concluding that there should be no focused program for veteran-owned businesses in city contracting. The report surveyed only a small pool of veteran-owned businesses and estimated NYC's number of veteran-owned businesses. As advocates noted at the time, the findings of that report were inexplicably low, even going so far as to contradict the much higher number of veteran entrepreneurs that had been reported in 2007 U.S. Census figures for NYC. This report has stood as a bar to making veteran-owned businesses competitive for city contracts, forcing veterans who seek lucrative government contracts to seek eligibility for existing federal and state contracting programs in the continued absence of city priorities for veteran businesses.
- **Change is Essential.** In 2015, the policy paper produced by NYC Veterans Alliance (see attached excerpt) highlighted flaws in the city's 2014 report and recommended, based on responses from an online survey of the NYC veterans community, that NYC set a goal of 3% for contracts with service-disabled veterans—the mandated minimum for federal contracting—and work toward reaching that goal as it currently does with M/WBEs.
- **2017 Hearing on Veteran Businesses.** In June 2017, a joint hearing by the NYC Council Committees on Small Business and Veterans discussed resources available to veteran business owners, and NYC Veterans Alliance again made the

above recommendation.³⁶ No legislative action was subsequently taken to address contract priorities for veterans.

- **Low Participation in NYC-Provided Training for Veteran Entrepreneurs.** SBS has offered a training program for veteran business-owners, but it is offered during daytime work hours, making it challenging for currently employed veterans to attend. Participation has appeared to be low. Outreach materials for veteran business owners have been difficult to locate on the websites of both SBS and DVS.
- **Successful Nonprofit and Academic Training and Incubator Programs.** Successful outreach programs and support have been offered by nonprofit and academic ventures such as Bunker Labs NYC³⁷ and NYU Tandon's veteran entrepreneur training program and the new Veterans Future Lab,³⁸ a robust incubator program for veteran businesses located at Industry City in Sunset Park.
- **Low Resourcing for Veteran Street Vending Entrepreneurs.** Veterans seeking information about the city's oldest entrepreneurial venture for veterans—street vending, a unique New York program started in the 1890s for wounded Civil War veterans³⁹—still must navigate murky regulatory guidance between different city and state agencies just to determine how to attain a license, let alone operate successfully.

³⁶ http://www.nycveteransalliance.org/supporting_veterans_sbs

³⁷ <https://bunkerlabs.org/new-york-city/>

³⁸ <http://engineering.nyu.edu/press-releases/2017/11/13/nyu-tdonon-launches-tech-hub-military-veterans-brooklyn>

³⁹ <https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20151124/midtown/veterans-ask-for-preferential-treatment-overhaul-of-street-vending-laws>

Easing Access to Register, Vote & Receive Absentee Ballots

Action Items:

- **Enact Early Voting.** Co-sponsor / pass resolutions in support of **S7400 / A2064** to extend an 8-day period for voting in elections, including Saturdays and Sundays, giving voters flexibility around work, school, and family obligations.
- **Streamline Voter Registration.** Co-sponsor / pass resolutions in support of **S3304 / A2278** to make registration and updating voter information easier.
- **Protect Voting Rights.** Co-sponsor / pass resolutions in support of **S6164 / A5925** to prevent discrimination in electoral practices, requiring counties with populations of at least 10 percent of any racial, ethnic, or language minority group to have approval by the NYS Attorney General before changing poll site locations or purging voter lists.

Background:

- Veterans have sworn to support and defend the U.S. Constitution, even placing their own lives at risk for the sake of American democracy. There is no more sacred duty than ensuring democratic processes are strong, accessible, and fair in the city and state they call home.
- Last year, NYC's voter turnout was approximately 14% in the primary election, and 24% in the general election. Because of long and unpredictable commutes on public transit, voting must be made more accessible and available to improve turnout.
- Absentee voting is essential for servicemembers deployed abroad. Given the amount of time it takes for mail to travel through the military postal service to locations where they are deployed abroad, including forward deployed areas, it is essential that absentee ballots be made available in the most timely manner possible.
- Voting rights are essential to American democracy. Preventing disfranchisement within NYC counties is essential to preventing violations that have occurred recently within NYC.

NYC Veterans Alliance Team

Kristen L. Rouse, Founding Director

With more than 23 total years of service in the U.S. Army, U.S. Army Reserve, and Army National Guard, including three tours of duty in Afghanistan, Kristen brings a passion for supporting veterans transitioning back to civilian life and honoring all veterans—regardless of their era of service—for their service and sacrifices for our nation. She likewise brings six years of experience in interagency planning and emergency response in New York City government. She has been named an Organizer-in-Residence at Civic Hall, a 2017 Penn-Columbia Social Impact Fellow, and continues in the University of Pennsylvania's Executive Program in Social Impact Strategy in 2018.

Staff

Staff members include an attorney, an experienced political organizer, and veterans with communications experience. Our team also includes a graduate-level intern from Hunter College.

Advisory Council

Advisors provide key advice and assistance with operations and planning. The Council includes professionals experienced in managing digital products, public relations, writing and editing, and political and community organizing.

Board of Directors

Board members include veterans and family members of veterans, with experience that ranges from community organizing to foundation operations, public relations, tech startups, and more.

STAFF

Kristen L. Rouse
U.S. Army Veteran
Founding Director

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