



**THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
BOROUGH OF THE BRONX  
COMMUNITY BOARD 7**



RUBEN DIAZ, JR., BOROUGH PRESIDENT    EMMANUEL MARTINEZ, CHAIRPERSON    ISCHIA BRAVO, DISTRICT MANAGER

## VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

<b>Chair:</b>	<b>Chad Royer</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>Wednesday, April 28, 2021</b>
<b>Meeting Time:</b>	<b>6:30 PM</b>
<b>Members: (Check Those In Attendance)</b>	<b>✓ Chad Royer    ✓ Emmanuel Asamoah    ✓ Hugo Gonzalez</b> <b>✓ Jean Hill    ✓ Jeffery Hunter    _ Helene Redd</b> <b>✓ Adaline Walker Santiago</b>
<b>Minutes done by:</b>	<b>Chad Royer</b>

**Minutes:**

- I) Introductions**
- II) Review of previous minutes (If applicable)**
- III) Follow-up from previous month (If applicable)**
- V) Outreach**
  - a) Regarding participation of a memorial event at Woodlawn Cemetery, the committee was awaiting a response regarding maximum capacity allowed. The chair reached out to Woodlawn Cemetery and was told they would look into options for allowing members of the public on site. Due to the current situation with COVID-19 and not having enough time to prepare, the Education Committee has opted not to go forth with doing an event with members of the youth.**
  - b) The next round table event will be on Wednesday, May 26, 2021 at 6:30 pm. The topics will highlight health and mental health challenges that veterans are dealing with.**
  - c) The committee will work on a recruitment flyer where it will be used to target veterans and family members of veterans of the community.**



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**The purpose of the flyer is to increase attendance and engagement at the committee meetings.**

## **VI) New Business**

### **a) MTA Veterans Fare Reduction Proposal**

- 1) World War Veteran HP Schroer is a veteran advocate and director of UMEWE, a self-funded organization representing 12,000 veterans who attend college in New York City. Over the last 4 years, Mr. Schroer has advocated for the MTA board to facilitate a system for veterans to pay discounted fares as seniors do, but the pushback stems from financial restraints.**
- 2) Three years ago, the mayor and City Council agreed to provide funding to enable veterans attending college in the city to purchase fares at half price, but only less than 400 of the 12,000 eligible were able to get the discount because the mayor changed the eligibility requirements. The MTA recently received billions of dollars from the Federal Government to help with finances.**
- 3) Two bills S1287 and A00774 will allow all veterans to purchase MTA fares at half price, but the bills have not been put to a vote. We need to direct the request to Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Member Jeffrey Dinowitz and Assembly Member Helene Weinstein and request the bills to be placed in this year's budget in advance of the June 10, 2021 deadline.**
- 4) The original eligibility requirements were 1) veterans must be honorably discharged, 2) veterans attend college in New York City, 3) veterans are able to show proof of 1 and 2, and 4) veterans do not have an income requirement.**



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- 5) A veteran in his/her 30s who continues to pay his/her full fare will have spent over \$60,000 on public transportation during lifetime. Many veterans have moved out of New York State over the last 10 years due to high and rising cost of living. If the MTA were to dedicate 2 cents from every fare collected, this would provide ample funding for the discount.
  - 6) Motion by Jean Hill for a letter of support to be sent to elected officials Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Member Jeffrey Dinowitz and Assembly Member Helene Weinstein to support MTA Reduced Fares For Veterans Program from bills S1287 and A00774 and to have the bills S1287 and A00774 placed into this year's budget, seconded by Hugo Gonzalez. Five out of five members vote yes. Motion passes.
- b) Presentation on by Coco Culhane, Esq, Executive Director of Veterans Advocacy Project: Upgrading Honorable Discharges
- 1) The VA has different levels of discharge that determine a veteran's eligibility for benefits.
    - Honorable discharge- full benefits
    - General (under honorable conditions)- No GI Bill benefits
  - 2) Other Than Honorable (OTH) or Undesirable discharge- VA makes a character of discharge (COD) determination, followed by a review of personnel file for legal bars to the "veteran status", followed by a decision on "Honorable" or "Dishonorable for VA Purposes"
  - 3) Bad Conduct Discharge (BCD)- No medical by statute, and no benefits unless BCD is from a special court martial and VA decides COD is "Honorable for VA Purposes"



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- 4) **Dishonorable- No benefits and no medical**
- 5) **6.8% of veterans were less-than-honorably discharged (620,000). Post 9/11, 15.2% of veterans were less-than-honorably discharged (over 500,000 as of 2021). Suicide rates for those discharged involuntarily for misconduct is about 3 times higher than other veterans. Over 31,000 service members were discharged with reason of Personality Disorder, but many were not legal. It took an investigation from Congress in 2008 to have new regulations in place. According to a government report from 2011-2015, 62% of those discharged for misconduct were already diagnosed with PTSD or conditions related to the misconduct behaviors.**
- 6) **Discharge information is found on the DD 214 forms. Any discharge less than honorable not only carries a stigma where it can be deemed as criminal by civilians, but also veterans are barred from getting medical care by Congressional statute.**
- 7) **Before 2011, about 100,000 people were discharged for their sexual orientation, and although they can get an upgrade, the boards who cover the discharge statuses would still look for any misconduct.**
- 8) **To change one's discharge or to get into the VA, one has to have a discharge upgrade or correction (DOD), or a Character of Discharge (COD), and the latter allows one to apply for VA benefits and health care without being a discharge upgrade**
- 9) **The boards responsible for discharges and corrections are as follows:**
  - **Discharge Review Board (DRB)- statute of limitation is 15 years from the date of separation. 3 high ranking officers**



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make up the board. One can apply for documentary review and then a personal appearance if needed. They can only change the characterization and narrative reason but cannot lower a discharge. They cannot change what is in your record. The form needed is the DD Form 293.

- **Boards for Correction of Military/Naval Records ((BCMR/BCNR)- statute of limitation is 3 years from the date of discovery of injustice or error. If you have a good reason, like having a lawyer for the first time or there was a policy change that would have changed what happened to the person, they will waive the time limit and allow you to apply. Civilian DOD employees from the Pentagon or Homeland Security (Coast Guard) make up the board. A person has only one opportunity unless he or she has new evidence for reconsideration. The form needed is the DD Form 149. They can change almost anything except overturn a general court martial conviction but cannot lower a discharge.**

**10) Discharge Review Board (DRB) has 2 types of review.**

- **Documentary-** submit Form DD 293, evidence, and a written explanation of what happened. Include exactly what you are asking for.
- **Personal Appearance-** ask for a documentary review and if denied, come back for a hearing

**11) Reasons to include in a person's written statement requesting an upgrade should address propriety (there was a mistake or error, or a fact was wrong), equity (something was unfair),**



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and clemency (a person admits to doing something wrong, but the person is reformed and regrets the action). A person also wants to include any mental health condition he or she had or thought he or she had. Court-martials are considered fact.

- 12) Do not use "I need benefits" as a reason for an upgrade.
- 13) According to the Kurto Memo from August 2017, boards can now give liberal consideration to the possibility that a mental health condition contributed to the issue that led to the discharge (harassment, sexual assault, PTSD, TBI and others). Applicants are encouraged to include any mental health related issues as evidence as long as they can be linked to the behavior according to the memo.
- 14) For more information, contact the Veteran Advocacy Project at [contact@veteranadvocacy.org](mailto:contact@veteranadvocacy.org), or the intake line at 646-602-5620.

- VII) Next meeting date: Wednesday, May 26, 2021 – Veterans Committee Roundtable
- VIII) Discussion on next month's agenda
- IX) Adjournment