**New York City**

**Veterans Advisory Board**

Minutes for the June 17, 2021 meeting held virtually,

representing the meeting for Staten Island

**Members**

**Present:**

Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn) Mercedes Elias (Queens)

John Rowan (Queens) Paul Dietrich (Staten Island)

Jennifer Kamrowski (Manhattan) Joe Bello (Bronx)

Todd Haskins (Manhattan)

**Absent:**

Charles Hernandez (Bronx)

Peter Kauffmann (Queens)

Andrew Walcott (Brooklyn)

Note: Awaiting board member to be appointed by Speaker’s Office.

**Minutes**

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* Wendy McClinton (Chair) commenced the meeting at 6:05 pm.
* Chair McClinton goes over the agenda. All VAB members introduced themselves to the audience.

Paul Dietrich introduces representatives from Staten Island on the call. Michael Matthews from Staten Island Performing Provider System (SI PPS) and representative from Councilman Matteo’s office.

**Presentation**:

Mr. Matthews talks about the work of the SI PPS Veterans Population Health Program. SI PPS partners with many organizations on Staten Island – hospitals, nursing homes, substance abuse centers, mental health providers, etc. Mr. Matthews runs the veteran program. Over 2,000 veterans outreached to assess COVID 19 needs, over 33,000 meals delivered to veterans by Meals on Wheels and Chasi, 125 veterans connected to health and social services. Delivered 2,500 face coverings donated by DVS. Pilot suicide prevention program started that will be blueprint for DVS to initiate in the other boroughs. Serve as the Community Integration Coordinator for Staten Island for the End of Time in Service – Sponsorship program, one of 10 nationally, which helps service members transitioning from active duty. Mr. Matthews contact information is 917-613-2645.

Chair McClinton then turns it over to Commissioner Hendon for updates from DVS. Commissioner Hendon acknowledged Councilman Matteo and Mr. Matthews for attending. Lists contact information for DVS: nyc.gov/vets. 212-416-5250 connect@veterans.nyc.gov @nycveterans.

Commissioner Hendon stated VA facilities providing vaccines to veterans, their family members and caregivers. The city is providing in home vaccinations for those who are eligible (one of any of the following: 75 years or older, person with a disability, fully homebound, employee or retiree of city of New York, referred by union – Vaccines for those who are homebound: <https://forms.cityofnewyork.us/f/home>). Community organizations looking to host a pop-up site, can call 877-829-4692. New items from DVS:

1. This summer unveiling veteran business map (nyc.gov/vetbizmap) identifying all veteran owned businesses throughout the city.
2. Working with mayor’s public engagement unit to assist them with accessing affordable care act and screen them for VA healthcare eligibility
3. Housing connect drive this summer helping veterans navigate affordable housing
4. Housing grants through emergency rental assistance program, ran by state providing rent support. Providing up to 12 months back rent and utilities as well as up to three month forward rent. Black Veterans for Social Justice is an approved partner for the program. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/new-york-emergency-rental-assistance-program-erap.page>.
5. Supportive Services Veteran Families Program is a VA run program similar assistance. Can find out more information at nyc.gov/vethousing.

Updates on core services food (nyc.gov/vetfood), housing (nyc.gov/vethousing), employment (nyc.gov/vetjobs), healthcare (nyc.gov/vethealth).

Chair announces that the next session for the VAB is Sept 15th. Thanks Commissioner for his comments. Commissioner adds that Councilman Matteo just put through legislation that will extend the veteran property tax exemption, making it permanent and thanking him for that. Legislation currently on Mayor’s desk awaiting signature. (Veteran Property Tax Exemption info: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/finance/benefits/landlords-veterans.page>) Turns it over to Mercedes for outstanding issues brought up last meeting.

**Old business:** Questions posed at last Veteran’s Advisory Board (VAB) meeting.

1. Issue with the Bronx city parks and having veterans kicked out of the park houses. DVS sent an update from the parks department that as of June 14th, the following recreation centers officially reopened:
	1. Hunts Point (BX), Brownsville (BK), Hansborough (MN), Alfred E. Smith (MN), Highbridge (MN), Rec Center 54 (MN), Thomas Jefferson (MN), Tony Dapolito (MN), Al Oerter (QN), Lost Battalion Hall (QN), Greenbelt (SI), Lyons (SI), Faber (SI)
	2. The following will reopen shortly (recreation centers are presently being utilized as covid testing sites, distance learning locations, and polling stations)
		1. McCarren (BK) and Ocean Breeze (SI)
2. What is board’s position relative to discount that should be offered for veterans attending school in NYC? Vincent Garcia who followed up on that from DVS was running late to meeting and would address later. (*Added note, Mr. Garcia had a personal family matter and could not attend*).
	1. Robert Wadiak (attendee) adds that any low income New Yorkers, regardless if they are a veteran, are eligible for fair fares program by going to NYC HRA website to get half price Metrocards. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/fairfares/index.page>

There is no other old business to discuss.

Next presentation is Arnold Lewis, administrative coordinator from SAGEVets. SAGEVets is a NY State program for LGBTQ veterans aged 50 years and older offering outreach and referral services as well as highlight issues specific to those who served pre “don’t ask, don’t tell.” Discharge upgrade cases are referred with New York’s newly implemented Restoration of Honor Act and are processed by volunteer attorneys. Arnold’s contact info is alewis@sageusa.org or 929-484-4178. Chair asked of any link with events going on for pride month. Arnold stated if anyone contacts him, he can share.

Chair turns meeting over to Chief Operating Officer of Black Veterans for Social Justice Martin Krongol to discuss the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). BVSJ wanted to become an approved provider since they are located in central Brooklyn. They were awarded but still awaiting funding, which they expect to receive in July. Any single individual who makes $41,800 or less, or is in a family of four and makes $60,000 or less is eligible (roughly 50% of median income) and have to show that you have lost work in the past year. Will need pay stubs, lease, proof of unemployment, etc to verify eligibility. For any landlords, they need W-9 for payment and proof they own the building. Emergency Rental Assistance Program home page: <https://otda.ny.gov/programs/Emergency-Rental-Assistance> Phone Number: 844-NY1RENT (844-691-7368).

Chair turns presentation to Peter Spencer, speaking on behalf of Councilman Matteo. Mr. Spencer briefed that the council passed bill that Councilman Matteo sponsored, turning the property tax exemption for veterans from temporary to permanent. No recertification process if a veteran was approved previously under the temporary provisions. Can contact their office for the process to apply if they have not yet received. Will receive benefit for as long as they live in New York City.

Mercedes shares new email for VAB: nycveteransadvisoryboard@gmail.com

Chair calls on next presenter, Erica Newhouse from Arts in the Armed Forces (AITAF). This Sunday at the Queen’s Drive In having Michael Pareole discussing Spike Lee’s Summer of Sam. (Link to events page: <https://events.aitaf.org>). AITAF founded by Marine veteran Adam Driver, provide play readings and film screenings for veterans, in addition to two writing awards (play writing and screenwriting) for $10,000 each. They also have internship programs and annual veteran’s day event on Broadway. Showed video highlighting capabilities: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7kasw-_7ic&t=22s>. Have a virtual film screening event in the fall with Blue Star Families. Bridge award ceremony will be held on the Intrepid. Also serve incarcerated veterans. Contact email is newhouse@aitaf.org.

Chair turns it over to Mr. Belkebir who asked to speak in private chat (comments below since they are of an issue with city, not one of the scheduled presentations).

John Rowan briefs issues being addressed by Vietnam Veterans of America. First is the dependency indemnity compensation and COVID deaths. Issue is that people who have passed from COVID are not getting correct cause of death listed on death certificate, therefore the VA is denying claims for dependency indemnity compensation. They are not having other associated diseases the veteran had listed. Need to have doctors list what other diseases they had besides COVID when they passed (i.e. heart disease, hypertension, etc). Expanded caregivers program to include pre-9/11 veterans, but very few older veterans have been able to get approved for the program. Asked attendees to contact him if they are having issues with either of the above. jrown@vva.org. Discussed assistance from FEMA for burial due to COVID, Joe Bello included link: <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/87667/details-femas-covid-19-funeral-expense-reimbursement-program/> .

Joe Bello commented to make sure everyone is aware, we can, and have invited both the State and Federal VA to meetings but they do not have to attend if they chose not to. When they attended, it was to listen and to share information.

**Public Comments**: The following comments were submitted to the board during the virtual meeting and were addressed throughout the course of the meeting. Both questions and responses are provided.

**Lobsang Salaka**: If your organization wants to distribute community service related information and free items, please attend Queens Community Board Dist-03, Immigrant Heritage Month Celebration, please register. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1G_YTQ5uzpWumshC-sKWG2KJgMFHplceI/view?usp=sharing>

**Joseph Kosinsky**: Would you explain to me the following. I am Navy medically retired and 100% VA Perm. and Total. I have no other health insurance. Now that I am over 65 years old why must I enroll in Medicare to enroll in DOD Tricare-for-Life (I did not for both). Where is the health care for me and my wife? Why if I travel overseas I have very limited health coverage. My wife is enrolled in DOD Tricare-for-Life and is reimburse for health care overseas.

* Commissioner stated Tanya from his staff will follow up with him since they have worked on this issue with him before.

**Rabah Belkebir:** Vietnam veteran, knows Joe Bello. Wants to bring up issue of disabled veteran street vendors who are being discriminated by city of New York. Has emailed politicians and Commissioner. Stated disabled veterans are losing rights over non veterans.

* Commissioner acknowledged receipt from Mr. Belkebir on Monday and asked Director of Intergovernmental Affairs to follow up.

**Colleen Ryan:** Is there a discount on subway fares for student veterans still?

* Mercedes asked for email to get same update from Vincent that is given to H.P. Schroer.

**Lobsang Salaka, DSL, MBA, MPA**: Commissioner, I have friends who goes to DOT to get handicap permit, but they don’t take VA letter and they have to fill out their paper and have doctor sign.

* Will follow up during next meeting.

**G1**: My husband passed in Dec. How can I get help for myself I'm disabled. When my husband was alive we did go to VASH and was told we had to be homeless before we can get help. We applied for many services. My husband 0% served in Korea. VA rated my husband prostate cancer and heart disease. msshes2bad@yahoo.com

* Response from Amauri Espinal, DVS: Hello G1. Please call 212-416-5250 or visit https://nyc.uniteus.com/vetconnectnyc/ and submit an Assistance Request for help with your situation.

**Colleen Ryan**: First question regarding options for veterans regarding transportation. Has the city considered a partnership, with like Citibike, as an alternate option than taking the subway giving the rising crime rates? Second, is there an estimated time when the VA is going to bring back child services? Northport VA closed services and was important since I have three kids. I assume the city VA’s have close theirs as well, but am unsure.

* Response from Robert Wadiak (attendee): Citibike gives a Veterans discount, you just need to let them know when you apply for membership.
	+ Oscar Guevara : Veterans and Military Discount $35 Off Annual Memberships In appreciation of the women and men who have served, Citi Bike is offering new and renewing members $35 off annual memberships to all active, reservist, veteran and retired US military personnel. To get your discount code, you'll need to first verify eligibility.
	+ Colleen Ryan : Thank you so much!
	+ Amauri Espinal : <https://www.citibikenyc.com/pricing/veterans>
* Commissioner stated he would follow up on childcare services with VA.

**H.P. Schroer**: Has been trying to receive information of veterans receiving half fare discounts. To best estimate, it’s less than 500, but there are over 170,000 veterans in New York City. Would like specific numbers. (Already scheduled for follow up)

**Daniel Seaman:** Concern that St Albans VA only mails out prescription and they are being stolen (home in Richmond Hill), can’t pick up prescriptions specifically for diabetes. Would like to go pickup insulin but they are closed for pickup. Second problem is that at St. Albans, you can only see physician on zoom. Want to know why they aren’t opening them up to in person meetings.

* Commissioner stated he will contact VA to try to get a response.

End of public comments.

**Meeting adjourned.**

Next meeting: 6 pm September 15, 2021

Submitted by: Mercedes Elias, Secretary