**New York City**

**Veterans Advisory Board**

Minutes for the November 18, 2021 meeting held virtually,

representing the meeting for Manhattan

**Members**

**Present:**

Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn) Mercedes Elias (Queens)

Todd Haskins (Manhattan) Peter Kauffmann (Queens)

**Absent:**

Charles Hernandez (Bronx) John Rowan (Queens)

Andrew Walcott (Brooklyn) Paul Dietrich (Staten Island)

Joe Bello (Bronx) Jennifer Kamrowski (Manhattan)

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

**Minutes**

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* Wendy McClinton (Chair) commenced the meeting at 6:03 pm.
* Chair McClinton goes over the agenda. All VAB members introduced themselves to the audience.

**Presentation**:

Chair introduces Howard Pollack, Community & Emergency Services Liaison for Speaker Corey Johnson, City Council Speaker. Mr. Pollack provides remarks to let everyone know he is grateful to attend and will provide information to outgoing speaker and incoming speaker.

Upcoming VAB meetings for 2022 provided:

WED Feb 9th – BronxWED April 13th – QueensWED June 8th – Staten IslandWED Aug 10th – BrooklynWED Oct 19th – Manhattan

Chair introduces Quamid Francis, Deputy Commissioner to brief on behalf of DVS. Mr. Francis thanks everyone for attending and thanks everyone for supporting the Mayor’s breakfast on Veteran’s Day.

Shared some notable announcements made by either the state or the city directly supported or advocated for by DVS:

1. NYC DVS launched VetConnectPro, connecting veterans looking for work in NYC public and private sector with employment opportunities. It has a skills translator, job postings from city agencies as well as information for local, city and state benefits, civil service exam schedule, as well as recommended online job training. Can visit this at nyc.gov/vets.
2. Announced by Governor, advocated by DVS, expanded the Military Enhanced Recognition, Incentive and Tribute (MERIT) Scholarship, making it available to all family of fallen and disabled service members. Removes requirement of service after Aug 2, 1990 for their children and spouses to be eligible. Legislation S.5543A/A.7685 <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/veterans-day-governor-hochul-signs-legislative-package-protect-and-support-veterans-and-their>
3. Legislation was passed at the state providing all men and women who have served to receive civil service credit for appointments and promotions, by removing restriction that you must be a combat veteran. Leigslation S.763/A.5447 <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/veterans-day-governor-hochul-signs-legislative-package-protect-and-support-veterans-and-their>
4. In relation to COVID, partnered with state department of veterans’ services to advocate for information sharing between the VA and the state department of health. Process in underway to make sure that the Excelsior pass recognizes vaccinations received through the VA: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/executive-order/no-8-directing-department-veterans-affairs-transmit-immunization-records>.

Quamid introduced DVS staff present:

Cassandra Alvarez – Associate for Policy and Strategic Partnerships

Amauri Espinal – Assistant Commissioner for Community Services

Allan Houston – Press Secretary

Ellen Greeley – Director of Grants Administration

Dana Rock – Director of Housing

Glenda Garcia – General Counsel and Agency Chief Contracting Officer

Ellen Greeley announced event on December 6th that will help veterans with tickets they receive from other city agencies.

**Old Business**

What is the current status with the military veteran preference for the street cart vendors?

Quamid responded that the legislation to appoint a veteran to the advisory board for street cart vendors currently held up at the state level. Working to move it with counterparts at the state level. Wendy asked if issuing of license is on hold or if they are still issuing them. Quamid responded that to his knowledge, they should still be issuing, and nothing is on hold but will verify.

There is no other old business to discuss.

Mercedes addressed current issues submitted by community:

What is current booster eligibility for vaccinations at the VA?

Quamid responded, the VA is following CDC guidance for eligibility. NY Department of Health authorizes all veterans to be eligible. <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/booster-shots-and-additional-doses/#getting-a-booster-shot> . Amauri added that fully vaccinated veterans are eligible if they had it over six months prior if they meet certain eligibility.

Any mental health resources they would like to highlight?

Amauri responded with VA link to mental health resources: <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/54878/helping-veterans-cope-ptsd-holidays/> . Also provided the New York City resources page as well: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/services/mental-and-behavioral-health.page> . Wendy added that there are faith-based institutions to help as well. Ellen working on establishing crisis management teams, have started in Staten Island and Queens, looking to expand to Brooklyn. Wendy asked for consolidated ‘cheat sheet’ with mental health resources available to distribute to community.

Dana wanted to provide information on additional housing services. She stated the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) ended abruptly, so they are working with community-based organizations to see what they are doing to provide assistance. The Landlord Rental Assistance Program (LRAP) is still open for an additional time: Landlord Rental Assistance Program- open through November 21 <https://otda.ny.gov/programs/landlord-rental-assistance/>. Before you couldn’t apply in HRA portal without first applying to ERAP, now that is no longer the case. SSVF has prevention program for at risk veterans, and notes that they did slightly increase their income cap. Wendy noted there are some programs through HUD and the United Way as well.

Chair thanks staff from DVS for their participation and comments.

Chair turns the session over to Arnold Lewis 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.” Falls under sage care management department, which includes the caregiver program. The caregiver program provides case management, homecare respite, short term counseling, and various other services. Highlighted participation in Veteran’s Day parade and spoke with Senator Holman and stated many of the senior veterans in the community were deeply touched by the support. Recently hosted a panel with medical experts from VA facilities in each of five boroughs celebrating Transgender Awareness week, highlighting lesser-known services at the VA for transgender and gender diverse veterans. Will be hosting a Restoration of Honor conference with the state Department of Veterans Services, which is designed to restore honor to veterans who were discharged due to sexual orientation or gender identity. Arnold’s contact info is alewis@sageusa.org or 929-484-4178 SAGEVets Newsletter <https://www.sageusa.org/resource-posts/sagevets-newsletter-fall-2021/> .

Chair thanked Arnold for the work SAGEVets does and introduces next speaker, Michael Matthews from Staten Island Performing Provider System (PPS).

Mr. Matthews discusses the Expiration Term of Service-Sponsorship Program (ETS-SP) and Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) Outreach. Discusses DVS started the PPS for community-based intervention combatting suicides. First year of transition from active duty is the point of highest risk for veteran suicide. ETS-SP program establishes trained sponsors that help service members while they are still on active duty and after the first year of their transition as a civilian. Both veterans and civilians can serve as sponsors. SDOH – Social and economic factors, health behaviors, clinical care, physical environment, genes & biology. Used SDOH to assess needs of veterans in Staten Island during the pandemic. Mr. Matthews discussed the importance of training in military culture for civilian organizations. Wendy asked how we implement their program to other boroughs. Mr. Matthews mentioned starting with the ETS program, anyone can get involved. Secondly, their program is now starting in Queens and Ellen chimes in that DVS has been working on expanding the crisis mapping across the other boroughs. Danielle Bracco is ETS coordinator and introduced herself as well. Contact info is danielle@etssponsorship.com <https://www.etssponsorship.com/>.

**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.

**Peter Lomtevas:** improve your website pages

**Steven Merced**: Thanked DVS for assistance with civil service exam fee. Many veterans have vehicle certifications from their time in the military, and they would like to drive for Lyft or Uber. NYC has halted issuing new TLC plates because of congestion. If a person has electric vehicle or wheelchair accessible van, you can get TLC plates. Suggested TLC plate exemption for veterans as an employment opportunity.

* Quamid acknowledged suggestion and considered it a good idea, will look to see what they can do with taxi and license commission.

End of public comments.

**Meeting adjourned.**

Next meeting: TBD

Submitted by: Mercedes Elias, Secretary