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MEMORANDUM

TO: Mercedes Elias, Chair, New York City Veterans Advisory Board
FROM: James Hendon, Commissioner, NYC Department of Veterans' Services
DATE: December 1st, 2025
SUBJECT: DVS Response to the Veterans Advisory Board's 2024 Recommendations

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memorandum is to formally respond to the NYC Veterans Advisory Board (VAB)'s 2024 Annual Report.

BACKGROUND

Beginning in 2026, the NYC Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) will submit responses to the VAB's annual report within ninety days of the report's publication. This is in keeping with a commitment made by DVS during a September 22nd, 2025 New York City Council Veterans Committee Hearing on the topic "Implementing Recommendations from the Veterans Advisory Board."

For our response to the VAB's 2024 Report, what follows is largely excerpts from testimony delivered by DVS during the September 22nd, 2025 hearing.

DVS RESPONSE TO 2024 VETERANS ADVISORY BOARD REPORT

Each year, the Veterans Advisory Board distills community input into recommendations for the Mayor and City Council, recommendations for DVS, and recommendations for legislation and programs. What follows is our response—where we agree, where we have acted, and where we commit to continued work – to the board's recommendations from their latest (2024) report. For the record: the 2024 Veterans Advisory Board Report – and all VAB reports dating back to 2002, can be found online at nyc.gov/vetboard.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

Processing of the Private First Class Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans' Support Program Grants

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The board rightly noted delays in 2024 related to approval and reimbursement for the Dwyer Program. The cause was a process error that routed funding through the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene rather than directly to the Department of Veterans' Services. In response to FY 25 process delays, FY 26 Dwyer funding – and Dwyer monies moving forward – are recognized by the Mayor's Office of Management and Budget as belonging to DVS at the start of each fiscal year. For future years, we are working with state partners to establish a direct state-to-DVS flow of funding. The objective is straightforward: reliable, timely support for peer-led mental health programming without administrative drag. An update: during this fiscal year (FY 26), 31 NYC Dwyer Projects are in operation. Details can be found at nyc.gov/vetdwyer.

Appointment Terms to the Veterans Advisory Board

The board recommends that every new appointment carry a full three-year term, including appointments to fill a vacancy. We support this change. We also support a review to ensure balanced representation across all boroughs and stand ready to assist the Mayor and the Council.

Attendance at Public Sessions

To strengthen accountability and continuity, the board recommends members attend at least three out of the five public sessions each year, with mandatory in-person attendance in the borough they represent. DVS agrees this is a practical standard that will improve consistency, participation, and trust.

Encouraging Veteran Engagement in the Political Process

The board urges collaboration to recruit veterans to community boards and to expand participation in civic life at all levels of government. Our department will continue to share opportunities through our channels. We welcome Council partnership to elevate these pathways. To be clear: DVS can assist and inform veterans about participating in non-political activities such as joining one's community board, attending public hearings, and volunteering. The websites nyc.gov/vetcommunityboard, nyc.gov/vetvolunteer, and ourveterans.nyc offer examples of how we promote community and civic engagement opportunities. That said, the NYC Department of Veterans' Services cannot engage in political activity.

Increased Funding for the Department of Veterans' Services

The board correctly noted that our department is the smallest in city government by headcount and budget. We are grateful to the Mayor and City Council for approving an FY 26 adopted budget that increased our agency's headcount from 39 people (in the FY 25 adopted budget) to 49 in FY 26. This represents a 25.6% expansion. This is more than a number; it is capacity to execute, sustain, and scale. Past adopted budgets for DVS can be found online at nyc.gov/vetreports.

Reaching Older Veterans

More than half of New York City's veteran population is older (per 2023 ACS data, 70.7% of New York City Veterans are age 55 or older, 50.5% are 65 or older, and 31.8% are 75 or older). That being said, digital outreach alone is not sufficient. In the summer of 2025, DVS mailed 52,000 postcards to Veteran households earlier this year. Within the first week, we received more than 400 phone calls. Our agency is committed to a holistic, life-cycle approach in supporting service members. In practice, this means continuing to engage with Veterans younger than 55 to keep them informed, connected, and active in the programs and services available to them. We will continue to blend traditional and digital outreach so that every veteran can connect with DVS.

Evaluation and Documentation of Programming

The board called for dedicated funding to evaluate and document programs, including claims assistance and intake. The NYC Department of Veterans' Services currently reports through the City Council Scorecard effort, New York City Council hearings, the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity, the Mayor's Office of Operations (in service of the Preliminary Mayor's Management report and the Mayor's Management Report), the New York City Comptroller, and we submit performance data in compliance with local laws including, but not limited to: Local Law 23 of 2015, Local Law 30 of 2017, Local Law 215 of 2018, Local Law 44 of 2019, Local Law 4 of 2022, Local Law 37 of 2024, Local Law 38 of 2024, and Local Law 39 of 2024. Data that we report can be found at nyc.gov/vetreports. Additionally, our upgraded **VetConnectNYC** platform improves outcome tracking, two-way messaging between veterans and staff, and automated reminders for follow-up. This strengthens accountability and service continuity. The website for VetConnectNYC is nyc.gov/vetconnect.

That being said:

- During this fiscal year (FY 26), six positions were added to DVS' headcount which will implicitly increase the level of quality assurance and quality control from an internal checks and balances standpoint. Those positions are three coordinators who have been

added to our Housing Support Services team and three who have been added to our Veteran Support Services team (also known as the VA Claims unit).

- During this fiscal year, two positions were added to DVS' headcount which will explicitly increase the level of quality assurance and quality control of our reporting and actions. Those positions are:
 - a. VetConnect NYC Coordinator. One person will oversee, help optimize, and internally evaluate the flow of all of our VetConnect services and referrals.
 - b. Senior Advisor for Operations. The Senior Advisor for Operations will provide command and control over the Housing Support Services team and the Veteran Support Services team. This will be an added layer of internal oversight, quality assurance and quality control. Leaders of the VSS and HSS units will report to the Senior Advisor for Operations.

Increase Veteran Vendors' Inclusion on the Street Vendor Advisory Board

The board again recommends a formal veteran seat on the Street Vendor Advisory Board. Our department supports **Intro 686 of 2024**, which is supported by all of the council's veterans committee members. If approved, then Intro 686 would add a veteran seat to the Street Vendor Advisory Board and ensure that entrepreneurs who served have a voice in policy that affects their livelihoods. Agency liaisons for veteran street vendors are listed at nyc.gov/vetvendors.

Funding and Resources for Student Veterans

The board recommends an equal level of support for student veterans attending CUNY – across the CUNY system. The board also recommends that innovative housing solutions be offered to student veterans.

Specific to CUNY: During the last fiscal year (FY 25), DVS executed a transfer of funds to the CUNY Office of Veterans (COVA). This represents the first of what will become an annual monetary commitment from DVS to CUNY Veterans. Among other things, resources from DVS will empower CUNY Veterans to receive more situation-appropriate, in-depth services CUNY-wide. Information for student veterans can be found at nyc.gov/vetstudents.

With regard to housing, recent updates that positively impact student veterans (and all veterans) are: 1) for Housing Connect, DVS and the VA can now sign to verify a veteran's service-connected disability determination for hearing, vision, and mobility impairments when an

eligible, service-disabled veteran applies for a disability set-aside unit; and 2) there now exists a 10% veterans preference within the Housing Connect lottery. Veterans can visit nyc.gov/vethousing to learn more.

Veteran Treatment Courts

The board recommended that Veteran Treatment Courts (VTC's) -- which each have their own standard operating procedures and leadership structures within each borough -- serve all veterans regardless of discharge status, adopt a uniform set of procedures and policies, and receive cultural competency training through the VA's Veteran Justice Program. The board also recommended that nonprofits which recruit, train, and support Veteran Treatment Court mentors be properly funded.

The Veteran Treatment Court system is run by New York State -- through the judiciary arm of each of its counties (the New York State Unified Court System). County District Attorneys have influence on the system as well -- within their respective counties. The local VTC system is not run by the City of New York.

Nevertheless, given constraints on what we at the City level can do to change Veteran Treatment Courts, areas where DVS has sought to add value are: 1) working with the New York City Criminal Justice Agency to better-identify veterans who encounter the criminal justice system (this ties back to veteran identification), and 2) funding a local nonprofit that supports Veteran Treatment Court mentors, United Veteran Mentors, Inc.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' SERVICES

Codifying Responsibilities Between the Department and the Veterans Advisory Board

The board proposes clarifying roles, expectations, and procedures—covering board expansion, timely updates to our website, term standards, meeting locations and technology, and formally recognizing the board as New York City's **Community Veterans Engagement Board (CVEB)**. We support these recommendations and this framework. Further, local designation would align New York City with federal engagement models and deepen intergovernmental collaboration.

Establishing the NYC Veterans Advisory Board as the Community Veterans Engagement Board for New York City is critical for three reasons: 1) it ensures that VAB meetings are always held on VA facilities (this enhances turnout), 2) New York City's Veteran community is strategically more visible, and hence more influential, in the eyes of the VA regionally & nationally, and 3) the CVEB offers a formal venue through which Veteran Benefits Administration, Veterans Health Administration, and National Cemetery Administration officials

can respond to local community complaints. Representatives from each of arm of the VA – VHA, VBA, and NCA -- must attend CVEB gatherings.

It is also important for the Veterans Advisory Board to serve as our local Community Veterans Engagement Board because the existing CVEB for New York City, the Metropolitan NYC Veterans Community Veterans Engagement Board, has not met in more than five years.

Providing Personnel Support for the Veterans Advisory Board

The board recommends a dedicated staff position within our department to support board administration. We will continue to facilitate meetings, hybrid broadcasting, and communications using existing personnel; however, we cannot support a dedicated staff line at this time. We stand ready to facilitate the board securing one or more VA Work Studies (paid interns) to support the board's work.

Documented Tracking on Progress from Previous Recommendations

The board seeks detailed metrics on claims submissions, approvals, and the financial impact of federal compensation and pension benefits. We support the spirit of this recommendation. Today, producing such reports requires manual data pulls from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs' Veterans Benefits Management System and long-term modeling of annual increases in VA disability compensation rates—workload we cannot sustain without added staff. Should staffing permit, for example through the future addition of an administrative assistant to the claims team, we could implement regularized reporting based on queries of the VA's system.

Discretionary Contracting Capability at the Department

Since February 2023, our department has had authority to approve veteran-focused discretionary contracts of twenty thousand dollars or less. The board requests a detailed review. We are amenable to a process review and could coordinate with oversight entities to assess program value and performance.

During fiscal years 2024, 2025, and 2026, we managed no more than ten small dollar council discretionary awards per year as a pilot effort. Starting in FY 27, DVS will manage all veteran-focused council discretionary projects valued at \$25,000 or less. Past being prologue, this will amount to DVS managing approximately 20 to 30 discretionary awards per year. DVS is also one of the inaugural agencies participating in the Mayor and City Council's Discretionary Grant Program (DGP). DGP accelerates payments for a selection of small-scale discretionary funding awards and streamlines the City's discretionary funding process.

LEGISLATION AND PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish a Preference for Contracting with Veteran-Owned Businesses

I want to start with the title of this section itself (“Establish a Preference for Contracting with Veteran-Owned Businesses”). New York City’s procurement rules – particularly matters that involve set asides and discretionary spending levels – are dictated by New York State. That being said, this administration supports state legislation which, if passed, would increase the discretionary spending limit for New York State-certified Service-Disabled Veteran Owned Businesses that are certified as Emerging Business Enterprises by the City of New York. During the 2025 legislative term, this legislation was introduced as S8233 in the Senate (it passed in the Senate) and A8783 in the Assembly (it did not pass in the Assembly).

Now to the VAB’s sub-points:

The Veterans Advisory Board supports **Intro number 685 of 2024**. This intro enables Veteran Owned Businesses to identify as such when registering to do business with the City of New York. An aside: the City’s Payee Information Portal already allows veteran owned firms to self-identify. Separately, the intro codifies what DVS currently calls the Veteran Business Leadership Association (or VBLA). The VBLA facilitates technical assistance, mentorship opportunities, networking, and certification support for Veteran and Veteran Spouse entrepreneurs. Information can be found at nyc.gov/vetbusiness. The VBLA also maintains a map of New York City’s Veteran Owned Businesses, which can be found at nyc.gov/vetbizmap.

Our department supports Intro 685.

Supporting Veteran Vendors

Two complementary measures merit support:

- **Introduction number 686 of 2024** adds the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans’ Services (or designee) to the Street Vendor Advisory Board and increases Speaker appointments to include a representative of the veteran community.
- **Introduction number 687 of 2024** waives the two-hundred-dollar annual commissary permit fee for mobile food unit commissaries that reserve space for veteran vendors.

Both proposals lower barriers and signal veteran inclusion in a competitive market. Our department supports both.

Property Tax Exemption for Cold War Veterans

The board underscores that New York City remains an outlier – compared to other tax jurisdictions in New York – in not adopting the Cold War Veterans Property Tax Exemption. Our department supports **Intro 740 of 2024**, which would establish this exemption locally, bring the city into parity with statewide norms, and provide meaningful relief to a generation that served through decades of vigilance.

An update:

Intro 740 of 2024 passed in the New York City Council on November 12th, 2025. In December of 2025, Intro 740 will become law. We thank the Veterans Advisory Board – and all VAB Meeting attendees – for their advocacy and support of this legislation.

CONCLUSION

DVS appreciates the board's partnership and the support of the City Council and Mayor as we continue this work together. We may not be able to adopt every recommendation in full; however, we can honor the intent behind each one: to make New York City a place where veterans can live, learn, and work. In a word, a place where the veteran community can thrive.

A reminder that the NYC Department of Veterans' Services can be reached online at nyc.gov/vets, via telephone at 212-416-5250, email at connect@veterans.nyc.gov, and through social media using the handle [@nycveterans](https://twitter.com/nycveterans).

Thank you.