

**VETERANS COMMITTEE**  
**OF THE**  
**SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE**  
**MINUTES**

A meeting of the Veterans Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York on February 2, 2016.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Leg. Steven H. Stern, Chairperson  
Leg. Sarah S. Anker, Vice Chair  
Leg. Monica Martinez  
Leg. Thomas F. Barraga  
Leg. Lou D'Amaro  
Leg. Leslie Kennedy

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

Sarah Simpson, Assistant Counsel/Legislature  
Jason Richberg, Clerk of the Legislature  
Amy Ellis, Chief Deputy Clerk/Legislature  
Rosalind Gazes, Budget Review Office  
Tom Ronayne, Director/Veteran's Service Agency  
Shannon O'Neill, Director of Veterans Affairs/SC Community College  
Ben Zwirn, Suffolk County Community College  
Deborah Harris, Aide to Leg. Stern  
Justin Littell, Aide to Leg. D'Amaro  
Robyn Fellrath, Aide to Leg. Anker  
Ali Nazir, Aide to Leg. Kennedy  
Alyssa Turano, Aide to Leg. Hahn  
Michael Pitcher, Directory of Communications/PO  
Rick Brand, Newsday  
Lynne Bizzaro, County Attorney's Office  
And all other interested parties

**MINUTES TAKEN BY:**

Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer

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**THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 9:46 AM**

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

Okay, good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Veterans Committee. I ask everybody to please rise and join us in the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator D'Amaro.

**SALUTATION**

I ask everybody to remain standing for a moment of silence as we keep all of our brave men and women fighting overseas in our thoughts and prayers.

**MOMENT OF SILENCE OBSERVED**

Thank you. Okay, and, again, welcome, everyone. Thank you for being with us this morning and welcome to my colleagues -- new colleagues joining us on the Veterans Committee; and special welcome to Vice Chairwoman Legislator Anker.

We do have items on the agenda today, but before we go to those agenda items, we welcome Director Ronayne.

Madam Clerk, there is no -- no correspondence this morning; correct?

**MS. ELLIS:**

No, sir.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

Any cards?

**MS. ELLIS:**

No.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

All right, thank you.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, members, thank you again as always for the invitation to appear.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

Welcome.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Happy new year. And this is exciting. We have our own committee. I have very few specifics to report. I just wanted to provide a -- sort of a beginning of the new year overview of what we are working on in the agency and where we stand in terms of ongoing projects and efforts in the community.

In no particular order, I will begin with the -- the very successful, in my belief, outcome of the -- the effort that we had all become a part of back in -- beginning of October of 2013 when we were joined -- County Executive Presiding Officer, Legislator Stern and others were joined by the assistant secretary of HUD and several VA officials to announce the implementation of the Mayors Challenge in Suffolk County, which was the effort on the part of the Secretary of Department of Veterans Affairs to effectively end homelessness amongst veterans in the United States. And the mission end date on that effort was December 31 of 2015.

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Now, I have stated in the past that I -- I think the phrasing may have presented some challenges, the actual elimination of homelessness, I think, is a commendable goal, but I'm not convinced that it is achievable. To that end, we experienced great successes. The Long Island Coalition for the Homeless SUS Serving The Underserved, EOC, who also administers an SSVF contract in Suffolk County and several of the -- several other coalition partners are still in the process of finalizing the numbers to be reported on this. But I can tell you that over the course of the past two years, we housed, my belief is, in excess of 700 homeless veterans on Long Island, which is an extraordinary accomplishment.

This -- this effort did result in the coining of, I believe, a new term, a new phrase in the -- in the lexicon of homelessness where those veterans who have been made contact with, veterans who have been outreached to and who have been extended to an offer of services and the ability to come in and receive both sheltering and other appropriate or necessary services but have declined to accept those services, that population, a number of which whom we are aware of, continue to be what we refer to as street homeless. For purposes of the program, they are now defined as -- within a phrase known -- now known as functional zero. So they have been severed from the larger population and they are identified as a standalone group now having had services offered to them but been declined.

The one benefit to having identified these folks is that we now have the ability to engage and continue an ongoing outreach. And the hope is that over time we are able, and we've had some successes with this, where over time we are able to demonstrate that our -- our intentions are genuine and that we really are primarily interested in providing them sheltering and both primary medical and mental health care. We've had some late acceptances of services, but to date the -- the functional zero number is in the low nineties. I believe the number today is 94. So these are folks that we continue to outreach.

In fact, over last weekend during the storm, we effectively outreached to four of these functional zeros who are known to us living in larger homeless communities in the -- in Suffolk County. And while we did not have anybody accept coming in, on Monday after the storm, we did have one individual contact us and request assistance. He was actually hospitalized as a result of that exchange, that encounter, which I see as a very strong positive.

So the effort was very successful. The reality of achieving a goal of ending homelessness, I think, will always come with a lot of asterisks, a lot of qualifiers, but we continue to engage. Obviously December 31 is a moment in time, but the problem doesn't -- the problem doesn't know that it needs to end itself on that date. So, you know, the sustainability of the efforts is what we are focused on now. And I'm very excited to announce that we have redoubled our efforts with our partners in the community, the Long Island -- the Long Island Coalition for the Homeless in particular. And some of our other partners in government have actually, I would say, stepped up their game a bit. Recently the MTA through the Long Island Railroad released a contract to SUS, or Serving The Underserved, who is one of our coalition partners. And their contract is to provide homeless supportive services to homeless veterans on any property owned or managed by the MTA or the LIRR, including all of their stations, their parking facilities, their right-of-ways, their power line right-of-ways, their track right -- right-of-ways. And SUS actually now has personnel in the field outreaching to folks living in those communities. That's a specific community that had not been targeted previously for these purposes.

So it's an ongoing process. We're getting much better at it. We've had many successes. And I look forward to keeping you informed on this. As soon as the numbers -- I'm certain by our next committee, the formal numbers will have been released and we'll be able to discuss those at more length.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

Thank you. Thank you, Director. And that's an important update for all of us. Let me ask you this: The number of those that we know of, those that -- an outreach effort has been made, there's been some contact but for one reason or another they just have not been brought in and receive services, whatever that number is, whether it's 94 or goes to 90 or goes to 85, there is going to be that population. In your experience, what is the likelihood, then, of making significant inroads into that number along the way? And, you know, what is the likelihood of bringing even that number down substantially?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

I think that we will see progress made on that number. I think the reality is that we probably will never accomplish a 100 percent rate of bringing these folks in. A lot of it, as with so much of the work that we do, a lot of the successes in this area are resulting from establishing trusts. And those trusts, in this instance, comes from multiple repeated contacts. When we -- when we stop in and we engage these folks, we'll bring cases of bottled water, we'll bring MREs, we'll bring gift cards for supermarkets and so forth, we'll check on their wellbeing. During the storm, we were bringing out bottled water, MREs, blankets, hats and gloves. So they know that we are genuinely concerned with their wellbeing. And I think that that provides us the vehicle that is most often successful in getting them to accept services.

You know, the other reality of this is that for every success that we have penetrating this particular population, the likelihood is that they at some point will be replaced by others coming into that -- coming into that population. So the sustainability of the efforts is really key to maintaining any degree of success in this area.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

Sure. Legislator Anker; and then Legislator Kennedy.

**LEG. ANKER:**

Again, I want to thank you, Tom, for the work that you and your department have put forth and really looking out for our veterans. So my question is what's the percent of mentally ill and drug-addicted folks that you have -- you deal with; is it the majority, is it, you know, 30%? Because, you know, with the mentally ill people, no matter what you do, unless they're in a facility, they're going to keep, you know, wanting to be, you know, doing their own thing. And then -- it's hard to take care of people with mental illness. You know, I know with family member -- with a family member. But, you know, you want to do everything you can to make sure that they don't harm themselves, you know, or others, but -- so what's the percent that you're dealing with?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

That's a difficult number to quantify. And the reason that I'm reluctant to put an actual number on that is a very, very large, I would say well in excess of 75% of the folks that we encounter, primarily the homeless and people needing specific services, experience SMI, serious mental illness, other forms of mental illness and/or alcohol or substance abuse. And it becomes very challenging, certainly in a nonclinical setting, to assess where the primary underlying problem lies. Is it mental illness supplemented by substance or alcohol abuse; is the alcohol or substance abuse the primary and prevents us from making a fair assessment as to the mental -- the mental health of the individual? There are -- there so many contributing factors and so many of them are overlapping that it's very difficult. But I would say the percentage is quite high.

**LEG. ANKER:**

And I guess you work with our Health Department and work with the medical professionals to try to, you know, help those folks.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Yes.

**LEG. ANKER:**

Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

Legislator Kennedy.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Thank you. Hi, Tom.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Good morning.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

You do a marvelous job. I just have one question. Our homeless veterans, do you survey the church soup kitchens? And I'll tell you why, because I work with a bunch of them that are relatively unknown. And some of them are veterans who try to attend regularly, daily.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

We had met, I would say September, October of last year, we had met twice with -- with the assistance of our Police Department then specifically Detective Lieutenant Donahue, we had met with the Clergy Council, which is a group of approximately 60 ministers, pastors, individuals who in some manner represent congregations throughout the County. And one of the resulting discussions that came from that was that we expand our region to that community; and that that community understand that they have access to us.

One of the barriers, I don't know how real of a barrier it was, but one of the things that was identified to us was the concern of co-mingling governmental services with the faith-based community. And I think to everybody's satisfaction, the resulting agreement that was arrived at was that these -- these faith-based largely congregation-based entities would extend the services to anyone, but when they were specifically able to identify a veteran within their population, they would provide access to literature, telephone numbers and so forth from the organization. The ability of them to provide sheltering, many of them operate overnight -- overnight sheltering, bedding, food pantries, clothing pants, soup kitchens, that they would provide -- that they agreed to provide all of these services to veterans without a need or responsibility -- an obligation on the part of the veteran to accept ministry; that they could go to any of these faith-based institutions and receive any of these services without an expectation of being ministered to. If the individual expressed a willingness or an interest in participating in their ministry, then they would accept it; they would accept that invitation to expand their level of service. And we've had some successes in that realm.

We can always -- there's always more that can be done. There are always more folks that we can be touching, but I think -- I think we've been doing a better job of working within that particular community. And they have become a resource for us in terms of understanding where some of these more -- more challenging, more difficult to reach individuals are. Many of these people revert to their faith when they've lost faith in other avenues such as governmental services, VA and so many other things. So, you know, we hope to bring them back into our fold from --

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

All right. Thank you.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

I'm very light on details this morning. Some of you may have seen the announcement yesterday that -- we have announced we have moved forward significantly in the planning of the second annual Suffolk County Marathon. There have been some changes. And in the interest of avoiding confusion, I will hopefully have a document with me at our next committee, I'll make that effort, to provide specifics. But the most significant changes that there has been a route change. The route largely remains the same, but the course will reverse and the races will begin and end in Patchogue Village and cycle through Heckscher Park as opposed to starting in Heckscher Park and ending in Heckscher Park. So the course remains the same, but the start and end have reversed. That's the largest. And as Legislator Barraga noted earlier, we've added a 5 K to -- to the race, which we think will be a great tool in expanding the interest of folks in the community who may have been intimidated or unwilling to commit to a half or full marathon. I think the 5 K is going to open the door -- open the door for a great many folks to participate in this.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

I'm holding out for the 1 K.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Pardon me?

(LAUGHTER)

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

I'm waiting for the Fun Run, for the 14 and under but --

(LAUGHTER)

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

And, Tom, there is -- there's a disbursement committee that's been created that will determine where the proceeds are going to go. Can you just bring us up to date on the disbursement committee that's been meeting? And there's an upcoming meeting, I know, and how is that going?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Very well. In fact, the applications for requesting funds from the marathon closed on Friday of last week on January 29. And I didn't really know what to expect. I was very pleasantly surprised at the end of business Friday when we closed the applications acceptance, we had nearly 50 applications received in the office. Because of the large number of applications, we are in the process of breaking everything up into packages so that the committee members will have an opportunity to really begin the review process. We had a meeting scheduled for this week. And I chose to extend that meeting into next week only because the number of applications received, I think, exceeded what we had anticipated. And in fairness to all of the applicants, I wanted the members to have an opportunity to be able to review each of them before getting into deliberations.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

And procedurally has the committee decided whether -- if an organization has submitted an application for this year, for the first go around in disbursements, will they need to submit an application again next year if they've already done it this year? And, I guess, the -- the follow-up question would be if an organization is selected to receive a disbursement this year, are -- has the committee decided whether they will be eligible to receive a disbursement next year or years after?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

We're going to be establishing tiers of eligibility going forward. And those tiers would probably, to your point, represent organizations or entities who have received funding in the past. A big factor is going to be the amount of money available, the amount of funds requested. Just because we have a large number of applications does not necessarily mean that we have applications that would exceed the total amount of funds that we have available to give. We haven't opened them to make ourselves aware of that point yet.

Going forward into the subsequent years, again, it would be the determination of the committee, which we haven't finalized yet, as to whether entities would be eligible to apply for successive years, or if they would be -- become second-tier and allow new applicants to be considered for priority.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

And is there a working timetable at this point as to when you think the work of the disbursement committee will be finalized and you'll be ready to make distribution?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

We are hoping -- we are hoping to have our -- all of the application reviews completed and have it prepared for submission to the Legislature by March.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

Okay.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

And, again, because one of -- one of the the expectations is that any recipient of funds under this -- under the Marathon Funds Program, that those funds be extended in calendar year 2016. So in the interest of fairness, we would like to move our process along as expeditiously as possible so that these organizations have the ability to actually have time to spend this money appropriately.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

Very good. All right. Anybody else for Director Ronayne? All right. Thank you as always.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

All right. Next on our agenda the Committee is pleased to welcome Shannon O'Neill, who is the Director of Veterans Affairs for Suffolk County Community College. Welcome.

**MS. O'NEILL:**

Okay, good morning. Thank you so much for the invitation to be here today. It's an honor to share with you some of the great things that are happening for our student veterans at Suffolk Community College. Just wanted to share with you a little bit about our background and kind of how we got to where we are now and a little bit of what our plans are for the future as well.

About two or three years ago, I would say, Dr. McKay made a commitment to really make an effort to better serve our student veterans. At the time I think we had -- thought we had about 500 veterans that we knew were identified at the time. They did a search in order to establish a position for the Director of Veterans Affairs, which is now me. So I took position on September 1st of this year. I'm happy to be there. It's really been such a wonderful opportunity and what a great experience it has been to get to know the culture of the College.

And one of the things I have to say is that we thought we had about 500 student veterans, but it

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turns out we have closer to about 700 so far that have been identified as either veterans using the GI bill or eligible dependents. And I also have to say as a caveat to that is we believe that there's probably a lot more than that. One of the things that we've learned is that many of our student veterans either do not self identify; or as I say to our students all the time, you know, this is probably the least expensive school you're ever going to attend so you might want to consider not using your benefits this semester and maybe look at financial aid or some other ways that you might be able to afford going to school at Suffolk so that you can then continue on and get your graduate degree.

So while we've identified that as a wonderful opportunity, it's also caused a little bit of an issue with the way in which we track our veterans. And so we believe that we've actually probably got closer to about 8 or 900 at this point. So we've actually started to work on a committee to better understand how we can identify those student veterans as well as our eligible dependents and family members.

So over the past years, about a year ago, the College received a grant through the foundation, through the Island Outreach Funds for \$50,000 to establish a Veterans Resource Center on the Ammerman Campus. And thanks to the Legislature I know that they have approved moving forward with some renovations that will be happening in the coming years there and our hope is to establish a state of the art Veterans Resource Center on that campus.

When I was hired on September 1st, I sort of made the pitch to say, you know, we've got three campuses, though, so we need to do a little bit of a better job and say how do we come to our veterans? We can't expect our veterans to come to us. And thankfully we were able to receive some private funding from a donor in the amount of \$80,000 to be spent in the spring semester only renewable for hopefully another \$100,000 for next academic year. We have been actively spending that money and working to establish a Veterans Resource Center on each of the three campuses.

I'm pleased to announce we had a ribbon-cutting ceremony last Thursday in order to establish and really open up our first resource center on the Eastern Campus in Riverhead. Right now we do have an interim resource center that is open on the Ammerman Campus until Kreiling Hall is renovated. But for now it's actually a pretty nice place and I think our veterans are very pleased with it. And our Grant Campus will have the resource center opened within two weeks. We're just waiting on some furniture to be delivered.

And so what are we looking to do in these resource centers? So the first thing that I've been doing is spending a lot of time networking and coordinating with our local agencies in the community. And so one of the things that I always say is that, you know, we can't be all things to all people so we want to partner with those who are already experts in what they're doing. And we recognize, and I have to say that I'm pleased to say that we really have support from administration, that we have to really look at our veterans with a holistic approach. And so while we're in the business of education, we understand that, you know, we can't expect people to be successful in school when they've got so many other things going on. And so we've been working very hard.

We've partnered with the Joseph Dwyer project, who will be working with us to bring on some peer mentors. Actually I believe they've already posted a position so that they'll be able to provide peer to peer support groups, a really outreach on our campuses. And the hope is that they'll connect with our student veterans clubs which are very vibrant. I have to say in my experience of working with student veterans, I've never seen such a vibrant group of veterans. At points they have their meetings where there's standing room only. There are so many that want to get involved so I think that's really exciting. We want to work with that momentum.

So the Dwyer project has plans to come on board to participate, get to know, kind of build

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relationships with some of our student veterans so that we can really establish what their needs are. We're also working with Tom Ronayne's office, thankfully, with Veterans Services Office and hoping that we'll be able to get some assistance there as well with a Veterans Service Officer on campus in the future to assist with disability benefits and some of the other needs that our student veterans might have.

We also work closely, as you mentioned earlier, with services for the underserved as well as the EOC of Suffolk trying to just really provide some office hours so, you know, I attend many, many committees to serve veterans and we always hear that their services are there but we can't access the veterans. And so, you know, I say we've got 700 veterans, we have to engage them and find ways to reach them. So we've been partnering with lots of outside organizations in order to do that.

We are also working right now with Congressman Zeldin's Office to advocate for additional fundings for a VetSuccess on Campus Program. The threshold is 800 student veterans and so we believe we are probably at that cusp so we've gotta to work a little bit harder just to identify them. VetSuccess on Campus Program would allow us to have a fully funded veterans counselor on campus to provide services to our students and they would be split between all three campuses.

Right now the only other VetSuccess Program in New York is at Syracuse University. And so we believe that we would be a great program and a great fit for that, but the funding is not available. So that's something that we've been working with Congressman Zeldin's office. And he's a great advocate for us.

We've also been working with an organization down in DC called the Veterans Education Success Program that has also agreed to advocate on our behalf to try to come up with some additional funding, private donors and also some additional services that we might be able to bring on campus to better serve our student body population.

Another part of my position here is outreach. So I've been spending probably about 30% of my time outside in the community trying to build partnerships. We've had several really productive meetings with the 106th Air Guard out in Westhampton Beach. Our hope is that we'll be able to provide courses right there on site. One of the things I noticed when I first came to Suffolk was that, you know, we have a lot of identified student veterans, but we don't have a lot of guard and reserves. And I find it hard to believe that that's true. I think we're not identifying them. But in not identifying them means that they're not using the benefits that they're eligible for.

And so our hope is that we would be able to position ourselves within Suffolk County as the community college that students will go to to start out their education. And then they would save their GI Bill to go on to get their bachelor's degree or their master's or even further their education. And by reaching out to our local guard units, those students are eligible for tuition assistance through the Department of Defense. And so we've been working closely, as I said, with the 106th Air Guard. There are five courses that are required for them for promotion and so we are hoping to be able to either provide them down the road at our Eastern Campus; or even better come to them if that's something that we can work out.

In addition to that, across the street from there is the Coast Guard Housing so I've been working closely with the Education Office for the Coast Guard. Actually they're coming down today from Connecticut to meet with us to discuss ways that we might be able to reach out to Coast Guard families and some of the other Coast Guard installations in the area. And we've got -- we've been really working hard to build some great relationships with the Farmingdale Reserve Center as well to do continued outreach there. I mean, there are different units that drill there every weekend. And so our hope is that we'll have an ongoing presence there on a weekly -- on a weekly basis really to make sure that they know what services we're offering, what degrees we have and just find ways

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that we can go to our military instead of wait for them to come to us.

One of the great benefits of the grant that we received is that we're able to hire some staff. So we've been able to hire a full-time professional assistant and we'll be hiring two part-time professional assistants that will be used to staff the resource centers, but to also assist with some of the outreach efforts that we have going on as well.

In addition to that we've hired veteran work study students that will staff those resource centers as well. And the great benefit to that is that they're fully funded by the VA. So it's a little bit of extra money in the pocket of our student veterans and they get to serve in their own community.

And so my biggest challenge has been I was inundated with applications. So it's an exciting problem to have, to have so many student veterans that want to give back and want to be involved. And, as I said, it's an exciting time so we're really able to kind of build a foundation and really decide to -- you know, what it is -- what is it that our student veterans want? So we've established several committees with our student veteran population, one in which is determining and building an orientation program and a student outreach plan. We've got others that are working on coordinating all three of the student veteran groups on campus. We have another organization that we're paired with that is also working to connect students at Suffolk Community College with the four-year institutions. So I spent some time in the Fall semester, we'll be doing it again in the Spring, taking our student veterans on position-your-transition trips so that they can get the experience of a four-year institution. But more importantly for me as I want them to have a warm handoff. I want them to know who is the veterans' liaison on that campus. I want them to know who they can go to and so that we can really create a partnership so that there is a smooth transition from the two-year to the four-year schools.

So we've also connected with the Intercollegiate Veterans Coalition of Long Island -- it's a little bit of a long name -- which is a group of local schools all on Long Island that are working together for -- to serve our student veterans in a larger capacity. And so Suffolk has really taken a lead in that. We'll be hosting a meeting in a few weeks. We're inviting all of the -- the four-year institutions as well as Nassau Community College, but we've also started a secondary group which is just our student veterans meeting. And we're hoping that it will help them to continue to build comradery, understand that there's really more out there than just even what their own individual school has. But, again, for the purposes of Suffolk, it's for me to get them to think about going onto a four-year school, but to continue on with those support services that are so necessary for student veterans.

We've also coordinated with the VA Hospital and hoping to have some opportunities for them to come on campus in the Spring semester, to provide some outreach services, some medical services and things like that. And I serve on several committees in a local community and just -- I'm trying to come up with ways in which we can maybe better connect with the community. I think that it's important for us as we're serving our student veteran population that we recognize, you know, we talk about this all the time, that we don't have an active duty base on Long Island, right? The closest thing we have is the 106th Air Guard. And so our student veterans are looking for a place to connect. They're looking for a place where they can meet fellow veterans. And so we're working on ways in which we can continue to partner with local organizations in the community, the County and all of the townships as well. So we're connecting with all of the different veterans services committees within a town to find out, you know, what can we do differently.

We're also working on a veterans employment career conference which will specifically identify ways in which we can help to prepare our student veterans. One of the things that's really important is try to help them to understand how to take their military training and experience and put that into civilian terms on their resume. So we've been partnering with other organizations, Northwell Health, Suffolk County Department of Labor as well to come on campus and provide some

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opportunities for that. And we're hoping to do a large outreach opportunity, I guess, and connect with other agencies as well.

And so for the future we're hoping that we'll be able to really position ourselves where students will come to Suffolk Community College first, save their GI bill benefits, get some wonderful services to really help them to transition back into civilian life and then partner them with moving on towards a four-year institution or into the workforce.

We're also partnering closely with our workforce development programs as we've got lots of student veterans who are interested in that as well and maybe not interested in the four-year institutions. So we're hoping really that we'll be able to partner with these organizations. And with the grant that was received, it's opened up a lot of opportunity. This grant was only awarded to five community colleges in the country. And so through this grant we've also been able to partner with the Community College Research Foundation and through that try to develop some best practices for ways to serve student veterans. And so Suffolk is really on the forefront of trying to come up with that. We've had lots of opportunities in connections in Washington DC and we're really excited about the future. So we really believe that we'll be able to position ourselves here not only on a local level but on a state level in the SUNY system, but even larger on a national level where we can really establish what our those best practices and become a model for serving student veterans. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

Very good. Thank you. Very exciting and great news. I have a question about the VetSuccess Program and looking to qualify for a counselor.

**MS. O'NEILL:**

Okay.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

Is that counselor -- if you're able to get the counselor there on the campus, is that through DOD or through the VA?

**MS. O'NEILL:**

Through the VA. It's considered a vocational rehab counselor. And so I think the last time that they've established funding was in 2013. There are 94 schools in the United States and only one in New York. And it's not quite a balanced approach as far as serving community colleges so we're also trying to advocate in that direction. And, you know, with 700 veterans now and knowing that there is a large pool that are unidentified, I'm confident that we'll get to that 800 mark very shortly.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

As you continue to seek partners, particularly when it comes to job training and job placement, I know in my home town of Huntington, there is the Huntington Chamber of Commerce and they have a Veterans Committee.

**MS. O'NEILL:**

Yes.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

And they seek to work very closely with our veterans and other organizations in terms of making them aware of job opportunities and job placement and job requirements. And I'm sure there are several other business oriented organizations throughout Suffolk County that would make great partners.

**MS. O'NEILL:**

Okay.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

So I'm sure that's the kind of thing that you're looking at. I want to encourage that because there are those business-based community organizations that really do want to be of assistance. And this sounds like a perfect opportunity for that kind of synergy. That's great.

**MS. O'NEILL:**

Absolutely.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

Anybody have any questions for the Director? Legislator Martinez.

**LEG. MARTINEZ:**

Hey. Just -- I'm actually looking forward to sitting down and talking, one, with both of you actually. One of the reasons why I did want to serve on this committee this year is because I want to better serve my veterans in my district and -- especially now that I just learned of all you're doing at Suffolk I am now the Chair of Education, I would definitely love to sit down and see how we can work together. So thank you for everything that you just said. I wrote everything down. So I'm looking forward to sitting down with you.

**MS. O'NEILL:**

Thank you. I would love that.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

Director Ronayne.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Just for the record, I have known and worked with Shannon professionally for a number of years now. And as close as I think that we are able to come to having an honorary veteran in our community, Shannon and the work that she has done not only at Suffolk but prior to her going -- moving to Suffolk at her prior institution, the creativity, the resourcefulness, the ambition that she has approached her work with have been really inspiring. She truly has the, you know, in our world it's adapt, improvise and overcome. And she does that masterfully.

I can tell that you having had conversations with members of the administration from Dr. McKay to other senior administration, trustees at the college, and certainly today we have Mr. {Biande} and Ben Zwirn with us, with the support structure in place and knowing how Shannon operates and her -- her desire and her commitment to ensure that the best interest of our veterans are being served, I'm excited about the prospects. I know that we have a very successful -- it may at times be difficult for me to keep up with her, but I think we have some very exciting times ahead of us at Suffolk County. And it will not only reflect positively on the College as an institution and Suffolk County, but at the end of the day, my primary objective is to see that our veterans are well cared for and they're in very, very good hands with Shannon.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

Director, thank you. Thank you for being with us today and thank you for all of your efforts. And we look forward to continuing the conversation, anything that we can do to be of assistance, of course, please always feel free to let us know and we look forward to celebrating many successes with you in the future. Thank you.

**MS. O'NEILL:**

Thank you very much.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

Okay.

### INTRODUCTORY RESOLUTIONS

Moving on in the agenda, then, we do have Introductory Resolution before us today, it is **IR 1007, Adopting Local Law No. -2016, A Local Law to provide designated parking for veterans at County facilities. (Muratore)** This is a local law requiring a public hearing so I will make a motion to table for purpose of a public hearing, second by Vice Chairwoman Legislator Anker. All in favor? Any Opposed? Any Abstentions? **IR 1007 is tabled for public hearing. (VOTE: 6-0-0-0)**

### PROCEDURAL MOTIONS

We do have a Procedural Motion before us, it is **PM01, Designating Veterans Organizations to receive funding for Memorial Day Observances for 2016. (Stern)** We do this every year as a matter of procedure. I will make a motion to approve.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Second.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

Second by Legislator Barraga. Everybody good? All in favor? Any opposed? Any abstentions? **PM01 is approved. (VOTE: 6-0-0-0)**

So now would be good. Mr. Zwirn.

**MR. ZWIRN:**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make the members of the Committee aware that one of the things that Shannon talked about was a grant that we received from the Kisco Foundation, which is privately funded and would provide a counselor and for setting up a resource center. And some of that funding will be used to set up the other resource centers on the other campuses. That will be coming as a local law 40 grant. It's not on the calendar. It will -- it should have been the Education Committee but it will be on the Consent Calendar. I just want you to be aware that you have to approve it before we can spend the money.

**CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

Very good. Thank you.

Everybody good? There being no other business before the Committee this morning, we are adjourned.

**THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 10:26 AM  
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY**