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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 June 13, 2017.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Leg. Steve Stern, Chairperson
Leg. Sarah S. Anker, Vice Chair
Leg. Leg. Thomas F. Barraga
Leg. Lou D'Amaro
Leg. Leslie Kennedy
Leg. Monica Martinez
Leg. DuWayne Gregory, Presiding Officer

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Amy Ellis, Chief Deputy Clerk/Legislature
Andrew Tarantowicz, Budget Review Office
Thomas Ronayne, Director/Veterans Service Agency
Joseph Pecorella, Comptroller's Office
Jennifer Fasano, Comptroller's Office
Robert Novotny, Director/Vets Lives Matter
Deborah Harris, Aide to Leg. Stern
Lisa Pinkard, Aide to Leg. Martinez
Justin Littell, Aide to Leg. D'Amaro
Ali Nazir, Aide to Leg. Kennedy
Alyssa Turano, Aide to Leg. Hahn
Katie Horst, County Executive's Office
John Marafino, County Executive's Office
Jason Hann, County Executive's Office
Rick Brand, Newsday
And all other interested parties

MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer

MINUTES TRANSCRIBED BY:

Denise Weaver, Legislative Aide

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 9:35 AM

CHAIRPERSON STERN:

Good morning and welcome to the Veterans Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature. I'm going to ask everybody to please rise and join in the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Martinez.

SALUTATION

Please remain standing for a moment of silence as we keep all of our brave men and women fighting for our freedom overseas in our thoughts and prayers.

PRESENTATIONS

Thank you.

Okay, we do have a couple of presentations today. Before we get to our presentations, first an announcement. And while I'm making the announcement for the record, let me ask Director Ronayne to come on up, we'll -- we'll begin with you, Director.

This is a notice that we -- that my office had just received from Island Harvest. We're all familiar with Island Harvest a food bank for Long Island. This Thursday, June 15th from -- this Thursday, June 15th from 2 o'clock to 3:30 PM Island Harvest will be donating one 50-pound box of free food per veteran at the Suffolk County Department of Labor, Licensing and Consumer Affairs at its One Stop Employment Center, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway in Hauppauge. There is a number to participate; it is (631) 853-6556. A copy of this notice is being distributed to all members of the Committee. And anybody who is here with us in the audience who's interested, should pick up a copy as well. But that is this Thursday, June 15th from 2 o'clock to 3:30, Island Harvest making available one 50-pound box of free food for a veteran that comes into the Department of Labor. And so we appreciate Island Harvest and all they do for our entire community.

Director Ronayne, welcome.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, members. As always, thank you for the invitation.

I have just a few things. And I know in deference to at least one of the presentations this morning that I won't take up too much of your time. But, Mr. Chairman, I did want to ask you if -- I was not present at the last meeting. And I believe you were also not present. I wanted to know if -- if you had an opportunity to brief the Committee or if you'd like me to do so regarding the recent trip that we made to Washington DC on behalf of H.R. 897.

CHAIRPERSON STERN:

Please.

1 **DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

2 Do you want me to go on?

3
4 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

5 Yes, please.

6
7 **DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

8 We recently traveled to Washington DC as a group, Chairman Stern,
9 CEO Mike Stoltz of the Association for Mental Health and Wellness,
09:38AM 10 who is our contract partner with Suffolk County on the Joseph Dwyer
11 Program, Marcelle Leis, who is the Program Director and myself.

12
13 We met in DC over -- over the course of two days. We had a pretty
14 aggressive schedule. We had -- we met with a total of 17 of the 22
15 members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee or their staffs.
16 And we also had the opportunity to speak with the subcommittee on
17 health, which was an unexpected pleasure. I think that that was
18 something that we had not anticipated having an opportunity to do
19 to present to the subcommittee, but they were very receptive to our
09:39AM 20 -- to our presentation. And I think largely we were very, very
21 pleased with the reception that we received.

22
23 We were -- we were primarily sharing the -- the founding and the
24 initial guiding philosophies of the program, what -- what
25 precipitated the belief that there was a need for such a program in
26 Suffolk County and the evolution of the program up to and including
27 the published report last year that was published by the State
28 University of New York's Albany School of Social Welfare, which was
29 extremely favorable to the -- to the methodology and to the -- to
09:40AM 30 the template that -- that Suffolk County has developed and
31 administers the program under. That program, as you now know is --
32 has expanded to 16 counties throughout the State of New York. And
33 HR 897 seeks to replicate the Suffolk County program and expand it
34 to a -- a national program, again, largely using Suffolk County as
35 a template.

36
37 One of the values of the meetings that we were able to participate
38 in in Washington was to make very clear to the members of the House
39 Veterans Affairs Committee that while we're flattered and feel very
09:40AM 40 strongly about the fact that this model is replicable and that
41 Suffolk County is doing a good job, we have long -- we have long
42 held that Suffolk County is not every other county in the United
43 States. And we have recognized that difference in New York State.
44 And as the program has evolved and been replicated in other parts
45 of New York State, it is done so with -- certainly with the
46 consultation of Suffolk County and with some guidance. But each
47 county largely operates their program autonomously to the extent
48 that there are certain core principles and core values of the
49 program but the local -- the local needs should drive this program
09:41AM 50 to achieve maximum effect and maximum -- maximum benefit.

51
52 They were -- the members and the staffs that we met with were very
53 receptive to that -- to the inclusion of that piece of information.
54 Because I think at one point there had been a concern that we were
55 looking to take something and simply duplicate it identically. And
56 when -- when it was made clear that the intent was not necessarily

1 to duplicate all of our -- all of our functions here, but to use
2 them as a guideline, I think the -- the level of reception
3 increased tremendously. There has been some discussion now of a
4 senate same-as. I do not -- I looked this morning and there has
5 not yet been a senate same-as published, but I know that Senator --
6 Congressman Zeldin, who is the -- the prime sponsor on 897 has been
7 working on that.

8
9 I just shared with Chairman Stern that the following week I was
09:42AM 10 back in DC attending another conference. And, again, unexpectedly
11 I was given an opportunity to go back and speak with the
12 subcommittee on Health for a second time, which I'm told is
13 somewhat unusual. They were very -- they received us very
14 favorably. And just as fortune would have it, the conference that
15 I was attending, we had several of our community-based partners
16 from Long Island also attending that conference in DC. And I was
17 able to bring with me to the second meeting with the subcommittee
18 on Health, Ralph Fasano from Concerned for Independent Living,
09:43AM 19 Frank Amalfitano from United Veteran Beacon House and, again, Mike
20 Stoltz from the Association for Mental Health and Wellness.

21
22 The value of having those gentlemen with me at the second meeting
23 was that we were able to demonstrate very vividly, I think, to the
24 -- to the representatives of the committee that the program for all
25 of its value, for all of its merit, cannot and likely would not be
26 successful autonomously if it were -- if it were left to its own.
27 The program relies on community-based partners. The public/private
28 partnership portion, we have proved to be effective; but the
29 community-based partners that we work are really the lifeblood of
09:43AM 30 the program, being able to make referral to and draw upon the
31 resources available from many of these partners. So by sharing the
32 -- the services and the resources that we have, literally
33 immediately available to us through these community-based partners,
34 I think, highlighted all of the successes that we had achieved in
35 the prior weeks' meetings.

36
37 And at this point we look forward to continuing to watch the list
38 of co-sponsors expand. I did speak with Congressman Zeldin on
39 Saturday. And while he didn't give me anything definitive in terms
09:44AM 40 of numbers, he did tell me that since our visit, there has been
41 great momentum on the bill, which I think to some extent, and we
42 had this conversation more than once while we were on the trip to
43 DC, that this program and the need for what this program is
44 achieving, I think we're in the right place at the right time this
45 year. And I'm very optimistic that this will -- that this will
46 move. And the next set of meetings will be to prepare testimony to
47 appear at what we're hoping will be a joint -- a joint house and
48 senate committee of the Veteran Affairs committees before this
49 would be put to a vote.

50
51 But the trip was extremely successful. I'm indebted to the
52 Chairman for coming down. His presence with us, being a -- a
53 senior elected official in the County and the Chairman with
54 longstanding, Chairman of this Committee, I think, spoke volumes to
55 the committee members and to their senior staff that the County has
56 made a commitment at such a level that the Chairman would take

1 several days out of his schedule to -- to visit DC for this
2 purpose.

3
4 So, again, publicly, Mr. Stern, I'd like to thank you for -- for
5 being there with us. You -- you helped make the -- you helped make
6 the trip a tremendous success.

7
8 And I can move on or I can answer questions relating to this -- to
9 this issue.

09:45AM 10

11 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

12 Does anyone have questions for the -- for the Director? Let me
13 first say, Director, thank you to you and, of course, Mike and
14 Marcelle, it was wonderful spending time with them and to be with
15 everyone who has such a passion for this outstanding program. It
16 was really my privilege to talk about the good things that are
17 going on here in Suffolk County and how important it is not just to
18 us, but hopefully how important it will be to so many of our
19 outstanding men and women who serve our great nation across our
20 entire country. So it was great to be with you. Thank you.

09:46AM 20

21
22 **DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

23 Thank you. And I should also mention that we have it on good
24 authority that one of the -- one of the folks who was with us on
25 the trip had been tracking such things. And apparently we were
26 solidly -- solidly north of our 16,000 steps a day on this trip.
27 So lots of -- lots of running.

28

09:46AM 29

30 Very briefly, before I continue I'd like to just introduce, if I
31 could briefly, behind me to my left is Anthony DeVol. Anthony is
32 one of our veteran service officers. Tony is accredited and he's
33 been with us a little while now, but he has not had the opportunity
34 to come and visit a committee. And I just thought that it would be
35 a -- a worthwhile effort for him to come over and see how the
36 sausage is made, so to speak. So I did ask Tony if he would like
37 to, by all means, be here with us this morning to -- to observe the
38 process. And I want to thank Tony for his service and the veterans
39 who he helps on a daily basis.

40 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

41 Welcome.

42
43 **DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

44 We recently hosted our annual Armed Forces Day. As always, it was
45 a -- a wonderful event. We struggled a little bit this year again
46 with attendance. We seem to increasingly be competing with other
47 localities for -- for attendance, but we had a terrific event. We
48 had Eric -- Colonel Eric Hesse, Director of the New York State
49 Division of Veterans Affairs as our speaker this year. And Eric is
50 a good friend to both the agency and to our County. And it was
51 very good of him to drive down from Saratoga Springs to meet with
52 us. And to speak in honor of, not only for his service, but to
53 acknowledge his time and service on this Committee, Legislator
54 Barraga was good enough with his -- along with his granddaughter to
55 lead the Pledge on the day of the Armed Forces Day ceremony. And
56 that was an acknowledgement and a thanks to -- to the long service

09:47AM 50

1 and commitment that he has held to our community. Thank you.

2
3 I'm very, very happy to report to you that we had a -- our fourth
4 annual Day of Family Wellness with the Joseph Dwyer Program this
5 past weekend. And it was really probably the best Day of Wellness
6 event that we have had to date. We have -- I don't have the final
7 numbers but we had in excess of 150 veterans in attendance and more
8 than 80 providers, not 80 individual organizations but a total of
9 80 providers for the respective participants. And it was
10 tremendously successful.

11
12 In fact, the day started off with a bit of a concerning incident.
13 We had a veteran who had an anxiety attack and he was not in a good
14 way for awhile. But through the methodology that we apply and
15 through some of the folks that we had participating in the event,
16 this gentleman went from not being able to get out of his vehicle
17 to being placed in a wheelchair and taken inside to be hydrated and
18 looked after. By the end of the day he had walked himself out to
19 lunch and he was participating in the program. So that is
20 precisely, if I had to write a script of what the program was
21 supposed to do, that is what the program is supposed to do, is help
22 veterans when they are in crisis or in pre-crisis.

23
24 We had a very successful event. We had a number of providers who
25 have been there in the past who commented that the reception that
26 they are now receiving in the community has grown. And they
27 attribute that at least in part to this Day of Wellness for
28 increasing and expanding the awareness of the fact that some of
29 these modalities are available for veterans and some of them are
30 very specifically and very uniquely effective for PTSD and some of
31 the other specific concerns that we try to address with this
32 veteran community.

33
34 So I wanted to thank certainly Vice-chairman Anker, who came out
35 and spent some time with us on Saturday. We had Congressman
36 Zeldin. County Executive Bellone was also with us. Just, again,
37 another -- another successful Dwyer Program event that we are
38 always thankful to be able to get the word into the community about
39 the -- about the effectiveness of this. It is a -- it's an ever
40 evolving, ever growing process.

41
42 Finally, I just would like to remind each of you and extend an
43 invitation to each of you that on Friday of this week, June 16 at 6
44 PM Armed Forces Plaza we'll be hosting the annual Korean War
45 Veterans ceremony. That is a -- always a terrific ceremony. If
46 you can attend -- this year I've met with the -- the sponsors and
47 the organizers. And I say that because we are the hosts. This is
48 technically not our event. We -- we act as host. And the Korean
49 War Veterans Association and the members of organizations from
50 within the Korean community actually sponsor the event. But we've
51 had some discussions. And given the state of world events right
52 now specific to the Koreas, we expect that this is going to be a --
53 an important event this year. We have a number of speakers; we
54 have a number of officials already committed to attending. And I
55 would invite and encourage each of you to come down if for no other
56 reason and, I think, Legislator Kennedy can attest to this, the --

1 the after-event barbecue and festival is worth -- it's worth the
2 price of admission in and of itself.

3
4 So I would encourage each of you if you have the opportunity to
5 please come down and see us at this event. And I am happy to take
6 questions.

7
8 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**
9 Legislator Anker.

10
11 **LEG. ANKER:**
12 I just wanted to comment about the Veterans Day of Wellness. It
13 was a beautiful event. That location was amazing. It was Camp
14 Pa-Qua-Tuck. Is that how you pronounce that?

15
16 **DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**
17 Camp Pa-Qua-Tuck.

18
19 **LEG. ANKER:**
20 Yep, close. And, you know, you had a lot of folks there really
21 wanting to help the veterans that were attending. A lot of the
22 cadets were there. I was very impressed, the naval cadets.

23
24 **DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**
25 Yes.

26
27 **LEG. ANKER:**
28 And it was a beautiful day. You were competing against a lot of
29 events. I had probably about ten events this weekend. And there
30 were a lot -- there was a lot going on but I just want to thank you
31 and your folks for putting this event together and really
32 supporting a very, unfortunately, common cause of, you know, mental
33 and physical illness. And it was just nice to see the alternative
34 healing, you know, with yoga and, I don't know, there was just so
35 many different types of therapies there instead of the pills and
36 the, I guess, you know, our common doctors would give us to take
37 care of illness; it was just an alternative way of healing and I
38 can very much appreciate that. So, thank you.

39
40 **DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**
41 And that's -- that's been one of the -- really one of the intents
42 of the program is to expose veterans to those alternatives. And
43 one of them in particular we tried something this year that is
44 fairly new, it's an emerging discipline within the acupuncture
45 community. It is ear acupuncture for PTSD specifically. And I
46 walked through the -- through the area where they were providing
47 this service. And there were five veterans sitting quietly in an
48 area that they had set aside, five veterans with ears full of
49 needles who all claim to have felt the benefit.

50
51 **LEG. ANKER:**
52 And I think you should do a survey from, you know, the folks
53 participating and show that these types of alternative measures
54 actually work. Because a lot of the veterans are, you know, 40,
55 50, 60, 70, 80 and, you know, and they may not feel comfortable
56 with this type of healing situation, you know, for wellness. But I

1 appreciate your efforts. And we need to get the word out that
2 you -- that we have this service available.

3
4 **DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

5 Thank you. And to that point about 50% of the veterans who we had
6 in attendance were Vietnam veterans. And, General, you may
7 appreciate this, we had one veteran who had served in Vietnam. He
8 fought in Vietnam and he continued to serve through the First Gulf
9 War. He saw action in the First Gulf War before he retired. And I
10 think he was the first -- the first particular individual that I've
11 met whose service had -- whose combat service had spanned that --
12 that time. So it's -- we're reaching them. It's just -- it's an
13 ongoing effort. And we need, as always, your support and your
14 help. And your being there was very much -- very much appreciated.

15
16 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

17 Everybody good? All right. Director, as always, thank you.

18
19 **DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

20 Thank you.

21
22 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

23 Joe? And we welcome the Comptroller's Office to the Committee
24 today to share with us their annual report regarding not-for-profit
25 veteran's organizations pursuant to Section 353-24.1 of the Suffolk
26 County Code, its annual report pursuant to Suffolk County Local Law
27 32-2016. Welcome.

28
29 **MR. PECORELLA:**

30 Good morning.

31
32 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

33 Okay. Do all committee members have a copy of the Comptroller's
34 report? All right. Joe, maybe could you just give us a -- just a
35 brief explanation of the report, the summary that is before us
36 today and maybe just share with us what you think, what your office
37 thinks some of the highlights are.

38
39 **MR. PECORELLA:**

40 Okay. Pretty much last November, the Suffolk County Department of
41 Audit and Control assumed the responsibility of registering all
42 non-profit veteran's organizations. We solicit funds and
43 contributions to Suffolk County. The Veterans Service Agency did
44 this before us; pretty much we picked up where they left off. Any
45 agency that had a certificate from their office, which expired in
46 the near future, we sent a recertification letter to informing them
47 of the requirements. Any new agencies that contacted us and saying
48 they wanted to solicit funds in Suffolk County, we send them a
49 letter also with the application to fill out.

50
51 There was, I think, 15 -- we issued 15 certificates from last
52 November through May 31st of this year. And it's on schedule one,
53 15 agencies to have a certificate. Schedule two has five agencies
54 that had a certificate previously, but that has expired. We tried
55 to recertify the agencies but they never got back to us with enough
56 information to get a certificate. So, therefore, if they're

1 soliciting funds to Suffolk County right now, they're not in
2 compliance with the law.

3
4 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

5 Joe, do you have any understanding as to whether any of those
6 agencies remain in the process of trying to get their
7 recertification? Or have they just stopped the process altogether
8 and are moving on and thus are no longer able to conduct their
9 activities here in Suffolk County?

09:58AM 10

11 **MS. FASANO:**

12 Good morning, thank you for having us. I know -- I've been in
13 contact last week with Marine Corps Veterans and they're in the
14 process of getting us one more document that we need.

15
16 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

17 And as to any of the others at this point?

18
19 **MS. FASANO:**

09:58AM 20 We sent them the paperwork, but we have not gotten back anything
21 from them.

22
23 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

24 No ongoing contact. Okay, thanks.

25
26 **MR. PECORELLA:**

27 I believe a couple sent us some documentation but not everything
28 that's required. And Jennifer did get back to them with e-mails
29 stating what's still missing, but we haven't gotten the documents.
09:59AM 30 There was one or two on schedule two that I think just never
31 answered us at all.

32
33 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

34 The ones that have not responded in any way, would you consider
35 those applications or recertifications of those files to be closed?
36 Or do they continue on, and if so, is there any kind of a time
37 period that you give them before you get back to them and say that
38 *we're going to consider the matter closed?*

39
40 **MR. PECORELLA:**

41 We don't really close it. They could always get back to us, say
42 they want to operate in Suffolk County and then we'll give -- you
43 know, as long as we get the documentation in, that's fine. They
44 comply with the requirements -- with the requirements of the law,
45 we issue them a certificate.

46
47 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

48 So as long as they're not conducting activities that would solicit
49 the funds, they're not -- it's not like they are violating anything
09:59AM 50 and it's a rolling application process otherwise.

51
52 **MR. PECORELLA:**

53 That's correct.

54
55 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

56 Okay.

1 **MR. PECORELLA:**

2 It's possible that they're not soliciting funds in Suffolk County
3 or that they could have closed up, could be out of business at this
4 point, we don't really know. A couple of these smaller
5 organizations, I think, also --

6
7 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

8 I'm sorry to interrupt. Legislator Barraga has a question.

9
10 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

11 Good morning, I just have a few questions.

12
13 **MR. PECORELLA:**

14 Sure.

15
16 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

17 I read your report but what is not included, but I'd like to get
18 your -- if you know the answer, how many non-profit veteran
19 organizations are registered in Suffolk County in total? I mean,
20 your report covers a six-month period, like 14 or 15 --

21
22 **MR. PECORELLA:**

23 Correct.

24
25 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

26 -- during that period of time. Do you have any idea how many?

27
28 **MR. PECORELLA:**

29 We don't have an entire population of veteran's agencies in Suffolk
30 County, that we don't have.

31
32 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

33 You don't have that. Okay.

34
35 **MR. PECORELLA:**

36 No.

37
38 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

39 Under chart one, total fund expenditure to assist veterans versus
40 total fund expenditure to support veteran's programs in Suffolk
41 County, the figure of 226 million nine-o-three. Is that figure the
42 total raised in the County or the State?

43
44 **MR. PECORELLA:**

45 Okay, chart one, the information that comprises chart one can be
46 found on schedule one, page seven, in column two. That shows each
47 agency's total funds expended. This is veterans and their
48 families.

49
50 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

51 Yeah, but, is the money, that 226 million, is that raised only in
52 Suffolk or is that raised by these organizations Statewide?

53
54 **MR. PECORELLA:**

55 County -- countrywide, the whole country basically, United States.

1 **LEG. BARRAGA:**
2 Whole country, so the 220 --

3
4 **MR. PECORELLA:**
5 The Wounded Warrior Project they operate in Florida, that's their
6 main headquarters --

7
8 **LEG. BARRAGA:**
9 Wounded Warrior Project, as I look at the numbers here, they raised
10 \$401 million. I'm talking about chart one, that 226 nine-o-three
11 figure.

10:01AM

12
13 **MR. PECORELLA:**
14 Correct.

15
16 **LEG. BARRAGA:**
17 What does that symbolize? Is that nationwide or State or what is
18 that?

19
20 **MR. PECORELLA:**
21 Nationwide. That's actually the second column on the same
22 schedule, schedule one.

23
24 **LEG. BARRAGA:**
25 I'm looking at page four here.

26
27 **MR. PECORELLA:**
28 Yes. If you compare page four to page seven, schedule one.

29
30 **LEG. BARRAGA:**
31 Yeah. Well, when I take a look at the annual -- what is being
32 raised by these different groups, these are 15 groups, I mean,
33 Wounded Warrior alone is 401 million.

34
35 I guess the point I'm making is that of the 226 nine-o-three
36 raised, only roughly 3.475 million is spent on veteran's programs
37 in Suffolk County. That's 1.5% of the total. That seems extremely
38 low, I mean, based on the number of veterans that we have.

39
40 **MR. PECORELLA:**
41 The number here -- the number -- I don't want to mislead you at all
42 but the chart one, the numbers on chart one come from columns two
43 and three on schedule one, page seven.

44
45 **LEG. BARRAGA:**
46 Okay.

47
48 **MR. PECORELLA:**
49 Now a good portion of that \$226 million came from the Wounded
50 Warrior Project to expend the \$213 million on veteran's programs;
51 however, only \$29,000 of that money went to Suffolk County.

10:02AM

52
53 **LEG. BARRAGA:**
54 Yeah, I mean, that's glaring to me.

55
56

1 **MR. PECORELLA:**

2 Um-hum.

3

4 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

5 Here's an outfit and they've had some problems from an
6 organizational administrative standpoint.

7

8 **MR. PECORELLA:**

9 Right.

10:02AM 10

11 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

12 They raised nationwide 401 million; of that 401 roughly 183 goes
13 off someplace else; they spend 213 on veteran's programs. And I'm
14 looking at what's being spent by them in Suffolk County, 29,459
15 from 2016 Soldier Ride donated to United Veterans Beacon House. I
16 mean, that's next to nothing.

17

18 **MR. PECORELLA:**

19 That's the yearly event that they have, I believe. That's all that
20 went for Suffolk County.

10:03AM 21

22 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

23 From that one particular group, basically Suffolk County veterans
24 are getting nothing. Nothing.

25

26 **MR. PECORELLA:**

27 Honestly, if you look at even the 3 million 475,357 that went to
28 Suffolk County veterans --

29

30 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

31 Right.

32

33 **MR. PECORELLA:**

34 -- most of that came from the United Veterans Beacon House. They
35 contributed 3 million of that money. So most of that money is
36 comprised of what they gave to Suffolk County veterans.

37

38 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

39 So it seems that many of these veterans groups, they're raising
40 lots of money, they're doing some sort of distribution; but the
41 money is not really coming back to the veterans of Suffolk County.
42 That's what your report is basically telling me.

10:03AM 43

44 **MR. PECORELLA:**

45 Yeah, it's just basically reporting the numbers they gave to us.
46 It looks -- does look that way, yes.

47

48 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

49 I mean, when I see Wounded Warrior \$401 million and we wind up with
50 29,000 based on some sort of a ride, that's alarming to say the
51 least.

10:03AM 52

53 **MR. PECORELLA:**

54 Yes. I mean, the most information's on schedule one, you can
55 compare exactly what they raised, how much they spent, how much
56 went to Suffolk County veterans, the first three columns; that's

1 the most accurate picture, I guess, of what's on chart -- chart
2 one.

3
4 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

5 Yeah, I don't know who the responsibility lies with in terms of
6 doing a better job with these different organizations to contribute
7 more to Suffolk County. I mean, I hear over and over again we have
8 one of the largest numbers of veterans in the State, here in
9 Suffolk County. When I take a look at the numbers, certainly that
10 financial assistance is not coming from any of these organizations.

11
12 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

13 Joe, do you have -- is there a way in the information that you have
14 or in your experience reviewing the activities of not-for-profit
15 organizations, is -- is there information that is readily available
16 or could otherwise be obtained that would show approximately how
17 much this organization receives in donations from people that
18 reside in Suffolk County or Long Island overall? That would be the
19 -- the very interesting and important number in addition to the
20 very small number that comes back to assist veterans on Long
21 Island, how many Long Islanders and Suffolk County residents, in
22 particular, are actually donating to that organization in return
23 for such a small insignificant percentage coming back to our -- our
24 local area.

25
26 **MR. PECORELLA:**

27 As part of the application we do ask all agencies to give us a list
28 of all organizations and -- or individuals that donated money to --
29 to veteran's groups in the last three years. So we do have a
30 schedule comprising, you know, who received what in Suffolk County
31 also. It's not part of this report but we do have it in our files.

32
33 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

34 Understood. And if you that information, that be would great if
35 you can get that to me, I can share that with members of the
36 committee. I think that would be an important part of this
37 question.

38
39 **MR. PECORELLA:**

40 Would you like information for each agency on schedule one?

41
42 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

43 If you have that available.

44
45 **MR. PECORELLA:**

46 I can give it to you, sure.

47
48 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

49 That would be great, thank you. Legislator Kennedy.

50
51 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

52 Thank you for coming Joe and Jennifer. When you speak about money
53 going to the veterans, what exactly are you speaking about?
54 Because I know some of these agencies provide the housing for
55 veterans, which you could consider money going towards veterans'
56 benefits.

1 **MR. PECORELLA:**

2 Well, like in the third column, it would say -- it's the amount of
3 money that was given for Suffolk County veterans or expended for
4 Suffolk County veterans. It doesn't have to be donated as far as
5 money. In other words, like the -- if you look at, like, line
6 five, General Needs organization, they gave money in boots, socks,
7 coats, hats. There was \$17,000 that was donated in goods and
8 services, not necessarily in money. Some don't distribute money to
9 the agencies, but they'll provide services add value for that.

10:06AM 10

11 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

12 Where would I find on this the --

13
14 **MR. PECORELLA:**

15 Schedule one, the third column.

16
17 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

18 And that includes or does not include housing?

19
20 **MR. PECORELLA:**

21 It would include any money -- any money spent on Suffolk County
22 veterans' programs -- programs in the last year. In other words,
23 like the Airborne Tri Team, they have races, equipment, gym
24 memberships; they provided money for that, for veterans.

25
26 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

27 Okay.

28
29 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

30 Just one further question. You know, the 15 organizations listed,
31 the only one I see here that's really contributing to Suffolk
32 County is the United Veterans Beacon House, a little over \$3
33 million.

10:07AM 30

34
35 **MR. PECORELLA:**

36 They're a big agency, yes, in Suffolk County.

37
38 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

39 Yeah, so -- but the rest of them looks to me like Suffolk County's
40 really getting the short end. But I don't have the total picture.
41 All I have is the 15 organizations that file for registration
42 between November and May during that six-month period.

10:07AM 40

43
44 **MR. PECORELLA:**

45 Right.

46
47 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

48 I don't know overall, you know, I'm sure there are many other
49 military organizations, non-profits, that are giving to Suffolk
50 County. But based on what I'm seeing here, I'm beginning to have
51 my doubts. And some of the largest organizations in the country
52 don't seem to be supporting Suffolk County veterans. I mean, this
53 thing with the Wounded Warriors that's -- that's a disgrace. They
54 raised \$401 million and we get next to nothing in Suffolk County
55 for our veterans.

10:08AM 50

1 **MR. PECORELLA:**

2 There could be other agencies, you know, other veterans agencies --

3
4 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

5 I know that. It could be somebody -- that didn't register during
6 this period of time that's doing a very good job. I'm looking at
7 what I have in front of me here. And except for one organization
8 the rest don't seem to be contributing anything. Okay, thank you.

9
10 **MR. PECORELLA:**

11 You're welcome.

12
13 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

14 Legislator Anker.

15
16 **LEG. ANKER:**

17 Okay, so we have a audit report but, you know, I'm looking at this
18 and I'm going online. And there are so many more veterans
19 organizations. So my question is now there's a law that basically
10:08AM 20 says if you fundraise for veteran causes, that you must register in
21 Suffolk County; is that correct?

22
23 **MR. PECORELLA:**

24 Correct.

25
26 **LEG. ANKER:**

27 Okay, how are we getting that information out there? Because,
28 again, I'll send this information to some of the organizations I
29 have in my community but there's VFWs and American Legions and just
10:09AM 30 so many other organizations.

31
32 **MR. PECORELLA:**

33 VFWs are always exempt according to the law. There's an exhibit --
34 if you look at the back of the law, Exhibit A, *any congressionally*
35 *chartered veterans service organizations are exempt*. There's a
36 whole listing.

37
38 **LEG. ANKER:**

39 What page is that?

10:09AM 40
41 **MR. PECORELLA:**

42 Exhibit A of the law of Chapter 353. It's referenced -- if you
43 look at section 353-20 of the definitions, non-profit veterans
44 organizations, it'll say at the end of it in Exhibit A.

45
46 **LEG. ANKER:**

47 Okay, so veterans and --

48
49 **MR. PECORELLA:**

10:10AM 50 It's not part of the report; it's in the law.

51
52 **LEG. ANKER:**

53 Right, American Legions also?

54
55 **MR. PECORELLA:**

56 Correct.

1 **LEG. ANKER:**

2 And what other ones, I'm sorry, I don't have the law in front of
3 me.

4
5 **MR. PECORELLA:**

6 Any congressionally chartered veterans service organizations,
7 they're not subject -- not subject to the requirements of Chapter
8 353 of the Suffolk County Code.

9
10 **LEG. ANKER:**

11 Okay. And I know --

12
13 **MR. PECORELLA:**

14 You know, I'm sorry, the American -- some examples; the American
15 Legion, the American Red Cross, the Marine Corps League, there's a
16 whole listing of the agencies.

17
18 **LEG. ANKER:**

10:10AM

19 Because I know there's a lot of organizations, not-for-profits,
20 that raise money for veterans groups. Now would they have to
21 register or not if they're --

22
23 **MR. PECORELLA:**

24 If they're soliciting in Suffolk County, they have to register if
25 they're not exempt, yes.

26
27 **LEG. ANKER:**

28 So a civic association, a historical society.

29
30 **MR. PECORELLA:**

31 Those are -- those are exempt. Just non-profit veterans
32 organizations. Some agencies do raise money but that's not their
33 main mission.

34
35 **LEG. ANKER:**

36 So those organizations don't have to register.

37
38 **MR. PECORELLA:**

39 Correct.

10:10AM

40
41 **LEG. ANKER:**

42 Even though they're raising money for veterans' causes.

43
44 **MR. PECORELLA:**

45 Only non-profit veterans organizations.

46
47 **LEG. ANKER:**

10:11AM

48 Okay, because I still know a handful of organizations that I know
49 are veterans. And I don't know see them on here and we will
50 definitely get them the information that they have to register.

51
52 **MR. PECORELLA:**

53 Very good.

54
55 **LEG. ANKER:**

56 Also, I think it would be, again, I know that you're -- we're

1 focusing on the organizations that are required and not exempt, but
2 it would be nice to know, like Legislator Barraga had mentioned,
3 how much Suffolk County's actually getting from all organizations
4 related to, you know, donating funds for veterans. Is there any
5 way to find that out?
6

7 **MR. PECORELLA:**

8 That's not really a requirement of the law. My office is just
9 basically working on the requirements of the law. There could be
10 those agencies in Suffolk County that aren't soliciting in Suffolk
11 County, in which case they're not required to complete the
12 paperwork and have a -- a registration certificate. I mean, sure,
13 there's a lot of small organizations out there; we really don't
14 have no idea what the population could be.
15

16 **LEG. ANKER:**

17 And I think that was the intent of the law is to make sure that
18 these smaller organizations that just pop up --
19

20 **MR. PECORELLA:**

21 Right.
22

23 **LEG. ANKER:**

24 -- and are not really legit, you know, to basically discourage that
25 from happening. And, again, that's the main intent. But it would
26 be interesting to know really how much money is actually going to
27 our veterans considering we are the largest veterans community here
28 on Long Island -- or actually in Suffolk County in the State of New
29 York.
30

31 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

32 Presiding Officer.
33

34 **P.O. GREGORY:**

35 Yes, thank you, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think you might have
36 answered the question because I -- I can imagine a situation where
37 potentially, say, a not-for-profit, they may be registered here as
38 far as business location but they operate in the City for some
39 reasons. But if they don't solicit here, but they solicit in the
40 City, they wouldn't have to register?
41

42 **MR. PECORELLA:**

43 Only if they're soliciting in Suffolk County.
44

45 **P.O. GREGORY:**

46 Only if they're soliciting in Suffolk County. And as part of
47 resources or funds, does that include -- is it just private
48 donations or does it include government grants or anything of that
49 nature?
50

51 **MR. PECORELLA:**

52 Pretty much if they're just soliciting funds from the public.
53

54 **P.O. GREGORY:**

55 Okay.
56

1 **MR. PECORELLA:**

2 -- understand what the law -- one second. Yeah, any non-profit
3 veterans organization that solicits funds or contributions from the
4 public within Suffolk County.

5
6 **P.O. GREGORY:**

7 Okay, okay.

8
9 **MR. PECORELLA:**

10:13AM 10 That's pretty much it.

11
12 **P.O. GREGORY:**

13 So it doesn't include government.

14
15 **MR. PECORELLA:**

16 Like some of the other agencies are based out of New York, you
17 know, like the Wounded Warriors Projects in Florida, but they do
18 solicit in Suffolk County --

19
20 **P.O. GREGORY:**

21 Right.

22
23 **MR. PECORELLA:**

24 -- so they have to get their registration certificate to have their
25 Soldier Ride every year.

26
27 **P.O. GREGORY:**

28 Right. I'm very, very surprised by that. Because I know the Town
29 of Babylon, you know, maybe at least 200,000 they raised -- have
10:13AM 30 been raised over the years; and at least this one year, right, not
31 even a year, it's six months, 29,000 has come back to Suffolk
32 County?

33
34 **MR. PECORELLA:**

35 Honestly, yes. It's only one event actually that they have in the
36 whole year, that was it.

37
38 **P.O. GREGORY:**

39 Oh, but they don't do any other solicitations?

10:14AM 40
41 **MR. PECORELLA:**

42 No, that's it, just the one event in Suffolk County. Everything
43 else is raised outside of New York, outside of Suffolk County.

44
45 **P.O. GREGORY:**

46 Yeah, but they raise -- because there's a dinner that they have
47 generally before the ride. And then there's the ride whatever
48 people do for the ride. And I know one year it was at least
49 100,000 and 50,000 comes to mind so it's -- it's a lot of money
10:14AM 50 that the County Executive himself, personally, when he was
51 supervisor and, I guess, they've done it for seven years?

52
53 **MR. PECORELLA:**

54 I believe it's going on for a few years, yes.

55
56

1 **P.O. GREGORY:**

2 Right. Wow, that's amazing. Okay.

3
4 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

5 The problem you have is that even though you might have an event
6 here, you just can't expect to get \$29,000 for an organization
7 that's raising over 400 million. And you're sitting in a county
8 that has one of the largest number of veterans in the state, if not
9 the nation, a county that has a million five hundred thousand
10 people. And, you know, like these different groups soliciting and
11 whatnot, they're soliciting in Suffolk County, why would you
12 possibly not solicit in the County that has a population greater
13 than seven states? Or of two counties that are together have a
14 population of 3 million more than, like, 18 different states.

15
16 All I'm saying is that, you know, when you take a look at Wounded
17 Warrior and some of these other groups, we are not getting
18 anything, for the most part, from these people for our veterans.
19 Now I'm questioning, you know, 401 million, you know, I'm taking a
20 look at a figure of 213 million actually expended to assist
21 veterans, that's \$183 million that just disappears with this
22 outfit. Where's the 183? I mean, you can't answer those
23 questions, but the numbers really paint a very dismal picture in
24 terms of these organizations supporting veterans in Suffolk County,
25 not doing it, except for one, Beacon House.

26
27 **P.O. GREGORY:**

28 And the piggyback on that if the money's not coming to Suffolk, I
29 wonder we're it's going. Is it going to Alabama or some other, you
30 know, like where and why?

31
32 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

33 Well, that was one of the -- the important underlying reasons for
34 this legislative initiative and the reporting requirement that went
35 along with it, was to provide the information to our public so that
36 they can have information before them in and make an informed
37 decision. Are these organizations that are doing a good job, are
38 they living up to the mission and are they supporting our local
39 communities; and, you know, with my contribution dollar, you know,
40 being very important to me, this way I have the information in
41 front of me to make that informed decision to determine which
42 organizations I feel are important and are deserving of my support.

43
44 But interestingly here, the -- the Wounded Warriors Project, they
45 -- as you said, they are based out-of-state. They do all -- I'm
46 sure, a lot of their fundraising efforts are out-of-you state but
47 they happen to have a Suffolk County tie in that they are
48 supportive of an event.

49
50 **MR. PECORELLA:**

51 Yes.

52
53 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

54 And so along the way they were either informed or discovered that
55 they had this requirement particularly if they were going to be
56 physically on-site representatives of that organization for a

1 particular event. But we can only imagine how many organizations
2 are located outside of New York that have a lot of their activities
3 outside of New York that don't necessarily have any type of
4 physical presence in New York that are soliciting Suffolk County
5 residents either online or by telephone or through fundraising
6 organizations that are getting dollars out of Suffolk County
7 residents for the purposes of supporting veterans or their families
8 in other parts of the country and literally never seeing a single
9 dollar come back to -- to Suffolk County. We may never ever know
10 the answer to that question, but you have to believe that that is
11 going on in large scale.

12
13 **MR. PECORELLA:**

14 It's quite possible, yes.

15
16 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

17 Legislator Anker.

18
19 **LEG. ANKER:**

20 I have a question for Tom, Tom Ronayne. I don't know if you want
21 to come up. Just real quick, do we have programs where these newer
22 not-for-profits focusing on veteran causes and raising donations
23 for veteran issues, do we have a program to encourage them to
24 follow this law or to show them -- because I'm reading through the
25 law right now. And, you know, you have to have a prepared
26 statement of the general purpose; there's, you know, you have to
27 have a lot of documentation to register for this particular law.
28 Is there something available for these not-for-profits?

29
30 **DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

31 Well, we encourage people to comply with this in a number of ways.
32 Firstly, it is the law. And the expectation would be that if you
33 are required that you should --- that you would be compliant, but
34 there are certainly organizations who simply choose not to. And
35 unfortunately there is not a -- Joe, correct me if I'm mistaken --
36 there's not an enforcement provision with this law that I -- that
37 I'm familiar with; or at least a practical enforcement provision
38 that allows us to really pursue or take any action on organizations
39 who are out there who are not, you know, doing as they should be.

40
41 **LEG. ANKER:**

42 Do we have something online where if a resident wants to donate to
43 a veteran's cause, they can look it up, you know, like we have the
44 Wall of Shame for carpenters or contractors; not necessarily we
45 want to highlight the vets groups that aren't doing well but the
46 legit vet groups, do we have that available online?

47
48 **DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

49 No longer through my office but I believe that the -- I believe
50 that the list of registrants who have certificates or certificates
51 pending renewal are listed on the Comptroller site.

52
53 **MR. PECORELLA:**

54 They'd be included in this report actually, schedule one and
55 schedule two. Schedule one's anybody that has a current
56 certificate from my office. Schedule two are agencies that have

1 expired.

2

3 **DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

4 And that's online; right?

5

6 **MR. PECORELLA:**

7 Yes. That's on the Comptroller's website, the report.

8

9 **LEG. ANKER:**

10:20AM 10 As we're hearing it, there are concerns. And, you know, my concern
11 is that I know of groups that are not registered that -- and they
12 don't -- it's not that they don't mean to register, I don't think
13 they really know the law, so. But I appreciate this report because
14 now we can reach out to those groups to make sure they're in
15 compliance.

16

17 **MR. PECORELLA:**

18 Section 353-23 of the County Charter, it does detail the penalties
19 for violations but doesn't say how they're going to be collected.
10:20AM 20 There are civil penalties of no less than \$500, but not more than
21 \$1,000 for each violation.

22

23 **LEG. ANKER:**

24 This is a new law, right? When was --

25

26 **MR. PECORELLA:**

27 No, it's all part of the same law actually. It's in Chapter
28 353-23.

29

30 **LEG. ANKER:**

31 What year was that?

32

33 **MR. PECORELLA:**

34 I'm sorry.

35

36 **LEG. ANKER:**

37 What's the year of the law; when was it created?

38

39 **MR. PECORELLA:**

10:20AM 40 It's the same law that the report's working with, Local Law 32-
41 2016.

42

43 **LEG. ANKER:**

44 So it's a new law; so, yeah, we need to get the word out.

45

46 **MR. PECORELLA:**

47 I think it's been out -- any -- Section C says *any civil penalties*
48 *collected under the article will be deposited with the Veteran*
49 *Service Agency to be used to provide services to homeless veterans.*
10:21AM 50 The only problem with the law is who is required to collect the
51 penalties and to enforce this. I'm not sure if that'd be, you
52 know, the Law Department and what the requirement would be. But
53 the penalties are detailed in the law. Probably wouldn't be with
54 by my office to collect the penalties.

55

56

1 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

2 And, yet, this has been a -- this has been a law that has been with
3 us for several years.

4
5 **MR. PECORELLA:**

6 Yes.

7
8 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

9 Now, the 2016 was the effort to move the auditing and the control
10 function from -- for the Veterans Services Agency over to the
11 Comptroller's Office. And, thank you, Comptroller, and, Joe, you
12 and your staff for doing a great job. This is very helpful
13 important information for us, important information for our
14 consumers and residents throughout Suffolk County. And those that
15 hope to do all of our part in supporting our veterans and our
16 families here that rely on them and many of the organizations that
17 seek to provide assistance to so many in our community.

18
19 Before I go back to Legislator Anker, the -- this information is
20 now on your site. Correct? At the -- the Comptroller's site and
21 no longer --

22
23 **MR. PECORELLA:**

24 Yes.

25
26 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

27 Perhaps I'm wondering if there might, Director, may be some kind of
28 a link that we can create; so if somebody goes to the Veterans
29 Services Agency, they might be able to click on something and be
30 able to bring up this information, I'm wondering if somebody's
31 interested in getting this information online. They're not
32 necessarily thinking in terms of the Comptroller's Office but they
33 might be looking at Veterans Services first and maybe there might
34 be a way to -- to link the information.

35
36 **DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

37 Absolutely, I could ask IT to look into that today.

38
39 **LEG. ANKER:**

40 One other question, too, though, I know when you start a
41 not-for-profit, you go through, here in New York, the Attorney
42 General's Office, the Charities Bureau. So that's also another
43 piece of information, I think, is very important to have available
44 maybe on a -- on a link both for vets services and maybe the
45 Comptroller's Office.

46
47 **MR. PECORELLA:**

48 We do have proof that they are certified and registered with the --
49 New York State. They do submit that to us. They have to go
50 through Charities Bureau website, I should look up the agencies,
51 they're in the report on schedule one and get their information.

52
53 **LEG. ANKER:**

54 Right. And I know the folks over there in the Charities Office
55 right here in Hauppauge, that might be something that they can
56 provide information when specific groups are looking to open up a

1 not-for-profit for veteran services. So maybe if you could reach
2 out to perhaps the Attorney General's Office here locally to make
3 sure that that information is available as they're signing up to
4 become a not-for-profit, that would be helpful.

5
6 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

7 Okay. Maybe just one more question, Director, you are familiar
8 with so many of these organizations that are listed here in this
9 report and many others that are not, and your eye is always out for
10 this kind of activity here in Suffolk County where organizations
11 are making outreach efforts, solicitations to -- to our local
12 residents. I mean, what are some of the things that -- that you
13 see maybe some of the organizations that you see are participating
14 in that kind of activity that might not necessarily be captured in
15 -- in the information that we have before us in order to make an
16 informed decision.

17
18 **DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

19 I think, and I appreciate the question, and I think probably
20 directly to Legislator Barraga's point, there are organizations
21 that -- that I think most of us are aware of who -- whether through
22 lack of awareness or lack of interest in compliant, but there are
23 also -- I'm familiar with at least a couple of organizations who do
24 either online or through other -- through other means or media,
25 Wounded Warrior's a good example with their -- they have a
26 wonderful television campaign, I think it's second only to the
27 ASPCA where it's -- it almost wants -- you want to draw a tear
28 where they -- they solicit recurring contributions where you can
29 have -- you submit a credit card number on that -- that
30 contribution hits your credit card each month. I don't know how
31 that would be captured, those types of dollars because I can't
32 imagine that with the veteran population in Suffolk County that we
33 don't have good people making donations of those types. I don't
34 know -- I don't know how -- and I don't know how, Joe -- Joe, your
35 office would even capture these things.

36
37 **MR. PECORELLA:**

38 I believe that that money should be included in the first column,
39 the total revenue raised by the agencies, it's probably in that
40 \$401 million. But if Suffolk County residents that donate money to
41 this agency, the money's not getting disbursed to Suffolk County
42 veterans, maybe people don't realize that, it's going to veteran's
43 organizations outside of Suffolk County most likely because they're
44 based in Florida, they're probably using it, you know, towards
45 Florida residents, I would think.

46
47 **DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

48 And if you think about it \$19 a month rounding up we'll call it
49 \$250 per year, per donor, you know -- you know, a million here, a
50 million there, pretty soon we're talking about real money, you
51 know, it -- so it is happening out there. I got an e-mail this
52 morning from an organization in Suffolk County who solicits
53 routinely. And they have chosen to not participate in this
54 registration process. But again, we are to some extent, and I
55 don't want to speak for the Comptroller's Office, but we are, you
56 know, limited in our ability to -- to respond to that beyond

1 enhancing awareness of the organizations and the contributing
2 public.

3
4 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

5 Just the very fact that we're bringing that out, this issue in this
6 Committee, hopefully it'll get some, you know, press. But, you
7 know, the point is, let's talk about the advertisement of \$19 a
8 month, \$250 a year. If I'm a Suffolk County resident and I decide
9 to get into that program, I'm assuming that a portion of that money
10 is coming back to help veterans in Suffolk County. That doesn't
11 seem to be the case. I don't know where the money's going but it's
12 not coming back to this County and it should.

13
14 **DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

15 And there's certainly no shortage of need.

16
17 **LEG. ANKER:**

18 Again, and my concern, of course, the organizations that are
19 illegit, but the legitimate organizations, and I'm looking at the
20 penalties, and it says to they're to pay \$500 or more, no more than
21 \$1,000 for each violation. *Each day a not-for-profit veterans*
22 *organization is in violation of this article shall constitute as*
23 *separate and distinct violation.* So, say, you know, a small group
24 popped up a year or so ago, they didn't know about this, will they
25 have to pay thousands of dollars for not knowing they had to
26 register?

27
28 **MR. PECORELLA:**

29 That law is not really clear. Basically, like an enforcement unit,
30 I guess, to enforce the law, it wouldn't be my office and I don't
31 think it would be Tom's office. Doesn't really say who's going to
32 collect the money. This is what the penalties are. And it's hard
33 to determine, I guess, how many violations there are; it's a whole
34 process to it, I would think.

35
36 **LEG. ANKER:**

37 But, I mean, if they only have a thousand dollars in their bank
38 account and, you know, how do you encourage them to sign up,
39 register, and then continue to do the good work that they're doing?

40
41 **MR. PECORELLA:**

42 It'd probably be on a case-by-case basis, I would think. I mean,
43 we really don't know of anybody right now who's soliciting outside
44 -- in Suffolk County who is not registered. If you know of anybody
45 please report them to me, my office or Tom's office, get them the
46 right paperwork but, I mean -- I'm sure there's agencies out there
47 that aren't aware of the requirement, that's quite possible.
48 There's a lot of non-profit veterans agencies, but we have no way
49 of knowing what the population really is and it could be agencies
50 that aren't soliciting in Suffolk County.

51
52 **LEG. ANKER:**

53 Thank you.

54
55 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

56 Director, thank you.

1 **DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

2 Thank you.

3
4 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

5 Gentlemen and, Jennifer, thank you for being with us today and for
6 sharing the information included in the report. Again, the report
7 pursuant to Suffolk County Local Law 32-2016 has been received by
8 this Committee as required pursuant to our County Charter. So,
9 thank you.

10
11 Okay. Next the Committee welcomes Robert Novotny.

12
13 **MR. NOVOTNY:**

14 Good morning, Mr. Chair, members of the board, thank you so much
15 for having me.

16
17 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

18 Good morning.

19
20 **MR. NOVOTNY:**

21 What I heard recently was a lot of passion and concern so I did
22 want to mention briefly why it is me that is sitting here. As many
23 of you probably have never heard of me or Vets Lives Matter and
24 what that exactly is, so I start with my story every time,
25 introduce myself, much like I can read all of your bios online.

26
27 My story starts here in Longwood where I graduated, so Suffolk
28 County guy, born and raised my whole life, graduated in 2005.
29 Immediately joined United States Marine Corps, knew college was not
10:30AM 30 for me so in 2005 stepped in the yellow footprints. Through there
31 I met a mentor, I didn't have an older brother, a Corporal of
32 Marines, Dan DeMeo and he taught me everything that it was to be
33 just a great human being, passionate, genuinely care.

34
35 So making this long story short, I'd gone through a lot of a
36 tragedy and hard times through divorce, the deployment, stuff like
37 that. He helped ground me. And he was due to get out in October
38 of 2011 now. So we built this great friendship over the past five
39 or six years. And come July of 2011 three months before he was due
10:31AM 40 to get out, the last thing that he ever said was *Happy Birthday,*
41 *you're my best friend.*

42
43 And through the transition being so difficult and Marines know it,
44 once a Marine, always a Marine, it was hard for him to get out so
45 the transition from that point alone is super difficult, but sadly
46 he took his life on my birthday in 2011, from which I've had
47 difficulty moving past. So two months later I did attempt to take
48 my life. And I reached out to one more Marine and I said *if you*
49 *don't come down here and take me to the hospital, you won't see me*
10:32AM 50 *ever again.*

51
52 So knowing that the transition is difficult, I got out in 2013,
53 September. My transition was so difficult it brought me to
54 Indianapolis Indiana where I knew two people, a Marine Major and I
55 was a Sergeant so I really -- I didn't really know this Marine
56 Major but he interviewed me and the person that I interviewed with.

1 So the two interviewers were the only people that I knew. So I was
2 alone and afraid. When you PCS from military you change stations,
3 you get that immediate camaraderie.

4
5 So that's kind of why I'm here and what I've built. Through Vets
6 Lives Matter, it's not a non-profit. I'm very blessed now that I
7 did find a great job where I've got great friends and we just want
8 to donate our time and our network. So our mission as -- we have
9 like an employer identification number, we don't take funds, we
10 show zero dollars, we spend zero dollars, we host events through
11 other great organizations: Like Team Red, White and Blue, Project
12 9 Line, The Beacon Home, United Way to promote their cause. I feel
13 like that's a free thing that we can do. We don't need to spend
14 money or get money. But our mission is to enhance veterans' lives
15 through education and employment. And I think that's what led my
16 best friend to take his life, was the fact that he was going to
17 find a job that wasn't as gainfully employing as being a Sergeant of
18 Marines, which bar none is the best job in the world.

19
20 So that's where we started. I've teamed up a lot with Team Red
21 White and Blue, which is a national non-profit and we do some
22 fantastic stuff out here. But what's -- I was looking at the audit
23 report and we're not on that. And I do think it's because we're
24 not soliciting for funds by the law from what I can read, we're not
25 required, but, again I mimic most of your -- your statements that
26 they should be reported, which would be great to see who is -- who
27 is giving the money back. And if we can funnel that through, if
28 the Wounded Warrior Project gave money to Team RWB to do a Suffolk
29 County event, so on and so forth, not my spot.

30
31 So what we're here for, and it says I'm speaking on veteran -- what
32 does that say? I just usually tell my story. Veteran programs.
33 We've got two -- two events that I wanted to highlight and when I
34 asked my -- my teammates and my friends and we want to highlight
35 two things where we're showing community involvement from the
36 civilian and veteran side, bridging the gap. So it's part of an
37 Eagle, which is Team RWB and Project 9 Line. So Team RWB is
38 sponsoring the event, soliciting the funds for Project 9 Line,
39 which is the Suffolk County non-profit. And VETS STOCK is also
40 Project 9 Line's event.

41
42 And there's great things from working together, the cohesiveness,
43 which I think will bring more attention to Suffolk County
44 non-profits. From what we do at Vets Lives Matter is we -- like
45 we're doing the consulting to find these non-profits, I guess, and
46 do -- you know, do events with them to help them find that one more
47 veteran worth. It was me and I was in that dark place and I
48 reached out to someone, I want to know who that person would be
49 when I'm in Suffolk County. So that's -- that's where it's brought
50 me to this day. And I'd be happy to answer some questions if you
51 have any.

52
53 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**
54 **Legislator Anker.**
55
56

1 **LEG. ANKER:**
2 I think I -- I met you over at the Middle Island Memorial Park.
3 Were you there?
4

5 **MR. NOVOTNY:**
6 Yeah, Longwood does it.
7

8 **LEG. ANKER:**
9 Nice shorts.

10:35AM 10
11 **MR. NOVOTNY:**
12 Thank you.
13

14 **LEG. ANKER:**
15 Aren't you the one -- you wear shorts, it's freezing.
16

17 **MR. NOVOTNY:**
18 I wear short shorts, every day.
19

20 **LEG. ANKER:**
21 Short shorts, yeah. You're known, yeah, you're known for your
22 attire. And I just wanted to thank you, though, for you what
23 you're doing for our veteran population and -- and locally too. I
24 know Gail Bailey and, you know, the Scouts, the fire department,
25 there's so many organizations that are working locally and thank
26 you for participating in those -- with those organizations.
27

28 **MR. NOVOTNY:**
29 Thank you.

10:36AM 30
31 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**
32 It's such an important element of -- it seemed like being so
33 supportive of a lot of the organizations that do such great work in
34 our local community. And those organizations regardless of the
35 efforts that they make, the outreach efforts that they make could
36 always use that kind of support. Because as we all know here as we
37 learn every single time we get together and hear from great
38 organizations in the community that awareness and outreach effort
39 is such an important part and can always use a lot more of that.

10:36AM 40
41 **MR. NOVOTNY:**
42 Sure.
43

44 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**
45 So I'm wondering as you support these organizations, how you make
46 those outreach efforts. You and those that you're working with at
47 your organizational level, what efforts are you making and what do
48 you find most successful? And as an organization, how do you --
49 how do you measure success; how do you know that you're making an
10:36AM 50 impact for our veterans and their families here locally?
51

52 **MR. NOVOTNY:**
53 So how we do the outreach, strictly social media campaign, that's
54 how I've found Pat Donohue, that's how I found Team RWB when I
55 moved to Indiana, was looking out and finding it and then
56 personally vetting them; we know which ones pass the sniff test.

1 And then you dive in and you really do an in depth vetting process
2 to find out if they are -- what a veteran would need.

3
4 So there are -- there's some great ones out there like the VFW is
5 lobbying for us on Capital Hill where a lot of other ones are not,
6 you know. And I encourage everyone to join the VFW. They're the
7 ones that are making the biggest impact from the federal level.
8 Where it's -- it's nice to be able to have a three-mile run and go
9 grab a beer, is that really helping any bigger picture than the
10 local community? So it co-couples pretty much. And that's, you
11 know, how we're engaging that way. And the locally, the SVAs are
12 what I leverage a lot. So I'm bringing that and our mission was to
13 enhance veterans lives through education and employment.

14
15 There are some companies out there that are charging \$50 per
16 resume. I can -- I've got Saturdays. So doing the stuff on the
17 weekend, like I said, it doesn't cost a dollar to help a veteran
18 out. So from that aspect that's what we're helping the local --
19 Team RWB and Vets Lives Matter, we've coupled a lot of places like
20 this where I'm building chapters now for Vets Lives Matter and
21 we're strictly focussing on if there's a member of each one of
22 those organizations that does need help in the local community,
23 we're helping them out, I guess, pro bono would be the best way to
24 put it. But it is really rewriting a resume. It's not difficult,
25 you know, I got a great thesaurus.

26
27 So it's -- that's where I'm finding it where we're helping locally
28 and a bigger picture by coupling with other organizations out
29 there.

30
31 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**
32 Legislator Anker.

33
34 **LEG. ANKER:**
35 You know what's frustrating is that -- and we've heard this year
36 after year is that, you know, when the men and women in our
37 military are released back in civilian life, they're not given
38 support. And I think that's really a huge problem and it leads to
39 issues: Drug abuse, attempted suicide or suicide. Do you see it
40 getting better on the federal side of providing -- and actually
41 it's identifying those folks coming over and then helping them with
42 support? Because we can't even do that on this -- on our
43 government level is to identify those for whatever reason, but
44 there are so many resources, but sometimes that connection is not
45 made.

46
47 **MR. NOVOTNY:**
48 Right. So Vets Lives Matter just did their strategic meeting in
49 February. And our -- - we made our BHAG for 2020, like we got this
50 20/20 vision. We want it so clear and so focused that it's 20/20
51 vision, happens to be the year 2020. We have the Big Hairy
52 Audacious Goal of rewriting the transition program for the DOD.
53 One of my partners is a lawyer; another one's a GS-15 in the
54 Pentagon; another one has his Masters for Business Administration
55 and I'm the face of it. *(*Laughter*)* I'm the passion, I guess,
56 the conviction behind it where it hits home.

1 And we want to rewrite where right not it's a four-day program to
2 get out. And then you cut the cord -- we want, there's a 13-week
3 program to join the Marine Corps and there's a four-day program to
4 get out. We want to make it a six-month every other weekend one
5 day, much like you're joining the IRR Reserves or you're going into
6 another unit, non-mandatory, but we want there to be a place where
7 you're checking up for mentorship counseling, guidance, leadership,
8 rewrite a resume, something that can be -- what the SVA is, we
9 want, again, couple with them to build this program where when you
10 do exit the service whether in school or not, that there is someone
11 out there that is holding your hand and guiding you through this
12 much like you had drill instructors or civilian instructors,
13 whatever we would call it, you know, it's three years down the
14 road, but that's something we would love to be able to do.

10:41AM

15
16 **LEG. ANKER:**

17 Maybe that's something we can help you with, you know --

18
19 **MR. NOVOTNY:**

20 Of course.

10:41AM

21
22 **LEG. ANKER:**

23 -- letter of, you know, support to move that idea forward. Because
24 it is so much lacking. You know, I want to our prisons have a
25 support transition time but it just doesn't -- you know, here we
26 are -- our heroes are coming back from military service and where
27 is the support? So I thank you greatly for your efforts.

28
29 **MR. NOVOTNY:**

30 Thank you.

10:41AM

31
32 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

33 Anybody else? Okay.

34
35 **MR. NOVOTNY:**

36 All right, thank you. God bless guys.

37
38 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

39 Thank you and, please, along the way, anything that we could do to
40 be of assistance, you'll always feel free to let us know.

10:41AM

41
42 **MR. NOVOTNY:**

43 Thank you guys so much.

44
45 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

46 And, thank you.

47
48 **MR. NOVOTNY:**

49 And be well.

10:42AM

50
51 **CHAIRPERSON STERN:**

52 Okay. All right. Everybody good? All right. There being no
53 other business before the Committee this morning, we are
54 adjourned.]

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**THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 10:41 AM
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY**

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