

VETERANS & SENIORS COMMITTEE
OF THE
SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

Minutes

A regular meeting of the Veterans & Seniors 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 November 13, 2007.

Members Present:

Legislator Steven H. Stern, Chairman
Legislator Jack Eddington, Vice-Chair
Legislator Cameron Alden
Legislator Jon Cooper (not present)
Legislator Jay H. Schneiderman

Also In Attendance:

George Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature
Renee Ortiz, Chief Deputy Clerk
Verna Donnan, Budget Review Office
Deborah Harris, Aide to Legislator Stern
Tom Ronayne, Director of Veterans Service Agency/Human Services Div.
Carol Krishnamoorthy, Coordinator, Homeless Services VAMC
Paul Perillie, Aide to Majority Leader
Linda Bay, Aide to Minority Leader
Joe Dujmic, County Executive's Office
Fran Siems, Legislative Aide
Cliff Hymowitz
All Other Interested Parties

Minutes Taken By:

Diana Kraus - Court Stenographer

Minutes Transcribed By:

Denise Weaver - Legislative Aide

(THE MEETING COMMENCED AT 1:24 PM)

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Good afternoon. Legislature's Committee on Veterans and Seniors will come to order. I ask everybody to please rise and join us in the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Schneiderman.

SALUTATION

I'll ask everybody to please remain standing and join us in a moment of silence to keep all of our very brave men and women fighting for our freedoms overseas in our thoughts and prayers. And at this time also keep in your thoughts and prayers, we learned the news just a few days ago that Legislator Schneiderman's dad, a World War II Veteran himself, recently passed away. We ask that you remember him and his family.

MOMENT OF SILENCE OBSERVED

Thank you. Do we have any cards? We'll begin with Public Portion. Renee, we don't have any cards so we'll go to the agenda and call up Director Ronayne. And state for the record who has come up with you.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Carol Krishnamoorthy. Good afternoon, Chairman, members.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Good afternoon.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Thank you again for the invitation. I think there were really only two things that I was hoping we could address today. One of them is some changes that are being made at the state level concerning the legislation for the Cold War Veterans real property tax exemption. There were a couple of technical points in the bill that was signed by the Governor; that they thought it best to go back and revise. Really the two prime ones were the requirement for 365 days of service. That has been stricken. And they've also removed the requirement for the veteran to -- in addition to having his DD 214's showing eligibility, also requiring that the veteran had received a Cold War recognition certificate. Not everybody got one of those. You have to apply for it. In my own case, obviously I'm eligible. I applied for it and never received it. I don't know why.

And I'm not sure when, but if it has not already stopped, the program had an end date. And I think we're right around the point where they will no longer be issuing those certificates anyway; so if you haven't got one, chances are you're not going to get one. That would have prevented you from being eligible for this exemption.

Then again that's really the -- those are really the two main changes to the legislation. But I wanted to make sure that I got that information to you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Now that is a change that has already been made in the state legislation?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

It's been made -- it's gone -- from the Governor it's gone back. It's passed in the Senate. I don't know if it's passed in the Assembly yet. Okay? I've got the Senate version here. I did not get a

copy of the Assembly version so I don't know that it's gone through the Assembly.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Legislator Eddington.

LEG. EDDINGTON:
Yeah, I just wanted to ask now, the Cold War certificate that you're talking about --

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:
Yes.

LEG. EDDINGTON:
-- is that like in lieu of the National Defense Award that -- like we got during Vietnam?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:
No, no. It's just -- it's a paper certificate that's suitable for framing --

LEG. EDDINGTON:
Oh, okay.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:
-- that you can -- you have to request it. And the Army was handling the issuance of the certificates for all five branches.

LEG. EDDINGTON:
Gotcha.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:
But, again, it's not -- it's not an award. It's not a decoration.

LEG. EDDINGTON:
Okay.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:
It's a certificate of recognition.

LEG. EDDINGTON:
Does everybody get the National Defense badge or whatever it is?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:
No, the National Defense Service medal?

LEG. EDDINGTON:
Yeah.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:
No, that's only issued during time of war.

LEG. EDDINGTON:
Oh, okay.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:
So, generally speaking it would be the folks out there who did not receive a National Defense Service medal who would be the eligible pool for the Cold War exemption.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Right, that's what I was basically getting to, yeah.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yeah.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

And is there no time requirement now?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

They struck the language that said 365 days of service.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

So I mean --

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

If you have an honorable discharge -- my interpretation of this would be that as long as you received an honorable discharge, you could have served for a short period of time and been medically separated or medically discharged, I suppose.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Oh, okay. I gotcha.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

But as long as you have the honorable discharge certificate and your DD 214 shows service within the dates of eligibility.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

And this is active duty? I mean are we talking about weekend warriors and that type of stuff being included?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

It would be for veterans so it would not -- this would not refer to active duty. You have to have a DD 214 showing eligible service dates.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Schneiderman.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

This is on a different subject. I was listening to a program yesterday where they talked about the high percentage of homelessness among veterans. It was talking about the GI bill, which I know was very helpful to my father when he came back from World War II and helped pay for his education and a new career for him.

What I wanted to ask you, two components about returning vets. One is in terms of homelessness, is there -- what are we doing to kind of to watch out for either to take care of our own vets. And, two, in terms of education, if you could go over what we're doing at Suffolk County Community College. I do believe we have a program for vets, at least, I think, if could explain what we do in terms of helping them get an education?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Well, the education benefits, again, they're funded and run through the VA. Every college, every

institution of higher learning, they're supposed to have a liaison, somebody to interface with veterans coming into the system to assist them with their GI bill and their education funding.

One of the things that we're doing in New York and not in Suffolk alone, but in New York as a state, in addition to the GI bill, there is another \$8,000 that is available from the state, from the division of -- New York State Division of Veterans Affairs for veterans for education that is vastly under utilized. People are just not aware of it so.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

So are we reaching out to those returning veterans as they come back from Iraq and Afghanistan?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Absolutely, absolutely. We try to make that information a part of what we share with pretty much every OIF/OEF veteran that we see.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Do we have a specific program as a young soldier comes home where we send a person out to meet with them or the family to go over what programs Suffolk County has to offer?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

If we knew who they were, I would go myself. That's one of the big problems.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Why don't we? I mean, how many Suffolk County residents do we have serving, do we know right now in Iraq and Afghanistan?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

No, we don't know. Our best guess is that we have between four and 5,000 between Nassau and Suffolk County but it's a best guess.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

So maybe around 2000, 2500 in Suffolk?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Again, best guest. The problem that we have is the Department of Defense does not share the information about who is serving and who is returning with us. Oddly enough they don't share it with the VA.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

That's crazy. We ought to be notified when a vet is returning.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Well, I spoke several sessions ago about a situation that is taking place in Nassau County where -- please don't ask me to explain this because I can't -- one entity that does receive this information, and they have it in their possession, is the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs. They have historically refused to share that information with the counties. About three months ago Nassau County was able to negotiate a deal with the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs to release the list for Nassau County residents.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Because we now have, we've got scholarship programs, we've got reduced park fees, we've got all kinds of things that we are doing for these veterans. And it would be great if we could send them a packet as they came back, saying, you know, here we are, here's the contact numbers, here's what's available to you; take advantage, please. If you have questions, call. Can you see if you can

cut through the red tape and develop a way to reach veterans as they come back?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

We've tried several times. And I think the most -- the best source of that information is the list that the state has, but they refuse to share. That being said, the Governor has announced that the Director of the Division of Veterans Affairs is being replaced. Actually it's happening this week, the 14th of November. Mr. Basher will be leaving the post. And the gentleman replacing him, I've already spoken to him is anxious to come down and meet with myself and my counterpart in Nassau County and talk about programs and what we're doing in Suffolk County. I'm cautiously optimistic that we'll be able to get him to release this list that the state has thus far refused to share.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Right. We might be able to play a really helpful role in preventing homelessness. A certain percentage of the soldiers have PTSD and, you know, we do, you know, have counseling programs. There's a lot that we can offer. And it's much more expensive if we end up with homelessness --

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Absolutely.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

-- than to try to prevent it so I just again would ask you to figure out a way to cut through that problem so that we can -- instead of doing these county-wide education campaigns, I'd much rather see a targeted approach that got information to these men and women as they come back.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I would love to be able to do a couple of mailings a year and specifically target these groups as they are returning and educate them.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Even more than a mailing. I'm talking about like a visit to the home when this person comes back.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

When they come back, it's -- things are -- it's a little funny in this war because largely they're not deploying or returning en masse. They're not coming back as large units. They're coming back -- we call them onesies, and twosies.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Right.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

If we know who is coming back, again, we can target them. We can do mailings. We can go and do outreach to them. One of the things that I find very effective is when we hold our town hall meetings, when we do mailings to the communities, we do a little bit of press and we get the veterans to come into Babylon Town Hall or a media room at Dennison, and we have large groups that we can focus on and share this information with them because homelessness, it costs -- if you want to take the human face off of it and just look at in terms of economics, when they come home and don't receive the services and the care that they need and they become homeless, they become incarcerated, they become unemployed.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Right.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

These are all drains on the budgets. These are all expenses to the County where if we were able to be in touch with these people in many instances, we would be able to make that difference. So, I couldn't agree with you more, Legislator Schneiderman, that this information would be important.

And if it were properly used, we could make a tremendous difference.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Let's make it happen.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

I think we'd want to speak with your counterpart in Nassau County immediately to see what procedure he was able to follow and get that information.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Interestingly just for the record, they did the announcement -- in fact it was a major announcement at the time they thought it to be real a coup that they were able to make this agreement with the state. As of last week the proverbial check is in the mail. They have been promised the list, but they've yet to receive it.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Is that right?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

So.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Alden.

LEG. ALDEN:

You kind of have two problems. Well, actually there's a bunch problems that stem from this, but it's territorial because if you go to the DLD, they don't want to release any information because they feel that you're abetting the enemy and you can actually get tried for treason so that's a major problem. But then you also have the citizen soldier, which kind of puts a different spin on it now because that's kind of locally controlled. Whereas, you know, in the past if you were drafted that's a national draft and a national chain of command, whereas now some of it does come through the states as far as through the Governor's Office.

So you've got a lot of -- a lot of hurdles to jump. And both the Governor's Office and the DLD still maintain this, you don't want to really, you know, disclose your hand to the enemy how many troops you have coming back, how many -- as a matter of fact they try to guard even the injuries and the KIA's. You know, they don't want to even give that information up. So you're up against, you know, like I -- not a stonewall but, you know, some pretty heavy opposition as far as getting that information.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

It's challenging, it's very challenging. And probably the two best resources that we have are cultivating our relationships with the military units on the Island so that when something is coming down the pike they can, you know, through a side door make us aware of it. We do get invited to family support group meetings and things such as that.

The other thing that we do is we partner and work very closely with VA. And I can tell you that VA is sending us a lot of business. We're working very close with them. They've got a stand alone OIF/OEF clinic at the hospital in Northport, that is not just for medical services. It's for mental health, it's for primary care. It's for just a multitude of services, any service that the soldiers would be eligible for. But they routinely, routinely send them up to us. I would go so far as to say that not a day goes by where we don't get one or two at least that Northport is sending to us. There we're making contact, but again, in the bigger picture we need this information.

LEG. ALDEN:

But I think you probably see it too that the local Commander he really doesn't want to ruin his career and do something where, you know, like it goes right up the chain of command. If they find out you're giving out information and they have a, you know, a cloak on all that or a restriction on all that, he could possibly ruin, you know, any chance he has of promotion up through the ranks, whatever he's got left in his time in the military.

So you got some major problems that we're looking at. If the Governor would change his thoughts on it, then I think maybe that's a way to include some of our information in there, decommissioning packet or when they're brought back and, you know, because some of them aren't even decommissioned they're just brought back for, you know, like R and R and then resent back over; reassembled and sent back over. So I think that, you know, maybe that would be an approach; is just try to hit the, you know, the Governor's Office and see if he'll make a little bit of a change and just start including some of our information.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Again, this -- it happens tomorrow, the new Director takes place, he takes office. I agree that the Governor's Office is some place that we need to work. I don't believe that the Governor's intervention is necessary because Mr. Basher had made the agreement with Nassau --

LEG. ALDEN:

Okay.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

-- to release that information. So clearly the authority exists within the Director's Office, it's just a matter of prying the information free from him.

Hopefully this new Director -- he's already expressed a level of excitement that what is going on -- he believes Nassau and Suffolk to be models for what should be going on in other parts of the state. And that's why he has asked to come down and meet with, Ed Aulman, the Director in Nassau County and myself.

LEG. ALDEN:

Good.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I'm hoping that we'll get the support from him that we need. If not, I'm sure the Governor's Office is the next stop.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Eddington.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Yes, I'm going to ask your assistance with something because talking about returning veterans, I met with representatives of the Veterans Club at Suffolk Community College. And they told me of an existing problem and they came to me for help and I did mention that I would reach out to you. And it's that they will get a deferment -- a partial deferment to the first day of school, but then they have to make a payment. And as a person that went to school under the GI bill, I know those things could be four months in coming. I was very upset to hear that they would have to pay a dime. They're taking personal loans to cover some of the costs. That is not taking care of our GI's, our veterans.

So I would like to see that they don't pay a dime until their GI benefits come in, not take loans and have a choice between feeding your family or going to school. So I'm wondering -- I reached out to the assistant, I guess, president or vice-president, but maybe you could do some background too

because I have not heard back and that's been over a month ago.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I'd be happy to follow it up and see who at the college we need to speak to.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Okay.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

There are two things that would have to happen. First of all -- first off, our friends at VA would need to find a way to speed up the process of getting the money up because it can be a lengthy waiting process --

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Right.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

-- from the time the paperwork is submitted until a check is actually received.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Right.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I think there may actually be an overlap where it would be a requirement that you begin the schooling that they're funding with your GI benefit --

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Right.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

-- before they release money.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Right.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

They don't want to send a check on the hope that you're going to use it to go to school. They want you enrolled in school and actually attending a class --

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Right.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

-- before they release the money.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

That makes sense. The other piece is what I'm concerned about, and if it takes legislation, I'm sure I would be willing to do it and get a lot of co-sponsors.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I will follow up. I'll find out who it is that I need to speak to at the college.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Okay.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

And find out if the college would be willing to, you know, offer some sort of a deferred payment program for veterans in that situation until the money arrives.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

All I can tell you is that Stony Brook did it 20 something years ago and St. John's did it 40 years ago. So we're talking that it's been done.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

We're not reinventing the wheel.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

It's just not being done in Suffolk.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I will follow this up.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Thank you.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Carol, welcome.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

Hi.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

How are you doing?

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

I'm fine. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Good. Thanks so much for being with us today.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

You're welcome. It's my pleasure.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

You had me here last year, I'm happy to be back.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Before you begin, maybe you could just state your name and organization for the record.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

It's Carol Krishnamoorthy. And I'm the coordinator for Homeless Services at the VA Medical Center in Northport.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And how we doing?

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

We're doing fairly well with a very large problem. When I came before you last year I was unhappy and peeved and I'm in no better shape this year because as I was sharing with Tom, I just came back from a conference in San Diego where VA celebrated 20 years of service to homeless veterans, and I've been in it for maybe 12 myself.

And although we are doing a lot for homeless veterans, we have a lot of programs our facility right here at Northport, I have a number of different programs. I have transitional housing in the community. I've developed some permanent housing in the community. The problem is there are more and more homeless veterans. So as we work with those veterans who have been homeless across the years and we get them placed and we get them going and we have been able to do that, more and more people are becoming homeless.

And I heard you just reference the OIF/OEF veterans, which is a tremendous wave of new veterans that will be coming in and a lot of them are coming in without housing. And as you said without jobs, without education. And they're coming back with young families and it's very, very difficult.

So we are seeing an increasing number. We've enrolled already 4500 OIF/OEF vets at the medical center. And my program is working with a number of those people who are homeless at the Salvation Army. And we're working to get them transitional and permanent housing. And it's very difficult because they're coming back also with PTSD issues in need of treatment. A lot of them are not ready to begin job training at this time. They're going to need treatment first. And there are families dependent on them while they need this treatment so they're not going to be able to go out and produce an income and get a job and it's just creating a lot of difficulties.

I don't think we're going to see a reduction on Long Island in the number of homeless veterans. I think we're going to see an increase. And I think one of the only things that we can do -- there are a number of things we can do, but one of the most important things is really to see -- and we are trying to do this on a federal level, if we can work closer with HUD and get more HUD vouchers to help these individuals coming back because then it allows them on a limited income to at least have housing. That is a tremendous problem. A lot of the veterans that come into Salvation Army, I want you to know come in with no income, partial service connection. If I have a veteran that has an income of \$1200 a month, I'm ecstatic. Most of the veterans have income that's going to range 500, 600, 800.

If you can imagine how difficult it is for me to try to find them decent, clean, affordable housing in Suffolk County even in a group situation, you know what I'm up against. I've been able to do it, but on a limited basis, you know. I have some housing providers out there. I do have group transitional housing and some permanent housing. The cheapest I've been able to do it for is around 450 for the transitional and around 550 for the permanent. I have veterans who are in Vocational Rehab Programs who have gone through treatment and are now in voc-rehab whose income is less than a \$1,000 a month.

It's very difficult for them to make it out there even in a group veteran housing situation with that kind of an income when you have the cost of having transportation; if you have a car, you have your insurance and your gas.

And the other thing that I'm going to bring up here because it's an increasing problem and I know it's a big one, I don't know if there's anything we can do about it, I'm trying to work with someone in the office -- the OTDA Office at Albany to explore the problem and allow them to understand the scope of the problem of veterans who have child support payments due that are totally beyond their capacity to pay.

And what happens in these situations is that the veteran develops a tremendous backlog of child support payments. And if they are able to get some compensation for even a vocational rehabilitation job, if they open any kind of an account in our Credit Union or somewhere else, that amount of money will be garnished. And it will just disappear out of that account. And we've been going with our veterans back to court to get a downward modification and what they might owe in terms of child support based on their current income, but it does not help them with the problem of arrears. And these veterans owe thousands and thousands of dollars in child support arrears.

And what that does, too, is that when -- if you know, if these veterans go through job training, let's say they want to become a radiology technician or they need any kind of professional licensure, they cannot get it if they have that problem. They cannot renew a professional license. They cannot renew their driver's license.

And I was saying to Tom, I was working with somebody in our EAP Program, Employee Assistance, no names, but this is not a single example, this is veteran that has two children who's working. And he has the child support problem. And although he had gone back to court and he had gotten an amount that he was supposed to pay every month, child support enforcement came in and took his whole check. So there's a lack of coordination. Even when we do what we need to do to try to address these issues, there's a lack of coordination between agencies on a macro level.

So this is the kind of thing that's happening on top of people having very low incomes to begin with. And that's why I say to you we need more HUD vouchers, Section 8 type vouchers through HUD that for someone who is psychiatrically disabled, has a substance abuse problem, that that person might be able to pay one-third of their income, whatever that might be, and have the voucher program support them in housing.

We have a lot of veterans who have mental health or mental illness as their issue, but I tell you that having been working with these veterans for many years, even the ones with the most severe mental illness, if they have enough income, if they are service connected, say, 100%, nine times out of ten they do not end up homeless. It is an economic money question. The veterans that I'm working with do not have enough income to afford even the most rudimentary housing here on Long Island and it's going to continue.

So we need to have some supported housing programs. I'd love for more not-for-profits to come and work with us. I have not-for-profits that have come and have gotten VA grants and it's working very well, but I have a handful of people. And even with that, that's helpful; but that's not going to be the answer. I think it really is going to require the counties and townships working in better collaboration with HUD. And that's the focus that my department is going to take for the next year is cultivating those relationships.

I know the VA has had a relationship with HUD for Section 8 housing in the past. What happened was in the past Congress funded the housing -- sorry, didn't fund the appropriations. They created the legislation for something called VA-VASH Program, VA-HUD Voucher Program. But then over the last several years they have never created the funding that would actually provide for the vouchers. I hear they are looking at it again, now, so hopefully that will help a little bit, but that's the type of direction I think we need to move in.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

If I could just offer some perspective on this. A report was released last week. And this was done by the Federal Government. The report states that the population at large in the United States, veterans represent about 11% of the overall population. The veterans' representation within the homeless community is 26% so where as 11% of the community, but more than a quarter of the homeless population. So this is certainly a problem. And we've discussed this problem many times, but I think when you look at the numbers it's quite startling.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

What's just as startling and unacceptable is that result of that same study and the numbers that came out that the report says that our numbers of homeless veterans are actually growing at a much more alarming rate than even the Vietnam era veterans, those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

Absolutely.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And you would hope, you would think that after so many decades that we would have much better coordination among levels of government in different services and unfortunately that seems not to be not case.

My question is are there examples of other jurisdictions whether in New York or across the country that have implemented programs where there -- they do hold arrears in abeyance? Are there examples that we can look to where there is that type of coordination among different of government?

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

Yes, there are. A few states that have done this, and I've actually just gotten the information sent to me where there have been agreements between VA and those states regarding these issues, I haven't even had a chance to read it; but the answer is yes. There are some prototypes that we can follow. And what we've been doing with Albany OTDA, who has been apprised of this issue, is that we are sending them -- we're going to send them this information and we are also sending vignettes to them regarding our veterans because it's a factor as I just explained to you not only if you are homeless, can you not climb out of that hole with that arrears problem, it is actually like for example the employee I spoke to you about who's a vet, it's going to create a homeless problem for this gentlemen. So it's on both ends. It's creating homelessness. It's also preventing people from getting out of homelessness. So I see that as a tremendous area that we really need to work on. And, yes, I will work on that. I'm going to continue to work on that. And I can share that with Tom also to let them know what states have this legislation.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

I would love to see a copy of that and help anyway we can, of course.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

Okay, thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Yes, Legislator Eddington.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

So what I'm hearing is that for a longtime you've been reactionary because of the lack of communication. And that's what you're trying to do right now, be more proactive by reaching out and communicating and working with the different agencies. Am I correct in what you're --

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

Actually I've been trying to be proactive for years.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Okay.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

Ellen Nesbitt, who's a person that Tom knows well from the Office of Temporary Disability Assistance in Albany and I have been working on these types of cross governmental collaborative initiatives for

years. And we have one here that we did with OTDA with Nassau and Suffolk County here, but she -- this has been our pet issue for a couple of years. And we finally have someone who has a sympathetic ear and who's seeing this as a real serious problem. And the time is right, right now, but we've been trying to do this really for a couple of years already.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Okay. I have like a scenario in my head because you're saying that there are more homeless veterans on Long Island and as we see there will probably be even more. What I picture in my mind is a young man or woman living at home who gets into the service whether they may be married or not, goes overseas, is making some money doing a great job for our country and they come back and they can't go back home and that's where they're at. What's the real picture? Who are we talking about?

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

No, I think that is one good example. We have family situations that have more or less dissolved.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Okay.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

You know, while that person has been employed. And as you know with people being sent again and again and again, the stressors on the family, if that person is married, are very great. And a lot of times when they come back, that person is coming back with multiple medical and psychological issues, you know --

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Right.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

-- not just the PTSD, but multiple medical issues.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Right.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

These veterans that I've seen so far have more medical issues than the veterans that initially came back from Vietnam. This is my -- just my unique experience.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

So that really goes back to what my colleagues over here have said about, we need to know who's coming back and when they're coming back. That's seems to be a key element so that you can be more proactive is, you know, you're almost forced to be -- you can plan, but then you got to be reactive. What are we going to -- what can we do to help you to get these lists and get -- I know you're working on it, Tom, but if doesn't come through, can you then come up with a strategy so we can verbalize whether we need to stand at your office and verbalize the need for these lists? I know there's all reasons why, I mean they don't want it to become a political thing and all this. But then you get it and then we can help and reach out. But we need -- that seems to be the key issue.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Well, the list, I think we'll have an answer one way or the other on list before the next session.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Okay.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

I think the other thing is, you know, I could -- Tom and I can talk, I mean, I -- we don't have access

to everyone coming back; that's a problem, but at least for those veterans coming back to VA, when we do our initial screening and we screen all of them, we might be able to hand out a packet from you guys. I mean, I don't have to speak to Joe Sledge and see if we could do that, but we might at least be able to hit those people that actually come back to us. And we do a lot of outreach and we have had a good number of people coming through and continue to come through.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Great.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

So that we could help you with you right away.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Great. Okay, good

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Standard operating procedure with Vanessa Brown, who runs the OIF/OEF Clinic, SOP with her is as a part of their overall process they make the veterans aware of us. They do let them know and they do advise them to present at our offices. We have the ability to do some good with the veterans who present at VA. The problem is not all of them do. A large number of them do not go to the VA. And those are the guys that we really to get our hands on.

One of the problems that we're seeing with this war, not that it's unique, but I think it's beginning to show that it's more prevalent than we've seen in the past. And my belief is that largely because of the multiple deployments that we're exposing these troops to, we're seeing staggeringly high PTSD numbers.

One of the problems with PTSD is a veteran with PTSD diagnosed or undiagnosed is very likely to not seek help, you know; yet it's a large male community. We have a very large number, an increasing number of woman veterans, but you have that -- it's a stubbornness, it's a pride, veterans don't want to ask for help, you know. And what they do is they'll go home, they'll go into the -- they'll go -- if they're living at home, in a car, in a friend's basement, wherever they are, one of the things that we routinely see with PTSD is the veterans will self-medicate. They'll turn to alcohol and substance abuse. It only compounds their problem. Now you've got somebody with a mental condition that's not being treated or is being treated, they're self-medicating. If they are employed if the substance or alcohol abuse becomes serious, then they potentially become unemployed. Now you're unemployed, you have no income, homeless, it's a vicious cycle.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

You know, it seems to me that as you're talking I'm thinking you know that I did the workshop in my area. And, of course, I'm going to give it to all the Legislators, but it seems to me that as you're saying what you're saying, both of you, this should be on TV. This should be, you know, welcome back our soldiers, here are the things -- I think we've got to get the media involved, you know what I mean? We're trying to solve a problem and they could do it. Certainly we know how powerful the media is. Maybe we got to get them to do some public service and continually bang out the message that there is help and you guys are the people to come to.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

If we could get 10% of the time in the media that Britney Spears' social life gets, what an impact we could make.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Well then let us know what we can do to help facilitate that through the Chair. I mean, if we have to go meet with somebody whether it's TV or radio maybe we need to do something like that.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

Well, I'll tell you're right on track because just this morning CBS called me and I gave it to Joe Sledge so we might get that opportunity --

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Great.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

-- to actually educate people about what's going on.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Great, great.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

And obviously Tom will be definitely involved in that.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Great.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

So I'll keep you posted.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Great.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

But I think you're right about that.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Thank you.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

But it's not just the outreach in getting them engaged. We have a lot of treatment work to do, but then where do they live on Long Island once they're in treatment and they're trying to move forward and they do not have the financial resources they need? We can do everything except the permanent housing. Affordable permanent housing is the ticket to having people not be homeless. And we don't have a lot of that that they have access to. It's a real serious issue that we need to address here on Long Island.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And getting that message out through the media or otherwise, of course, is an important element. But there are those that are in desperate need of help and services who are not going to be tuned in in quite that way. And Director Ronayne has shown outstanding leadership in taking it to the streets.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

Yes.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And taking it into our community and helping to identify those homeless veterans and getting them the services that they need. So, Tom, I'm going to ask, you know, at what point are we at, how have you been doing, how is that effort been going and what do you think we need to be looking at in the future to increase what is clearly, you know, a growing need?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Well, we're in the process right now of picking up the tempo because we have the changing seasons.

We're coming into a season now where over the summer we encountered veterans who were living in the woods or living in a van or so forth. They're less inclined to come in while the weather is comfortable, the evenings are warm, the trees are green. It's getting cold at night now. It's getting cold, it's getting wet. And we're finding that they are demonstrating more of a willingness to come in with us. We're regular visitors of the emergency room at Northport right now. When we get these folks, we put them right into a vehicle before they get to change their mind, if they're willing, we get them up, we get them evaluated and we're seeing results. But again, there's only so much that we can do given what we have.

And again, the information as Legislator Alden said, that's the cog right there, that's the core of the whole thing is having this information. And if we can intervene and get our hands on these returning veterans before they find themselves in the unemployed and homeless situation, everybody wins, everybody wins.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Alden.

LEG. ALDEN:

And we're going to find out much is in that advertising account that was recently used so maybe we'll redeploy some of those monies. But I have a question. The buildup in the arrears, that's occurring after their discharge or after their return; not while they're serving now; right?

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

Okay, this is not not basically about OIF/OEF. That's about other veterans that are older and have children and they've been not supporting them for a long period of time. It's going to occur with these veterans who if they cannot be employed. And what we're trying to do now is to make sure that they don't -- if there are family breakups and there are children and these decisions are made, that they actually go to court, they get a downward modification in terms of what they are supposed to pay so they do not build up these huge arrears because we realize what a problem it's been for the other veterans that we've been working with. Okay?

LEG. ALDEN:

Okay, now -- okay.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

So we're trying to do what we can, but those children have to be taken care of, too, so it's just really, really an issue. They don't have the money to pay what they need to pay.

LEG. ALDEN:

No, but unfortunately then the -- I guess, the taxpayers at large --

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

Yes.

LEG. ALDEN:

-- outlay that money.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

That's correct.

LEG. ALDEN:

And then they try to recover it from the responsible party.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

That's right, that's right.

LEG. ALDEN:

All right, but you're saying it's more like the older veterans that have basically walked away from their responsibilities and having sought that downward modification when they've fallen on harder times.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

Right. It's really people -- as Tom said I think the important thing to remember is that 40% of those people who are homeless veterans have a combined substance abuse, mental health problem.

LEG. ALDEN:

But a returning veteran though from Iraq or Iran or -- not Iran, but Afghanistan, they would actually be counseled that, you know, when you separate if your income's going to go down, you should immediately go and seek a downward modification, I would --

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

Yes, we are; we are doing that.

LEG. ALDEN:

Okay. Good, thanks.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Because child support and family law is a very private thing, I guess, it's a tough thing to keep numbers on. One area that they are able to track and we do have a statistic on this is child support arrears with incarcerated veterans. And the number for the incarcerated veterans who have child support issues, the average veteran being discharged or released from jail with arrears in their child support, the arrears exceed \$20,000. So -- and that's the average. So I'm not saying -- we're not saying that all veterans in child support situations are in arrears; but of those who are, the average being discharged from an incarcerated situation exceeds \$20,000. So it's a serious problem.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Anybody else? Yeah, Legislator Schneiderman.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

You know, it's certainly a shameful situation where, you know, when they die over there in Iraq because of some roadside bomb, you know, we call them heroes. And if they live and they make it back they end up homeless, it's really -- it's a very sad situation that we are not doing more for these people.

Housing in Suffolk County is a problem across the board. One thing maybe we can do in working with the towns, I know we have an awful lot of senior citizens who many of them are probably living alone in homes. The town codes probably don't allow them to have a second apartment. But why not bend the rule for a returning veteran without increasing their taxes, allow them an apartment. It will help the senior pay their mortgages and it will help that vet stay in the community. So there may be ways if able to work on the town level with some of the zoning to come up with some respectable ways for these veterans to return to our communities and stay.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Well, speaking on behalf of all of the veterans of Suffolk County, we'll take all the help we can get.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And let's continue this very important dialogue and please let us know what each of us can and has to do to help.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Thank you very much.

MS. KRISHNAMOORTHY:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thank you. Okay, we have one introductory resolution on the agenda today.

INTRODUCTORY RESOLUTION

It is **IR 2097, Adopting a Local Law to Establish a Cold War Veterans Property Tax Exemption (Romaine)** I'll make a motion to table for public hearing.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Second.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Second by Vice-chairman Eddington. All in favor? Any opposed? Any abstention? Motion carries.

(TABLED VOTE: 4-0-0-1 Not Present: Legislator Cooper)

Before we close today, Cliff, did you want to say something? I'll call Cliff as part of our public portion.

PUBLIC PORTION

LEG. ALDEN:

Mr. Chairman, while Cliff's coming up --

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Alden.

LEG. ALDEN:

-- maybe you should just put on the record when that public hearing would take place.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Public hearing is going to be November 20th.

LEG. ALDEN:

At 2:30, right?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

November 20th at 2:30.

MR. HYMOWITZ:

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee -- hello, hello, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I appreciate your letting me speak briefly. To change the mood of things I'm actually not here on transportation, I'm here representing the Town of Brookhaven as a mobility and disability specialist, which will come up in discussion at the Public Works Committee.

I just wanted to bring a couple of things to your attention. First of all, Family Service League has a program ready in existence called Share a Home. So I would really recommend that they use that resource. It's Family Service League that has it. And they do the matching with the seniors who are looking for people. So that's a really good resource.

The second thing is that the VA has a clinic in Babylon that specializes in marital discourse, you

know, having problems with marriage. And so I would be reach out to them to the Babylon clinic because they have a lot of good resource and they might have a listing at least I'm sure have a listing of people that are coming to them.

And the other thing I wanted to mention to you is that the Suffolk County United Veterans have a really good housing program for homeless veterans. And they've also been asked by the state to open up a drug treatment center. And, Mr. Eddington, that happens to be in your wife's office building. And so they're going to be addressing it that way.

The last thing is when they mention about the housing choice vouchers, which used to be all Section 8, there is a housing choice voucher called a mainstream voucher, which is for people with disabilities. However, each municipality that administers the Housing Choice Voucher Program has an administrative plan. In that administrative plan they detail how they're going to implement their vouchers. And the biggest one is the Community Development Corporation of Suffolk County, CDC who's under your auspices. Okay. They can do a lot more, okay, than they're doing now. What it is is, and what the woman said is correct, they're giving out more vouchers than they're given money to fund, okay. But the thing is that community -- CDC should start taking lists of veterans who want to be notified when the vouchers have been given out. They're refusing to take lists of people who want to be notified. Now, for example, I don't know how many people know the Town of Islip for two months -- or I think -- is opening up their Housing Choice Voucher Program.

So I would suggest that you reach out to each town body that handles the Housing Choice Voucher Program, ask to see their administrative plan, review it, and see that they make a priority for people with disabilities and seniors. So anyway --

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good.

MR. HYMOWITZ:

-- I hope that's helpful.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thank you, thank you. Okay, everybody good, everybody good? Okay. Motion to adjourn.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Second.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay, second. And we are adjourned. Thank you.

**(THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 2:13 PM)
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY**