

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 October 3, 2011.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Leg. Steven H. Stern, Chairman
Leg. Sarah Anker, Vice Chair
Leg. Vivian Vilorio-Fisher
Leg. Edward P. Romaine
Leg. Lou D'Amaro

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Sarah Simpson, Assistant Counsel
Renee Ortiz, Chief Deputy Clerk
Laura Halloran, Budget Review Office
Eric A. Kopp, County Executive's Office
Ed Hennessy, Aide to County Executive
Tom Ronayne, Director/Veterans Service Agency
Holly Rhodes-Teague, Director/Office for the Aging
Paul Perillie, Aide to Majority Leader
Deborah Harris, Aide to Leg. Stern
Jack Caffey, Aide to Presiding Officer
William Shilling, Aide to Leg. Anker
Tom Ryan, Aide to Leg. Vilorio-Fisher
Justin Littell, Aide to Leg. D'Amaro
Ali Nazir, Aide to Leg. Kennedy
Constance Fleming, Administrator for Sunrise Manor Nursing Home
Phil Berler, Freedoms Flying Memorial
Seth Bailan, Freedoms Flying Memorial
Kenneth Dolan, member/SC Veterans Advisory Board
And all other interested parties

VERBATIM MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 11:31 AM

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Welcome. Good morning everyone to the Committee on Vets and Seniors. And I ask everybody to please rise and join us in the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator D'Amaro.

SALUTATION

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

MOMENT OF SILENCE OBSERVED

PUBLIC PORTION

Thank you. Good morning everyone and thank you for being with us today. We'll start off with the public portion. I have one card, Kenneth Dolan. Good morning, Ken.

MR. DOLAN:

Good morning. I'm here to advocate for the continuing of a full budget for the Veterans Services Organization of the County. I serve as a member of the Veterans Advisory Board under Director Tom Ronayne. And I've come to realize what a wonderful service the veterans -- I'm a little nervous here, fellows.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Take your time.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

You're among friends.

MR. DOLAN:

-- the Veterans Services give to the veterans of this County. And in light of the -- probably up and coming draw down, we're going to get a lot more veterans returning home, many of whom are young -- young ladies and men who joined the service out of high school with no jobs in the interim. So when they come back, they're going to need a lot of services. And the services that are garnered by the Veterans Agency brings money into the County. These federal dollars will make the veterans viable members of the community. They'll be getting back -- getting jobs, getting back to work and becoming productive citizens.

So I don't want to belabor the fact, but it's a wonderful job. The Veterans Services Officers, if they're laid off, there's going to be a serious backlog. I know Dave Rivera who runs special programs, such as the stand down and the job fair, and is now currently involved with the VA Hospital Stand Down, these services will diminish and make it more difficult for our veterans returning home to find employment. That's about it. I don't want to belabor you folks with anything else. Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

All right. And thank you. Thanks so much for being with us today. With that in mind, we'll have Director Ronayne join us.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, members. Thank you as always again for the opportunity to appear before you this morning.

I've got a few items that I'd like to cover quickly. And then I have an issue that I'd like to spend a moment on and get a little bit in depth, if I might. The first couple of items are really more housekeeping issues. And I wanted to ensure that there was an awareness amongst the members of some of the recently past events as well as some of our more important upcoming events. As we approach Veterans Day, as always, on November 11th, we will have our annual ceremonies or observances at our national cemeteries both at Long Island National Cemetery in Pine Lawn and at Calverton, which are always well attended; and as always through the administrators of both facilities an open invitation always exists for the members to visit the facilities, certainly for ceremonies and observances. And if any of you at any time would like a tour or a briefing on the operations and the efforts that go into the operations and the maintenance of these facilities, I would be more than happy to arrange those visits.

Also taking place on November 11, and there is a conflict at this time so there is a possibility -- I would go so far as to say a likelihood that there will be an adjustment made in the time. On November 11th we will be observing or celebrating, in this case, the 20th anniversary of the Vietnam monument on Bald Hill in Farmingville.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

How many years?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Twenty.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

I can't believe it's been 20 years.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

It just happened, right? That thing didn't used to be there when you came up North Ocean Avenue.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

I know.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

But obviously this is a milestone anniversary. Many of the original committee members who were involved in the acquisition, the design, the construction and the opening of the monument will be serving as the committee for the event, which is upcoming. Right now that event is scheduled to take place at one PM on November 11th. The problem with that is that on that same day at one o'clock at the same time, the annual ceremony at Calverton National Cemetery takes place. Depending upon whether -- that ceremony can have anywhere from several thousand to approaching several hundred to approaching a thousand attendees.

The ceremonies occurring at the same time unfortunately would compete with one another. And I think unfortunately because of the prior commitments the lion's share of our veterans and other interested parties would probably wind up at Calverton. So we have suggested that some thought go into rethinking the time for the ceremony at Bald Hill. I've spoken to a number of the members of the advisory committee at Calverton and they agree. They will help get the word out on the Bald Hill event as well. But doing them both at the same time unfortunately, I think, would be counterproductive.

Before we have the Veterans Day observances, we have a very unique ceremony taking place on the campus of the VA Medical Center in Northport. And that will be -- for the first time the Traveling Vietnam Wall, which is a full three-quarter size replica of the wall in Washington DC -- anybody who has not experienced it, you don't visit it; you experience it. It truly is an exceptional experience to visit this thing and see what goes into it and the impact that it has. The Traveling Wall will be visiting the Northport VA Campus on October 28th, 29th and 30th. Opening ceremonies will be on October 28th. Formal invitations have not yet gone out. Some notifications have gone out, but there has been some back and forth with regard to the key guest. And at this time the guest who was hopefully going to be our speaker and honored guest was going to be Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs Shinseki. His office had as of several weeks ago declined the invitation due to prior commitments; however, we are being told through VA that there is now again a possibility that the secretary might be attending.

There are several other events occurring on that weekend that would be of interest to the secretary so through whatever back channels the VA is working, we're told to stand by to stand by, that the secretary may, in fact, still be attending. Whether he does or not, obviously each of you will be receiving invitations from Director Philip Moschitta at VA to attend the opening ceremonies and be a part of the honored guest contingent.

For the first time on the campus or on the grounds of a VA medical center, and I'll qualify that statement in a moment, on October 28th Northport VA will be hosting the first ever on the grounds of a VA medical center Homeless Veterans Stand Down. A great deal of planning has gone into this event. A lot of good people are working very hard. I'm very proud to say that given the dramatic successes that we have had in Suffolk County with our own homeless veterans stand down and our -- stand downs and our homeless veterans initiative program, we have been asked to and have proudly accepted to sit in a role as key or senior advisors to VA on the preparation and administration or production of the stand down. And while I'd like to say that it's all me, I have told you many times I'm only the pretty face. I go out there and make sure people know who we are. But the hard work is really being done by David Rivera from my office, who handles all of our homeless veteran programs amongst other things. David has been working closely with VA. As it stands now, it appears that the vast majority of the volunteers, who as you all know are key to having a successful stand down event, will be drawn from our volunteer base that we use through our department for programs here in Suffolk. Again, that is through the efforts of David Rivera.

Those are all significant events. They're very, very meaningful for what I think are probably obvious reasons and some reasons that may not be so obvious to our veterans community as well as the extended community, the veterans, their family members, their survivors and so forth. All of our veterans service organizations will be out in force at these events. And I look forward to seeing each of you at them. As I said, you'll be receiving invitations for all of them.

And as you'll see in a moment, I said that this would be the first time that a homeless veteran stand down is taking place on the campus of a VA medical center. At the time that VA Northport made the announcement that they were going to be hosting this event, that was, in fact, the case. Post announcement, once the notifications had been issued that VA Northport was going to be holding this event on October 28th, VA Bronx announced that they were going to hold one the Friday before ours. So they'll be out of the gate just before us. But obviously, and I think the proof will be in the pudding, we have had the benefit of a great deal more planning and the opportunity to prepare a much more comprehensive event.

Prior to that, my calendar today for some reason I wrote everything down backwards so my calendar is starting further out and ticking in. In just two weeks -- less than two weeks now on October 14th at our Police Academy, and I have to thank the Police Department, the Academy and Commissioner Dormer for always being so supportive of our programs and our services, we will be hosting our annual Veterans Employment and Job and Employment Fair once again at the Police Academy on the

Brentwood Campus of Suffolk Community College. This year my numbers may be off just a little bit, but as of Friday, we had 61 vendors in agreement that they were going to be participating. Mr. Rivera, again, had come to me and told me that even with a full house, 61 was stretching it terms of capacity for the room. David sat down and did some design work and appears to have come up with a way of preparing the room in such a way that we'll be able to get -- I'm not sure how many more, but more vendors into the space. So the number is 61 plus at this point.

As we spoke about last year going into the event, and it wore itself out after the event with the enormous attendance and the large success of the event, the economy being what it is, we intend or we expect that we will once again have a bittersweet success. We expect to have a great many veterans attending the event. The shame of that is that we have to have a great many veterans attend the event. These are not folks looking to change careers or move onto other opportunities. These are people who are just looking for jobs. And the numbers, we all know, are just really bad out there right now.

So with the support of the community, with the support of so many of our employers who have been out there for us in the past and a number of new ones, we intend that -- we expect that this event will be very widely received and very well attended. And, again, invitations will -- I think they'll be going out to your offices. I know we had sent fliers to each of the district offices in hopes that anybody who came into your district offices would have the ability to access that information. But actual invitations will be going out to the members. I believe they're going in today's mail. So they'll be inter-office and you should have them in the next day or so. But that will be Friday October 14th from ten AM to, I believe, two PM.

The final item that I'd like speak on goes to the County Executive's budget that was released. As we all know, and as I just spoke of, we are -- we live in difficult times. I understand fully that the need to be fiscally prudent is upon us. And the County Executive is looking at all areas with regard to preparing his budget. I fully understand the challenges that he is facing. I have full and complete respect for the job that he's got to do. I certainly would not want it. It's not an enviable thing to have to be the person putting forth a budget in these times. Unfortunately the budget will, as written, require that the Veterans Service Agency lose two filled positions at this point: One Veteran Service officer and one Management Technician.

Again, I fully appreciate the need for all of us to share the pain and to make due with resources available to us to the best of our ability. But I think in our situation we have a unique role or a unique function to be served. And certainly at a time when we're prosecuting two wars, and we will be having larger numbers of deployed service men and service women returning home to the United States, and that translates into our very own communities, I anticipate that the need for veterans services will be increasing. And I just have a concern that should we have -- should we find ourselves in a position of not being able to meet that demand, that these folk who most need our services will -- certainly we would never not have them be able to access those services, but the delays in receiving those services would be unfortunate.

One point that I would like to make with regard to our budget is, and certainly now that the satellite clinic in Riverhead has opened, we, I think, are fairly unique in County departments in that we return to the County's economy a great deal more money than the County invests in our budget. As an example, last year for the calendar year with regard to recovery of monies for veterans who had come to our office to prosecute claims for either disability or pension, we had recovered a total of just about \$8.3 million on behalf of those veterans. That was January through December of last year.

This year 2011 January through September, the actual number for 2010, and I'll have -- I'll give Debbie a copy of this for distribution, the actual number last year was 8,269,000 and change. This year through September only, we are well over \$10.3 million and we still have a quarter yet to go. I

think this speaks very clearly to the fact that the number of veterans being served through the Riverhead office, which has now been opened since May, and we're beginning to see a return on claims that have been prosecuted or submitted on behalf of our East End veterans who have not had the benefit of services for a very, very longtime, is beginning to bear fruit. We're beginning to see the result of the administration of those services. So at this point we're running about 25% over in dollars recovered than the entire calendar year of last year. And we anticipate that to, if not remain static, probably increase given the number of returning service members that we will be seeing.

In addition to the fact, I know some of you but possibly not all of you, are aware that not too long ago the Department of Veterans Affairs added two new medical conditions to the list of what are known as presumptive conditions for Vietnam veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange during their service in Vietnam. We have had many that we have worked well with our veterans over the years. The two that were added most recently were Parkinson's Disease and Ischemic Heart Disease. And to put it as simplistically as I can, the argument for a claim with a veteran with Ischemic Heart Disease is essentially any veteran with a heart condition. We are able to make an argument that that condition is now documentable and attributable to their service in Vietnam. Veterans with conditions who are listed on the list of presumptives do not generally require an argument to be made on their behalf. We prepare the paper work, we submit it. And with some exceptions, but generally if all of the paper work and all of the documentation is intact, as we strive to do in our office, we only submit claims that we consider what is known in the industry as ready to rate.

There are a great many veterans who -- not as many with Parkinson's but certainly if you consider the age group of our Vietnam veterans, Vietnam veterans with heart disease are out there in large numbers. And the services that we're administering on their behalf are not only providing benefit and relief to the veterans and their loved ones, but also returning dollars into the County's economy. Not into the County Treasury's Office, but into the local economy, which I would probably argue is more important. Those are the dollars that are being spent in the downtowns; those are dollars that are being spent to improve our homes and so forth.

So I would leave you with those observations. And, again, I thank you for the opportunity to be here. And I'm happy to answer any questions.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thank you, Tom. Can you talk a little bit about the positions highlighted in the proposed budget? You had mentioned their titles. But can you talk a little bit about the -- what they actually do, the services that they provide to the agency and to our veterans?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Certainly. The first one is the position of a Veteran Service Officer. Veteran Service Officer is essentially just what it sounds like. It is an individual who first must qualify and be recognized by the State of New York as having veteran status. That must be the case prior to being able to receive the mandated trainings that occur for the position of Veteran Service Officer. When these trainings are successfully completed, and they're required to be re-accredited -- accreditation is achieved upon the successful completion of the initial training. That would be the service officer training.

Every two years the mandate is that the service officer be re-accredited by attending an Advanced Veteran Service Officer Training Program. Generally those are administered in Washington DC. That is where we normally travel to attend these trainings. And the Service Officers become trained and versed in all areas of administration and prosecution of claims on behalf of veterans, whether it be medical, whether it be financial, whether it be loans, education, home loans, vocational training, homeless services, non-service connected pensions, which are income driven; not necessarily related to a veteran's disability, but to that veteran's income. The statistics bear out that an accredited Veteran Service Officer prosecuting a claim on behalf of a veteran compared to a veteran

who attempts to administer the claim on his own or using the services of somebody who is not accredited, the Veteran Service Officer is recognized as being successful 7 to 9 times more likely. That's a 700 to 900 percent greater likelihood of administering a successful claim. The amount of recovery for those successful claims is also greater than veterans attempting to administer them on their own.

The Management Technician is actually an interesting position within our Department. The position entails a number of things. One of them would be --

LEG. D'AMARO:

Just before you get to that second position, the Veteran Service Officer you just spoke to, the position's being eliminated or proposed to be eliminated in the County budget, how many of those officers would remain?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

We would retain five including the Directors.

LEG. D'AMARO:

So you have six now including the Directors and you would go down to five?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Correct. And I think it's important to note that of the Service Officers that we now have, one of them is retiring on March 2nd of 2012. He'll only be here for the first quarter of the year. Now, because he is not leaving prior to January 1, his position is funded for him through the year. But when he leaves that position, there'll be nobody drawing down on that salary that will be funded for the balance of the year. So in the instance of the VSO, the Veteran Service Officer, we're talking about -- if that retirement -- if that retiree is not to be replaced, the position would be completely funded save for three months. So the elimination of that position in its entirety is a little bit deceptive because the -- because the Service Officer has not yet formally submitted his documents for retirement, it can't be factored into the budget. But I have spoken to him extensively and he will be leaving the first Monday in March.

LEG. D'AMARO:

So that'll bring you down to four.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Correct.

LEG. D'AMARO:

By March. And then unless that position's filled, you'll remain at four. What's the caseload or the workload like? How many applications -- you know, how do you measure that? And, you know, is it -- is it overburdened right now or is it, you know, running at an even keel so to speak?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

We are -- between the two offices, we're up about 4.2% in numbers of clients being seen. To date this year -- I have to do math here -- to date this year between Riverhead and Hauppauge, we have served 21,264 veterans or dependents or survivors. That number includes office visits, mail and telephonic contact.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Is that the number -- excuse me for interrupting. Is that the number of vets served by the Service Officer?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yes.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Okay, so --

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I don't have a breakdown with me at the moment --

LEG. D'AMARO:

That's fine.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

-- for each individual Service Officer.

LEG. D'AMARO:

So over 21,000 veterans have been served by the six Veteran Service Officers from January 1 to date?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

That is correct.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Okay. And that's not the number of applications; that's the number of veterans?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

That's the number of veterans. And these veterans when they are seen, while we primarily serve with regard to veterans services, they can come in to see us for questions regarding Social Security, education, local, County, Town and State programs. So they're not all necessarily VA programs. The New York State Division of Veterans Affairs has a number of programs that we work with. Towns, Villages and so forth have local programs. So this doesn't represent 21,600 -- 21,264 VA claims, but this is universally.

LEG. D'AMARO:

I think it's fair to say it's a high volume, right?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I would call that an understatement, yes.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right. And my last question is, are the positions reimbursed at all? Or is it County funded; 100% County funded positions?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

At this time they are all County funded. One of the problems, and when I get into the explanation of the responsibilities of the Management Technician, one of those responsibilities is to research and pursue grant and funding opportunities. It is difficult to find funding for personnel to begin with. And in Suffolk County we -- unless we have a permanent -- a commitment for a permanent funding stream, we can't fund staff with grants or other types of funding that we do not have a commitment -- that would not be recurring for that purpose.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Okay. All right. Thanks for answering my questions. Thank you, Chair, also.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I should note that we do receive a stipend from the New York State Division of Veteran Affairs based on veteran population. That is about -- I believe it's about \$65,000 a year that we get from the State obviously in addition to County dollars.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Romaine; then Legislator Vilorina-Fisher.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Yes, very quickly, you mentioned something about \$10 million in revenue that your department is responsible for. Is that revenue coming to the County, is that revenue just coming to the General economy or, how is that calculated?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

To date it is \$10,338,000. And that is money that goes directly to the veterans or the recipient of the claims that we prosecute.

LEG. ROMAINE:

So you're putting that money into the County for the veterans to help them with whatever their needs are. And that money in all likelihood is expended locally; is that correct?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Well, I certainly can't speak to what everybody does with their own money, but I can tell that I'm a serviced connected disabled veteran and I spend mine.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Right.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Whether it's at Stop & Shop or my automobile mechanic's --

LEG. ROMAINE:

My father, before he was deceased, was a disabled veteran as well, wounded in World War II. And he spent his money on, you know, groceries and cars, gas and all things local.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yes.

LEG. ROMAINE:

So losing these two positions, would that slow down the processing of these types of things? What would that mean if we lost these two positions? Does that have an impact on revenue that you take in, that you transfer to veterans, what does that do?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Well, I can only project at this point having --

LEG. ROMAINE:

Because I know people are saying do more with less. I want to find out how much more you have to do and how much less we might be getting.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Well, again, I can only project because I don't know what the actual impact would be, but it stands to reason in my mind that if X number of people are serving X number of clients, if you remove one of those people, you will remove that number of clients being served. There are only so many hours

in the day.

LEG. ROMAINE:

You don't have your budget with you, do you? Somewhere? I didn't bring my budget document with me today.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I do not.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Okay. Maybe you can e-mail all the members of this Committee, I just have an interesting question that you might do. How much -- he's laying off two members of your Department; is that correct? In the budget? In the recommended -- the County Executive's Recommended Budget calls for the removal of two currently filled positions; is that correct?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yes.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Could you e-mail me how much you put in for terminal sick leave and terminal vacation pay?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yes, we will. You'll have that today.

LEG. ROMAINE:

You understand why I'm asking that question? It is in the departments that have suffered far more layoffs -- the amounts in those budget lines are miniscule and leaves one to wonder. Thank you very much.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

And to continue with the Management Technician --

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

I'm sorry, I had a question about the VSO's as well. Aren't there federal guidelines regarding the caseload of each of the -- of the Service Officers? And are we within the federal parameters, if there are any?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I apologize. I didn't hear the first part of your question.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Are there federal guidelines regarding how many vets are serviced by each Service Officer? I mean I know our population is growing. Are there guidelines as to how many Service Officers we should have visa vie population? Is there a ratio?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Believe it not, no there are not. New York State does have a program again where they provide funding to counties based on veteran population, but that does not go into the area of how many veterans are served. It's shear -- it's purely based on population of veterans residing within the County. Not services administered.

CHAIRPERSON VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I will say that in New York State the Office of the Division -- or the -- let me rewind here. The Veterans Service Agency is a mandated department within the State of New York. So that being said, you know, we do what we must do with what we have but --

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Getting back to my question, do you have any idea what most jurisdictions have as a ratio?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Some --

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Where do we stand, in other words? I just want to know we're providing the services that we should be providing.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

We're about average. We're about average. Some have more; some have less.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay. Thank you.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

And just finally on the Management Technician, in addition to his responsibilities with regard to researching and pursuing grants and funding opportunities, obviously as we discussed not for personnel or staffing, for the reasons that I had explained, but for programs and equipment, things that allow us to administer our programs, one good example would be the Department of Labor grant that we apply for each year, which is -- which helps us to offset any expenses associated with our Homeless Veterans Stand Down. In addition to those duties, Mr. Rivera also administers the programs that I had outlined earlier, the homeless programs, the stand downs, the job and employment fairs and all of our outreach.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

That's a particularly important point because you might not get that from the title. But it's important, I think, for all of us to understand that they provide so many more services than you just get from just reading through the title. It sounds like a lot of core programs that continue to make a meaningful impact. Director, thank you. As always.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Holly?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Good afternoon everybody. I have a couple programs I wanted to talk to you about. There's major changes happening in them and I know that you're going to hear from the constituents about it.

The first one is the Health Insurance Counseling Program. The open enrollment for Medicare and the part D Program has changed. And that will be from October 15th to December 7th. And a lot of our constituents are used to November 15th to December 31st. So it's important that they know that. It's October 15th to December 7th. They've moved it up.

We're also providing training to the HICAP counselors and to interested parties. I believe all your offices received information on the training. And that training is being held -- the training's being

held on October 12. And that's at the H. Lee Dennison so if you have staff that needs to get the updates, please have them call our office sooner than later because we're putting that list of who's going to be there.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Holly, I saw that e-mail. And I asked my aide -- they've all gone to the EPIC training before and the other training. But are you saying somebody should go again? Are there updates that --

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

One of the major changes to the programs that are coming up for January 1st is that the EPIC Program has changed drastically. New York State will no longer be covering co-payments for people. What it's going to be is a donut hole only program. So where seniors used to get coverage for a lot of different drugs throughout the time that they're taking them, what's happening now is when they reach the donut hole in their Part D Plan will be the only time that EPIC covers them. So it's important that they know that.

There's no fee to be in the plan anymore. And there's no deductible plan anymore. Those have all gone to the wayside. There's no cost to be in the EPIC Program if you meet their income guidelines. If you're in the program and you hit the donut hole -- and you have to have a Part D Plan. You can't be in EPIC without Part D anymore. So when you're in the Part D and you get to the donut hole --

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Someone from our office should be there.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Somebody should be there because the changes to EPIC are pretty drastic. That's the short version. So if they can call our office, we'd appreciate that.

The second program is the Home Energy Assistance Program. And as most of you know, I'm a subcontractor to Department of Social Services for that program. We take care of those 60 plus. And that program has changed as well. The federal program cut the program -- the funding for it by 50%. Then the State Office had to make their plan. So OTODA made their plan and they're changing their guidelines. Their program used to open November 1st. It's now opening November 16th. And we'll probably close earlier this year. It'll probably close in March. And they're not covering as much in terms of the expenses. The maximum benefits somebody could get is \$500. And that's down from last year when it was 700, down from 900 two years ago.

So the Home Energy Assistance Program is changing. We don't believe it will cover as many people unless there's a second infusion of funding from the federal government, which means that it would behoove everybody to get applications in sooner. And with that program not opening until November 16th, applications are not available for people until that time. The early mail-out to those who've already received the benefit in the preceding year has gone out. And to date our offices received about 3,000 applications.

LEG. ROMAINE:

This is HEAP?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

HEAP. So it's an important program to let your constituents know that if they're going to apply, they need to apply as soon as that program opens because the funding will not be there for the whole season probably. So those are two important programs.

The last thing I'd like to just tell you is that we're having our public hearings. We're required by state law to hold public hearings on our programs. And they'll be held October 24th in Brentwood

and it'll be held in Mattituck on October 26th. And they're both at ten o'clock in the morning. And we really look to hear from the seniors as to how the programs are affecting them.

Anybody have questions for me?

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Thank you, Holly.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Holly, thank you.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

It is my pleasure to welcome Constance Fleming to the Committee today. Miss Fleming is the administrator of Sunrise Manor Nursing Home located in Bay Shore. We were supposed to spend time together at our last committee meeting. You were not able to. And I know that's going to be an important part of the conversation today. So, welcome.

MS. FLEMING:

Thank you for inviting me. I was supposed to be here last month to talk about my experience -- our facility's experience with the Hurricane Irene and the power outage that had we experienced. However, on the day that you were having the meeting, I was engaging in my plan to evacuate some of my residents because we had been down to our fifth day without power and then running on a generator. And I had no answer from LIPA whether or not I was going to have service restored and when.

And I want to thank Legislator Stern because after he had heard the reason why I wasn't coming to the meeting, probably about 20 minutes later, I had a call from the Department of Health. And then I had the Town of Islip show up and the Office of Emergency Services show up and all the people that we had been talking to all week long were at my door helping to facilitate a possible evacuation; and hence LIPA then contacted me and our power was restored. Once they came to our building, our power was restored within fifteen minutes.

We're an 84-bed facility skilled nursing and rehab, generally elderly population. We do have some younger residents but our residents are compromised, on oxygen, feeding tubes, trac's. And on Sunday morning, the beginning of the storm, we -- my residents had viewed out their window that one of our branches had broke and hit one of the power lines. And there was some sparks given off and then it subsided. But we lost power instantly at that time. And I had stayed throughout the storm and the entire week because our generator then kicked on. And I contacted LIPA Sunday morning. And I contacted two areas of LIPA: The one that says you're out of power and the other that -- regarding the tree hitting the power line because I was also concerned that it was so close to our building that that might be an issue also.

On the recording it talks about them contacting them and letting them know the status of your outage. And I have to say that I only received a call back -- and I made numerous calls every day to LIPA -- that I only received a call back after Legislator Stern had done his magic power and got all these agencies involved. I had called LIPA every day. I had requested to speak to supervisors. I had actually been told that the supervisors there were unable to give me any kind of answer or response so it was better not to give me any response. At some point in time I got a general worker that answered the phone that had informed me that there was a substation under water in Bay Shore and that was the reason -- that was the reason why my power was still out.

I had appealed to everyone I spoke to in regards to the situation of the tree branch leaning on the power line because I was hoping that if they had at least come to evaluate that, that that may have been part of the fix. And in fact it ended up being the fix. And I later found out that there was no substation under water in Bay Shore.

Being a health care facility it was very distressing to find out that people living in homes were getting their electric before the facility was. And the stress that -- more so my staff was under including myself that we did not know how long the generator would run because we had never experienced running a generator for five days straight. And, in fact, it was overheating. And I did have to contact the fire marshals and I had the local fire department coming in because we also had carbon monoxide alarms going off and wanted to make sure the residents -- that there was no carbon monoxide in the buildings.

So I had to proceed to -- do intermittent periods where we shut the generator off which, of course, left us with less power, no phones and no elevators and had to put the staff on alert to use their own phones, God forbid there was an emergency, that we would have to throw the generator back on to transport our residents down the elevator if there was an ambulance needed. And, of course, once you shut the generator off after it's been running for all of this time, there is a part of you that says, "please, God, let it go back on." So as the days went on, thank God we did not have a heat wave during this time frame. But if we had, that would have really impeded myself to look at our evacuation plan sooner.

By Thursday our building was getting warmer and warmer. And I started to look at some of the residents that were older and the discomfort that may have been experienced. And I did call a sister facility, a local facility, to see how many empty beds they had so I could start transporting some of the residents that I thought were mostly affected by the heat. And as soon as I started that process, my residents went for a ride. And they were not there an hour later and LIPA had showed up. And 15 minutes later we had our power restored from the branch being removed from the wires.

So what I'm looking in advocating for is how they go about prioritizing who gets first serviced. I understand that you have no control over power outages; however, there should be a list of priorities. And along with the hospitals, the nursing homes we should be on that priority list. And I don't believe that people should be getting their power restored -- actually somebody from Newsday told me that, you know, some officials from LIPA that had power outages, and their own personal homes were restored before my nursing home was. And I don't know how true that is, but it is concerning there were five days without someone driving and surveilling the building. Because when the Office of Emergency Services showed up, the gentleman was lovely and he went out and looked at the situation. And he said "I'm telling you this is a less than 30 minute fix. I'm looking at it and it literally was some kind of transformer that got disconnected because of the tree limb." So that's very concerning.

So I'm hoping that in the future because there will be other storms and residents need to be advocated for. And that's why I'm here today, hoping that we'll have learned from this experience, that we'll be put on a list. And I truly believe that we just got forgotten. And it truly was a hardship for the residents and for the people that dedicate their lives of taking care of the elderly. It really put a stress on everyone. And it was unnecessary. And the results are that finally when we did get power and our generator from going on and off so many times. From testing it and from giving it breaks and shutting, you know, shutting it down for intervals that it blew out our air conditioning systems so we spent a couple of thousand dollars on that. And, you know, we've had some issues after the fact. So not only did the facility and the residents incur the inconvenience, we've also paid the cost for it also.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

First of all, thank you so much for being with us today. I'm sure you and your staff did a great job for your residents that you care so much about during very trying days.

Just a couple of questions. I'm sure my colleagues do as well. You obviously have a plan in place for these types of natural disasters. First off, I'm wondering how you develop a plan, who you make a part of developing that plan. And as a result of your experience, you share with us maybe some of the ways that your planning process and then the plan itself might have changed going forward.

MS. FLEMING:

Sure. We are required to have an evacuation plan. And I'm trying to think of what agency that helped -- I guess it was the Office of emergency Management that helped facilitate really extensive plans in the last few years, the nursing homes. And there were a lot of education in servicing regarding it. And my evacuation plan was probably about over 100 pages long. And it addresses all different types of evacuation whether it's in-house, whether it's from floor to floor, from fire compartment to fire compartment. It also addresses whether we have to do a total evacuation. And circumstances, whether it's a disaster that's internal or external including, you know, power outages, water outages, floods, getting hit by a plane, any kind of problem. So it's very involved.

And we have a -- before the storm came about, and thank God we had some notice, we did sit down with the department heads and review our -- we annually review it, but we also reviewed it at the time. And it's quite involved because if a resident is transferred to another facility, there's a lot that goes on with that. And we transferred eight people and I can tell you how -- I don't know if it would have been easier just to know we were transferring them all because first we had to pick. And people have -- a lot of our residents have more than 15, 20 medications. People have dementia, people who are on oxygen. There's a lot of eyeglasses, hearing aids. They need transfer of one person, two person, that type of thing. So we have these tracking forms that the Office of Emergency Management had made a standard type form. And we were advised that as we need it. But it's kind of standard in the industry.

So when the Office of Emergency Management showed up, he and I went through my tracking forms that I had been working on throughout the power outage because I was anticipating this could happen. And, you know, really trying to see what residents could be transferred by bus, by ambulette, who could ambulate, who could not, who would need ambulances. So it's pretty involved. And I was very thankful that the Office of Emergency Management Services, a gentleman name Joel -- I don't know what his last name was, but he came out with me and he helped me break up which residents we would do and offered his services as far as if we really needed buses and things of that sort.

But an evacuation plan is very involved. And -- because there's so many facets to the elderly population and their needs when they're in a facility like ours. It's not as much as a hospital. A hospital we're short term. This place is their home. So it really encompasses everything. It's not a matter of just putting a resident in an ambulette and shipping them out somewhere. These are their belongings. We know a lot about them and, therefore, we're responsible to make sure that their plan of care is continuous whether they're in our facility or in another place. So there's a lot that goes -- there's a lot involved in it.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And when you go through the process of planning on an annual basis or otherwise, do you ever have any contact with a LIPA representative? It would seem to be such an important part of preparation and what you're able to do or not do if the lights do go out, if the power does go down. Do they make themselves available, is there any outreach effort on their part or on your part to make them a part of planning process?

MS. FLEMING:

To be honest with you, not up to this point. I know that during the hurricane process there was a representative that was at the Office of Emergency Management. And the Department of Health was there, that we're under heavy regulation. And I was in contact with the Department of Health. And the representatives were notified, you know, that the person from the Department of Health was basically my liaison to them. So at least during the process, yes, we had access to them. However, nothing came of it. But it is something to consider in the future moving forward, what they can do for us and what advice they can give us as far as going forward. Because I think the Office of Emergency Services had said that there wasn't an experience like this since Hurricane Gloria, which was in the '80's. You know, we have snow storms. We have intermittent power outages, but generally don't last for more than an hour or two. So this was new territory for me as well as the industry.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

So during an emergency, how does it work, then? Is there a contact person at LIPA that you are able to contact? Is there a dedicated representative or is it that you have to go through your dedicated representative with the Department of Health? Do you ever have a direct line? Can you ever get a direct line to a representative at LIPA?

MS. FLEMING:

During this situation, I did not. And I attempted to move up the line in LIPA but I was unsuccessful. So, I guess that's something that I have to look into in the future. But I never directly spoke to anybody other than someone answering the phones.

I did actually -- the day that we were evacuating somebody -- some supervisor did finally call me back. But like I had said, they -- essentially they had kept telling me they would call me back. And I explained my situation. And I said I needed a supervisor. And they never got back to me. So going forward, yes, I think, you know, perhaps -- I'm calling the same line that any of you if you lost power in your home are calling; the same LIPA lines, so.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

When, in fact, you represent a facility that by LIPA's own guidelines is supposed to be high up on the priority list.

MS. FLEMING:

Absolutely.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

So it certainly isn't the same as a homeowner that might have been out a couple of days like myself, and I'm sure like many of my colleagues.

MS. FLEMING:

Absolutely.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

You don't have anybody that is designated, you don't have anybody to get to even though they say that you are supposed to be high up in the priority list.

MS. FLEMING:

Yes, absolutely.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

All right. Legislator Romaine.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Yes, Mr. Chairman. I'm suggesting that the members of this Committee draft a letter that you would prepare and we would sign to LIPA to their COO, Mr. Hervey, indicating that all hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities be given a direct e-mail address and/or telephone number and/or contact person at LIPA in case of an emergency so that they can reach out directly and deal with these issues. Obviously the failure of LIPA organization, that before that was LILCO, -- by the way it's still known as LILCO. It's LILCO doing business as LIPA, a/k/a LIPA. That LIPA has someone on staff that these people can reach out to. I'm talking about hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities. And we give them -- we request LIPA have a special person on staff in case of an emergency, a special telephone number, special e-mail, where they can reach out as part of their emergency plan.

To have a vulnerable populations subject to power outages for long periods of time and simply be overlooked is something as a County Legislator I don't want to see happen. I certainly think a letter from this Committee -- I would also copy the LIPA Oversight Committee on this as a way of reminding LIPA of their duty and responsibilities in terms of vulnerable populations that exist within our County. And I think nursing homes, hospitals and assisted living -- there's probably others, but if you just started with those facilities, I think that would be a good start. Thank you.

MS. FLEMING:

Yeah, I do agree. The designated line would be wonderful because at some point I was calling so often, as consumers were also, but the line was busy. So I wasn't getting anyone. And I was happy enough that I was getting through when I was getting through, but it wasn't continuous.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And so having gone through the experience, which I want to come back to in a moment, but have you had the opportunity to speak with representatives at LIPA since then, after power was restored? Have they been able to give an appropriate answer as to what happened and why and how they might be willing to work with you going forward?

MS. FLEMING:

Well, I actually did receive a call later in the afternoon that we went back on power. And he was just offering any -- you know, any help we could -- that the residents were okay and *we're here to service you*; and it was kind of that sales type of talk. And at that point in time I was more concerned with getting my eight residents back from the other facility and getting order restored in the facility, so. And no one's reached out to me since that day.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Well, for starters, certainly we need to make that outreach effort from this Committee as Legislator Romaine suggests. But going forward knowing now what happened -- you know, looking back, I'm sure we can all appreciate that there is chaos and there are technical aspects and maybe none of us necessarily appreciate it at the time or understand it at the time, but when in fact you're told that it is one problem, which sounds somewhat technical and perhaps something of importance, is underwater and maybe that would take an awful long time to fix, and when you find out days later that it was simply removing a tree from downed power lines and obviously nobody had been out to see, that should trouble us all. That goes beyond a letter. That goes beyond some type of reform and putting new plans in place and dedicated hot lines which, of course, are all important; but I certainly would like to know, and I'm sure my colleagues would like to know, how nobody came out to take a look at a facility that by its own guidelines is on the top of the priority list to see that it might have been as simple as removing a tree from downed power lines. And as the gentleman said when he showed up, *this is a quick fix*. That is troubling and should be unacceptable to us all.

MS. FLEMING:

Absolutely.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

I had just said as a side-bar that I believe that hospitals do have a direct representative that they call. But it wouldn't hurt to mention that all of these different facilities be represented in the same way, because you have a very vulnerable population that has its own special needs. And there should be a representative that you can call by name directly when there is an emergency like this.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Particularly because facilities do have guidelines that you need to follow. You do need to file an evacuation plan. You are ready to go with generators, but generators will only go for so long. And you're absolutely right, this could have easily been at a time during tougher weather, during the heat wave, would those generators have even lasted as long as they did. So this is not a question of having an appropriate plan in place. This is about having a partner --

MS. FLEMMING:

Right, support system, yes.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

-- that you can work with. And a facility like yours, which again, is already at the top of the priority list, shouldn't have to rely on government representatives days later to get some action. Again, I find that reprehensible and unacceptable and certainly look forward to working with you to make some meaningful change going forward.

MS. FLEMING:

Thank you. One side-bar I had mentioned to you when I had accepted your invitation, a different issue but regarding elderly and Medicaid. Our facility and other facilities that I hear a new issue that seems to arise is the difficulty in obtaining Medicaid for folks that have not legally divorced their spouse. They may be estranged from them for a decade or more. We have a particular -- we had two residents but I ended up having to discharge the one gentleman. We have a gentleman in our facility who's been living there without funds. He's been there for, I don't know, a year-and-a-half, two years. We have not collected a dollar on him. He is a veteran. And he has been estranged from his wife for more than a decade. He comes from a poor neighborhood. And I suppose either he couldn't afford getting a divorce, a cultural thing, I'm not sure. But his estranged wife is in a nursing home in the Carolinas. And he has estranged from his family who hasn't helped with obtaining or helping to facilitate getting the documents that he needs to get Medicaid.

And unfortunately when we tried to contact the nursing home in the Carolinas, because of HIPAA and all sorts of things, we're unable to do anything. And we've had a few cases like this. We have another gentleman that we just discharged who is well enough to go back out into the community, but we do have a loophole here where -- and I don't know what the solution is -- but we do now are starting to see that maybe they were previously approved for Medicaid. The gentleman has no money. He doesn't own a thing. He is a veteran. And he's in our facility. And we actually were just able to after utilizing attorneys and things of that sort, that we've been able to get him approved for community Medicaid. However, that's just a Band-Aid. He is really borderline. He really is borderline skilled nursing, that fine line.

And the gentleman that we discharged last week, because he did not have Medicaid and wasn't able to obtain -- the same kind of situation where he's estranged from his spouse and his spouse while he's in contact with her, they haven't lived together in a decade or so, but she will not -- she refuses to fill out any paperwork because she's afraid she'll be responsible for him, so. And I asked him why he never got a divorce. And he said he's Catholic. So, you have a different generation. And some of this is going to start to crop up.

And we have a resident in our facility right now for free. However, maybe another place would be a

little more savvy and see the writing on the wall before they even accept the residents. And then where do these residents go? So I'm just bringing it to your attention that there is a loophole in the system. And I don't know what the solution could be.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Well, I think you're absolutely right. And as the definition of family changes and family dynamics change, and you do have family members or former family members that are across the country. I think you're absolutely right, it's going to be an issue, that your facility, that all of our area facilities see a lot more in the future. If I can make a suggestion, if you stay a few moments and have a quick talk with Director Ronayne, you mentioned that he's a veteran.

MS. FLEMING:

Yes.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

So perhaps speaking with Director Ronayne, maybe you guys can come up with some ideas.

MS. FLEMING:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Sure. And thanks so much for being with us today.

It is my pleasure to welcome Phil Berler and Seth Bailan who join us today. They're here to talk about the Freedoms Flying Memorial sponsored by Marine Helicopter Squadron 361. Gentlemen, welcome.

MR. BERLER:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today before the Committee. My name is Phil Berler.

MR. BAILAN:

I'm Seth Bailan.

SLIDE SHOW PRESENTATION

MR. BERLER:

We represent Marine Helicopters Squadron 361 Veterans Association. I'm a civilian volunteer that has been with them for about nine years. The Association was formed in December of 2000. I have a little presentation here that we're going to run through and I understand there are time constraints so I will talk fast.

We were formed in December 2000 with about 200 former members from Marine Helicopter Squadron 361; also some retirees and civilian volunteers. Our Association's goal was to find an airframe that had actually been in 361 in Vietnam and to restore the airframe to flying condition. We found this airframe in Cochise, Arizona in 2000 -- in the summer of 2001. And it cost us about \$2,500 to purchase this airframe and about \$8,000 to ship it back to Long Island.

Through 100% volunteer time, ranging from experienced veterans who have worked on this type of aircraft in Vietnam, airframe and power plant mechanics, retired veterans and retired teachers and community volunteers -- we also had some marine mechanics who did some very heavy work, came back to Long Island under their own expense to do some of the heavy work with the transmission and the engine to align it. After five years and 20,000 man-hours, we restored this aircraft to flying condition.

Our first flight was in November of 2005. I can tell you that during this restoration, there were

several times when I myself and many of us didn't believe that we actually could accomplish it. And this aircraft being housed on a sod farm out in the eastern end of Long Island, the fellows who work out on the sod farm, their inside joke was *how long was it going to take to dig a hole big enough to bury the airframe?*

Well, we managed to accomplish it.

Now this is -- this aircraft is an education medium. Our purpose is to educate all who visit this aircraft at air shows. We display this vintage aircraft with its history in documented log books. We've maintained feedback from all pilots and crew who have flown in this actual airframe, not just in 361 but in other units as well. And we honor all who have flown in this aircraft in defense of their country.

Now we have flown this aircraft in many events on Long Island and around the country. I list here several events that just we've flown in 2011. We've been in Warbirds in the American Air Pilot Museum, the Memorial Day Flyover in Islandia and the Joseph Dwyer Hero Rally over Bald Hill. We did a flyover for the Sag Harbor Ferry Cruise, a Wounded Warriors Project over Sag Harbor and the fly by and wreaths drop in Fireman's Memorial Hampton Bays.

I've also listed some events from past years. We've been at the Air Power Museum many times. And I want to emphasize that many of these were without any direct funding from the events. We've flown just with the donations that we have raised ourselves through the donations from the funds that we raised from the association.

Now this airframe left the Sikorsky Plant in October of 1963 and went directly into service in Vietnam for six years. It's basically a flying truck. It served in a Medevac capacity as well as troop transport. It has 59 bullet holes to prove its service in that capacity.

In addition to this aircraft, we have many parts and supporting equipment that -- and we have an extensive collection of Vietnam memorabilia that we have always envisioned being able to display in a museum capacity. We bring some of those items with us when we go to air shows. We've been seeking a more permanent home for this helicopter.

The next slide displays our static costs. There is basically -- the hangar is really just a shed that we house the aircraft in when we fold the blades. And it basically costs about \$40,000 a year to just sit and not go anywhere.

This is listed as an aircraft experimental aircraft. The aircraft insurance is pretty low because we don't allow rides. Although at every air show that we go to, people always ask us if they can go for rides. Many of the aircraft that are at those air shows offer rides for fee. And our insurance does not cover that.

As I mentioned, we always get many -- a lot of attention to the aircraft. In particular, we get a lot of -- a lot of attention from kids. Kids just love this aircraft. This is one of my personal favorite photographs that I took for a guest there. And that's, I think, our poster shot. (Indicating)

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Good shot.

MR. BERLER:

We are a unique type of aircraft at every show. As I mention, we always generate lots of crowds. And I want to emphasize that the volunteers in this organization, we really want only one thing. And we want to basically keep this aircraft flying.

This is a photograph taken this year over the Islandia Memorial Day Parade in May. We flew over

that parade on the way to the Air Power Museum from for the Warbird Presentation. The aircraft is also -- although we, you know, get a lot of attention from civilians, and we use it as a teaching platform to teach about the history of the airframe, about the helicopter and the service of the veterans, veterans generate a lot of attention to this aircraft.

This is a quote from a letter sent by a fellow who had served in Vietnam. And this fellow had been pulled out by an H 34. "I personally have witnessed veterans walking up to this airframe and evokes tremendous emotion. One fellow walked up to the open clam shell doors and began to cry because it was the first time he'd seen an H 34 since it had pulled him out of the jungle from Vietnam." That was a number of years ago at an air show. And that's our story.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

I have been at many of the functions actually that you put up on the list.

MR. BERLER:

Yes, I know.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And then some with my kids. And, you know, they've had a great experience being around it. It's not only educational, but as you suggest, very moving when you're there up close. Legislator Romaine.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Yes, very quickly. I heard your need for hangar space. I believe the County has an airport that it owns in West Hampton called Gabresky.

MR. BERLER:

Yes, sir.

LEG. ROMAINE:

I don't have an inventory of the hangars, but there may be some hangars that are underutilized or not utilized, that there may be an opportunity for you to store your helicopter there. I would ask our Chairman if as Committee Chairman if he could inquire with the airport manager, and I guess it's Division or Department of Economic Development that runs the airport, to see what type of inventory might exist in terms of hangar space where these gentlemen could place this aircraft and protect it from the elements, particularly during the winter in stormy months. And they'd have a place to not only protect it, but work on it in a sheltered environment. So if you could do that, and maybe by the next Committee meeting, get back to the Committee and let us know what you've discovered, because I do believe there is an opportunity there for space in one of the hangars that they have. Thank you.

MR. BERLER:

Thank you, sir.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Anker.

LEG. ANKER:

Thank you for coming here today. We really appreciate your time and letting us know what you've been doing and how you've been able to create an awareness and education for our kids and for our residents. I also agree, I think that's a great idea Legislator Romaine has with Gabresky Airport. And also I just wanted to mention, too, I spoke with a number of seniors over in the Leisure Community over in Ridge. And there was a man who was interested in seeing if there was -- and maybe you can answer this for me. Is there a museum at Gabresky, do we know? Is there a

museum; a history museum?

LEG. ROMAINE:

Nope.

LEG. ANKER:

I would be very interested in working with you and working with some of the folks in my district to see if we can do something over there. Again, Legislator Romaine, have you heard -- that's your area? Is that your --

LEG. ROMAINE:

No, it's not. But I'm familiar with the airport because of the -- more than half a million dollars that this administration wasted in trying to get a police helicopter hangar. They bought the steel and a lot of other things and then just left it sitting there on the runway. Yeah, I'm familiar with -- I spent sometime at the airport, so yes.

LEG. ANKER:

It's Legislator Shneiderman's area. So, again, if you can, I'll have my Chief of Staff give you my card. And let's see if we can do something, because if they do have extra space and you already put so much time into doing this project, let's see if this can be the start of something even better, a whole museum about, you know, the experiences, something physical and tangible that you've recreated that people can learn from and really appreciate our veterans and what they put in towards the country in protecting it. So, thank you so much.

MR. BAILAN:

Yeah, we would certainly appreciate that. As you can see just our funding slide, everything that we do is volunteer. So all the money we raise goes into the hangar -- well, it's not a hangar, it's a barn on a sod farm to store the helicopter over the winter. And the rest of the money goes for fuel and maintenance. And we've never -- you know, we always try to support every event we can here on Long Island because we know it's a powerful thing when that helicopter flies over and lands. Kids see it, veterans see it. And it's just a matter do we have money to gas it up and could we get the pilots, who are all volunteers, they all obviously fly for a living; so getting them out there on a volunteer basis and getting the ground crew out there on a volunteer basis.

And if we can put all that together, we fly. We hit air shows as well, but we don't see ourselves primarily as an air show attraction as a lot of planes go around the air show circuit, things like that. We've always saw it as a teaching tool. And one of the things we wanted was a more permanent home, we'd be able to arrange for local schools to start bringing, you know, half-day trips, day trips. Right now obviously no school is going to send a busload of kids out to a sod farm in Jamesport to walk around an old potato barn, is essentially what it is. It's just not going to happen.

If we had a hangar space or a more permanent rural facility that, you know, a school district could justify sending some kids -- you know, younger kids on day trips, we have all the memorabilia, we have retired veterans who flew in these helicopters in Vietnam. We have younger veterans, you know. We'll make it happen as far as getting people out there and, you know, showing the helicopter, telling the stories, letting people see it, touch it, feel it. And that's really what we would look to do.

MR. BERLER:

The facility that we have today where we have this memorabilia, like Seth says, it's just not something that you want to bring people to. I mean it's just not the right place to bring a school bus to. We have all the stuff there, but it's just not the right kind of place. And that's -- it's really just a temporary place. And it costs an awful lot of money. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Well, gentlemen, thank you so much for being with us today. And some good ideas and some things that the Committee will certainly discuss. And let's work together going forward to see what good things we can do.

MR. BAILAN:

Thank you.

TABLED RESOLUTIONS

CHAIRMAN STERN:

All right. Okay. We will go to our agenda with a tabled resolution. We have before us **IR 1730-Adopting Local law No - 2011, A Local Law amending Local Law No. 5-2011, a Local Law to register non-profit veterans' organization in Suffolk County. (Cilmi)** That public hearing has been closed so we can take a vote. I'll make a motion to approve.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Second.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Second by Legislator Viloría-Fisher. Anybody? On the motion? All in favor? Any opposed? Any abstention? **IR 1730 is approved. (VOTE: 5-0-0-0)**

LEG. ROMAINE:

Motion to adjourn.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Anybody else? All right. Legislator Romaine makes a motion to adjourn. I'll second. And we are adjourned. Thank you.

**THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 1:05 PM
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY**