

**VETERANS & SENIORS COMMITTEE**

**of the**

**SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE**

**VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT**

A regular meeting of the Veterans and Seniors Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the rose Y. Caracappa Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislative Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York on April 30, 2012.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Legislator Steve Stern - Chairman  
Legislator Sarah Anker - Vice Chair  
Legislator Tom Barraga  
Legislator DuWayne Gregory  
Legislator Ricardo Montano

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

Sarah Simpson - Assistant Counsel to the Legislature  
Barbara LoMoriello - Deputy Clerk - Suffolk County Legislature  
Tom Ronayne - Director of Veterans Services  
Robert Martinez - Aide to Legislator Montano  
Bill Shilling - Aide to Legislator Anker  
Deborah Harris - Aide to Legislator Stern  
Lisa Keyes - Aide to Legislator Romaine  
Ben Zwirn - County Executive's Office  
Vicki Fleming - Cornell Cooperative Extension  
All other interested parties

**VERBATIM MINUTES TAKEN BY:**

Donna Catalano - Court Stenographer

(\*THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 1:00 P.M.\*)

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Good afternoon everyone. Welcome to the Committee on Veterans and Seniors ask everyone to please rise and join in Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Barraga.

**SALUTATION**

I ask everyone to please remain standing and join in a moment of silence to keep everyone fighting for our freedoms overseas in our thoughts and prayers.

**MOMENT OF SILENCE**

Good afternoon, everyone. We are going to have a presentation today, but before we have Ms. Fleming join us, I'll ask Director Ronayne to come on up.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, members. Thank you again for your invitation. I guess I firstly should report on the Homeless Veterans Stand Down that we held last week. We were able to host our 6th Annual Homeless Veterans Stand Down. Once again, we had great participation from the community, from our not-for-profits, various governmental agencies. Certainly, it was successful in no small part to the assistance that we received from the Northport VA staff and the Executive team at Northport who partnered with us and supported our efforts on behalf of hosting this event.

Again, as always, when these events are held, when they are successful, to me, it is very bitter sweet. It's wonderful that we are able to bring such a large number of providers and people together who are able and willing to assist this population in need. But it also, at the same time, is very troubling when we have the numbers of veterans that we have attend these programs. It so clearly demonstrates the need, the amount of hardship that is going on out there; the people who are struggling for a variety of reasons. At the end of the day, whatever the reasons are, either the fact remains that they are either homeless or in danger of becoming homeless in very large part. And it is a challenging population to serve. They have just a multitude of needs. Each one is -- while they may have similarities on the surface, each of their case, as you would imagine, are quite unique and they require individualized attention. And, you know, I'm very proud to be affiliated with the group of people who, once again, got together and were able to provide these services.

Before I take any questions, I'd just share some very preliminary numbers so you have a sense of what the day was about. I know a number of you were able to attend, and I appreciate you having stop by and were able to see firsthand what was taking place. At the end of the day, the preliminary count is that we serve 122 veterans. That service was provided by 115 volunteers. The volunteer number does not include the numbers of the people who represented the various agencies and so forth at the event. That number is a separate number. We had 48 agencies, we had a couple of no-shows. But in total, we had 48 agencies providing services.

Some of the other things that we did, we took a different approach to the food pantry, to the clothing pantry, some of the things that we done historically. But to give you a sense, we distributed 1200 pounds of food, we had 1200 pounds of food that were packaged and distributed to the veterans. We had 1500 pounds of clothing, almost all of it new. It was largely sweatpants, sweatshirts, jackets, socks, underwear, things of that nature, as well as blankets that were donated by a group of ladies auxiliary members who had made most of the blankets by hand and donated them to be distributed at the end.

We also had, I believe, 45 vision and glaucoma tests provided amongst the very many, many other services that were offered and provided at the event. So again, had it not been for the help of the volunteers and had it not been for the assistance of Northport, as always with any of the events that we do host, it could not have taken place. And I'm very grateful to all of them for their assistance. And I'm grateful to all of you for all of the assistance that you have offered over the years in making sure that these events continue to be hosted.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Legislator Barraga.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Tom, what was that number that you gave, one hundred and --

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

One hundred and twenty two veterans served.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

How does it compare to previous years?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

It is down, it's down a little bit.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Is that because of a lack of transportation? Were some organizations providing buses in the past that this year they couldn't do it because of fiscal considerations?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

We had at least two that that was, in fact, the case. We had two agencies who in past years have attended the events, but were not able to, for a number of reasons, including their finances and their transportation issues. It's difficult to put a hard number to how many veterans they would have represented, but it would have been several dozen each.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Because every six months you have a different event. This is for the homeless veterans, and in six months, you'll have an event, if you've scheduled it, to have different organizations and companies down taking applications for employment. That event, where you have employment, what is the outpouring on that? It seems -- I've attended several of those. That looks like it's in the hundreds. You seem to get a much greater turnout for that than the homeless, and I would assume that that's probably appropriate.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

We do. We've been averaging a couple of hundred at these job fairs. The last one was held in January. In fact, we had a conference call this morning with the Army. The Army has asked if we would partner with them again because of the success of the last event.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

At the same location, the Community College?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Same location, at the Armed Forces Reserve Center in Farmingdale.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Because I remember going to -- I don't know if it was the last employment seminar you had where

the line was out the door by 75 to 100 feet from the main entrance going in.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

I guess the easiest way to say it would be the face of the veteran who has been attending that event has not necessarily evolved and turned into a different group of veterans, but over the years we've seen an evolution in the level of preparedness and the type of approach that the veterans take to these things.

Initially, in the first couple of years, you know, we quite literally had folks coming out in jeans and T-shirts attending job fairs. Our last event, the vast majority were professionally dressed in business suits, fresh haircuts, professionally prepared and printed resumes, briefcases. There really looking, I think, much harder at the importance of these and events and understanding that when they attend these job fairs, their first encounter with whatever employer it is that they may be meeting with, whether it's one or many, in my opinion that first encounter at the job fair is your first interview. They seem to be embracing that philosophy and really taking it much more seriously. But you're correct, the numbers have been increasing over the years. The need for those type of services and matching the veterans with them is more and more important every day.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

And maybe with reference to the homeless grouping, maybe next year, maybe some special efforts can be made provide a few more buses. That would probably make quite a bit of difference in terms of those participating.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

We've already had that conversation.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Thank you.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Legislator Montano.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Thanks. Hi, Tom. Just a couple of quick questions. How do you make out in the budget? What is your personnel now in your department?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

I had one additional person receive his layoff notice over the weekend.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

So what does that leave you, seven?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

No. That will bring me down to six.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

That's right, you said last time you would have seven. Now you have six?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

And we have a pending retirement in late June, early July.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

That will bring it down to five?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Potentially.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

You said you serviced -- you served 122 veterans at this event.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

That's correct.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

All right. What does that mean though, "you served"? In what capacity? What does it mean to say, "I served"? I know you saw -- there were 122 veterans that showed up, is that what I understand?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

The way it works is when a veteran presents himself at the event, as they enter the building, each veteran is assigned an escort, and that escort will stay with that veteran the entire time they are at the event.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

So those are the volunteers basically?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Those are some of the volunteers, yes.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Right. Because you said you had 115 volunteers. So if you give each veteran a volunteer, you basically --

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Well, again, we don't have as many volunteers as we have veterans coming through, because at the conclusion of their cycle, when they've gone through all of the agencies and received -- and have been provided access to all of the services, when that veteran leaves, that escort returns to the registration area and picks up new a veteran.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

And I assume that of the 122, these are younger veterans, veterans from the Afghan war, the Gulf War, or is it across the board?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

It's across the board. I would say probably a little bit over half were Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. There were a sizeable number of Vietnam Veterans at the event as well. And then we have the -- what we call "other periods," the folks who serve between the end of Vietnam and the first Gulf War. They represent a certain number as well.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

I would assume that there issues are different than the more recent event veterans; am I correct?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Not necessarily. I mean, one of the things that would be a little bit different is that the population of veterans largely are not going to have the PTSD issues as that we see with many of the newer returning veterans. But their housing, their employment, those types of issues, while the reasons for having those problems may be different, ultimately, they're still homeless, they're still without jobs.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Okay. So just refresh my recollection then. What is the -- since you deal with veterans from all of the conflicts and the wars, what is the veterans population on Long Island?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

I always qualify responding to that question by saying that we've been in contact with and we've taken exception to the numbers that the census issued after the 2010 Census.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Exception high or exception low?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Low. We think they're low. One of the problems -- we knew that the number was going to be adjusted after the 2010 Census, that was just a reality. The problem is when they made those determinations and issued those new numbers, they did so based on actuarial tables and projections. There was no question asked on the short form, the long form or the home visit during the census in regard to veteran status. There was no question at all.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

So how do they have a category of veteran if they don't ask whether or not you served?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Based on actuarial tables; the average life expectancy of a person, male and female, year of birth, projected life expectancy extrapolated out to how many veterans we're known to have had in the County. We've taken exception to it. We don't agree with it. We've told the Census Bureau and we've told the VA we do not agree with the numbers.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Just so I'm clear, what you are saying is that in the census, there was a category of the number of veterans that are on Long Island, but you're saying that that was a projected number, because there's no question in the census form that asked, "Have you ever served in the military;" am I correct? Is that what you are saying.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

That is what I'm saying.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

All right. So that's kind of strange. But what is the number that was projected in the census?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Right now they're saying that we have approximately 85,000 veterans in Suffolk County.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

What do you say?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

We think the number is probably a little bit over 100,000. Again, we have no hard data to support that other than our own projections and basing on the number of veterans that we serve and the populations that we see in our offices when we meet with these veterans or when we communicate with them in other ways. We see veterans aging far older than the average life expectancy, as one example. We still have a great number World War II and Korean Veterans in Suffolk County who are active, they have organizations, they are participants in the community. We know they're out there, we work with them.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Just to do the math, what is it, 001% that you reached in this 125% -- 125 people there? Do you know what the percentage is?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

That sounds right.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

About 001%.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Point one.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

That seems like a low percentage. Is there a reason why it seems so low, or is that where it should be?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Honestly, I don't know where it should be. We produce these events and we make these services available to the populations that we believe are in need of those services. When the folks present to us -- we know that we don't see everyone, we know that we don't make contact with every veteran out there, and certainly, we don't make contact with every veteran who has a specific need. So I don't know where that number should be. I don't know what we should anticipate or expect to be attending these events. Personally, if we meet with and help one veteran, we've done our job that day.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Right. You said that you distributed 1200 pounds of food and 1500 pounds of clothing. So each veteran walked away with, I guess, 10 pounds of food and clothing.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

On average. Some veterans did not take any, some veterans took more than others. Again, we don't challenge somebody. If somebody comes in and tells us they're hungry, they're welcome to take whatever food we have.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Absolutely. I'm not implying that you should. I'm just looking at, you know, the numbers here. All right. Thanks. Appreciate it, Tom.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

I would say that you are right, Director, of course, there is no way to quantify, fortunately or unfortunately, what that number should be. Certainly, the hope is for this type of an event, that number goes down over time and not up. The flip side, of course, and we've had this discussion with so many of our servicemen and women who are going to be returning home, that the hope is

that it does not go up, but certainly, we do need to be prepared for that.

My question to you is of the 122, do we have any way to know how many of those 122 had come in years prior? Do any of them return, or are these all new people that are coming to this event?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

It's a mixture of both. We do have data from previous years, again, as part of the enrollments. We can come up with those numbers. Again, these are preliminary numbers. I'm still waiting for the final breakdown on era of service, male versus female. So the final breakdown of that number will be forthcoming. We don't have that yet. As far as veterans who have attended in previous years or at previous events, we can come up with that. We would have to go through the registration forms from the previous events.

One of things -- I think I'm going to guess where you are going next. We do attempt to outreach beyond these events, beyond the stand downs and beyond the job fairs to the veterans who register to, A) make sure that if they needed to be paired with a particular type of service that they were, what, if any, was their level of success, do they need further services of any kind. So we do tend to follow up. It's difficult to track this population. They're not always willing and not always able to have the type of communication that we take for granted.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

And certainly the hope over time would be that, particularly for this event, that if someone comes, they are then enrolled in the programs and receive the services that they need, so hopefully we're not going to see them again, at least not at this type of outreach event.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Ideally, we would not, but I can tell you that I've seen veterans who have been at past events.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Legislator Anker.

**LEG. ANKER:**

Hi, Tom. I really enjoyed visiting you this past weekend at the stand down. I have a question here. You just mentioned -- you answered, probably, my question. Do you ever follow up, and you do. You mentioned the 2010 Census was 85,000, that's vets or homeless vets?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Total veterans in the County's population.

**LEG. ANKER:**

Okay. I just wanted to clarify that. So you have -- these programs are for all vets, not just homeless vets, the stand down, or can any vet go to this event?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Any vet -- we would not turn any veteran away. The event is specifically designed around delivering services that are typically the type of services that that population would require. A lot of the services that are there, the DSS, the Veterans HUD VASH and Veterans Homeless Housing Project would not be appropriate for the majority of the veteran population. Some might be, but the majority of them would not attend, because it really wouldn't be well suited to their needs.

**LEG. ANKER:**

Thank you. When a person becomes homeless, there's usually reasons behind that; you know, some mental illness, you know, other health issues, hard luck, and they're looking for direction. I

think it's great that we're giving them some direction providing these services. But I think like had said, my concern and maybe just an idea is to go outside -- you know, start with this event and then go outside of it. You know, go to churches, go to families. We're looking for that person. Well, where is that person? That person could be in the woods, that person could be at a church shelter. Is there any way that we can try to find these people to provide a package which would -- you know, the Red Cross was there with donations and, you know, had so many other services. Is there any way we can be more proactive at outside events like this?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

We have over the years had a fairly active -- we've had several -- one of your outreach initiatives has been homeless veterans. And we do, in fact, work with churches, soup kitchens, not-for-profits, veterans organizations. We've had communication from members of the Legislature who have had veterans within their own districts that we've worked with. In fact, we recently spent time -- I spent an evening myself at a church in Ronkonkoma that they hold a soup kitchen several nights a week, and they had asked if we would be present to meet with any veterans that may be in that population. I think they fed 25 people at the soup kitchen that night, we saw five veterans. DSS also had a representative there. They saw more people than we did. But five of those 25 were veterans who were willing to come forward. There may have been more veterans in that group, but five choose to at least take a moment to speak with me and find out what was out there.

**LEG. ANKER:**

It's a sensitive issue. Veterans, you know they have this sense of honor. And they may be embarrassed in taking a handout. It's a shame, because they deserve what we have to provide for them. But thank you so much for what you guys are doing, what the men and women are doing to help these people that do need the help. If there is anything we can do as Legislators, you know, again, I would volunteer to go to the soup kitchens or a place where we can least get their attention and say, "Look, this is what we have for you. This is what you deserve. Let us help you." You know, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make them drink. I understand that. But it would be nice if we could get to more folks out there. I appreciate it. It was a great event that you held. It was very nice. Thank you.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

I appreciate that. Honestly, probably the helpful thing that you can do more is you're more aware of what the needs are and what exists in your own district. If you could somehow communicate to our office where these soup kitchens are, when they meet, where populations exist, we'll get out there. We may not get out there in 15 minutes, but we'll get out there. And even if we can't have a physical presence at one of the locations every time, we certainly can provide literature and contact information so that when people come through, at least they have access to that.

**LEG. ANKER:**

Sorry. One more thing. I wonder if there's a packet or standard type of information that we can leave at these soup kitchens where the homeless attend?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Yes.

**LEG. ANKER:**

I will take some of those.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

I can arrange to have bundles of these made and sent to the various offices. And this is really sort of a snapshot of all of the services that are available through our office. And then as we get more specific, we'll go into other things. But this is a pretty good overview.

**LEG. ANKER:**

That would be great. Maybe include -- I thought those were great packets from the American Red Cross. They had the toothpaste, and, you know, of course people are grabbing those, but to put that with it, I think it would be really important. So if we could help in any way, just let us know.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

If you need any of those packs, I have 15 in the back of my car.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Director, thank you.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Thank you very much. I just want to remind everybody that on Saturday, May 16th -- - I'm sorry, May 19th, we will be hosting our annual Armed Forces Day Ceremony at the Armed Forces Plaza at Dennison. Everybody certainly is invited and encouraged to attend. I would think that by now all of your offices should have received written invitations. Judge Toomey, who is the Presiding Judge over the Veterans Court, will be our speaker at this year's event.

And very significantly, also, on that morning, on the same morning, May 19th, at Long Island National Cemetery -- everyone calls it Pinelawn -- we will be hosting -- well, we'll be partnering with the Long Island National Cemetery and the Missing in America program to inter a number of veterans; again, homeless, indigent veterans who have got no next of kin whose remains were never claimed after their deaths. We, right now, have 35 veterans verified that we know we are going to be honoring that day. We have submitted the names of 14 more. So the number of veterans being interred that day is going to approach 50, which is pretty significant. It's never happened before in a number that large.

So, again, I think all -- maybe with one exception -- I think all of these are cremains. These are all veterans whose cremated ashes will be interred. We will not have the same type of presence with the caskets and so forth that we had at Calverton last year. But right now it looks like minimum 35, possibly as many as 49 veterans to be buried that day.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Tom, I'm going to ask you remain there for just one moment. We have Ms. Fleming with us today, and we look forward to her presentation, but I want to make sure that we get to our agenda while I have all the members of the committee still with. So we're going to go to the agenda, it's a short one.

We'll begin with **IR 1364- Authorizing the MIA-OON Flag to be flown at the Armed Services Plaza at the H. Lee Dennison Building, Hauppauge during the month of September (Romaine)**

Before I ask for motions, I see Legislator Romaine is with us today. But before I go to the sponsor, Director Ronayne, do you have an opinion?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

The only thing that I would ask -- and we've gone through this at least one time before where we wanted to add -- actually twice before -- where we wanted to add a flag at Armed Forces Plaza. And the process in the past has been that we would take that recommendation or that -- the information related to that particular flag and the reasons for flying it and present it to the County Executive's Veterans Advisory Board and our County's Veterans Advisory Board for their review and allow them to form an opinion on that. Obviously, through me, I would communicate that opinion

back to you. We do meet monthly, so it is not as if we would be a timely process to get this in front of them. So if you would be so kind as to indulge and allow me to have the Veterans Advisory Board make a review and form an opinion.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Thank you, Director. Okay. Let's get a motion on the floor first, then I'll go to you, Legislator Romaine.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Motion.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Motion to approve by Legislator Barraga.

**LEG. ANKER:**

Motion to table.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Motion to table by Legislator Anker.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Second to tabling.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Second to table by Legislator Montano. On the motion, Legislator Montano.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

From what I understand, what you're asking, the reasoning for the tabling is so that this can go before the advisory committee which is our normal process. That's what I heard and that's what you're asking; am I correct?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

That's what we've done in the past, yes.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

All right. So you haven't made a decision. That's our -- when you say you haven't done it in the past, that's a procedure that we have followed consistently?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

In the seven years I've been here, we have done that with the Merchant Marine Flag and we have done that with the Honor and Remember Flag, because both of those flags were being asked to be placed Armed Forces Plaza, which is our monument to our veterans, both fallen and living.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Okay. But your point is that you have not had a chance to review this request, and you would like this to go through the committee so that you can make a recommendation, is that what you're saying?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Correct. It's only recently be presented to me, and they have not had a chance to see it.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

In light of that, I will second the motion to table.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Legislator Romaine.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

By way of information, this is a flag that was designed by Mr. Sorenson who is the Executive Director of the United States Citizens Alliance. He is a US Marine Corps Veterans, and he created this flag, MIA, which is - - stands for Missing In Attack on our nation. I received a letter from Assemblyman Raia, he is a cosponsor of this with several other Assemblymen in the State Assembly as well as a companion bill in the State Senate that would allow this flag to fly in the month of September in Suffolk County.

It has flown with Island State Capital, it has flown next door in Nassau County, it's flown in Kuwait, it's flown in several places including in New York Harbor. And it is a way of reminding us of those who are missing based on the attack on our nation that occurred on September 11th of 2001. I'm introducing this resolution at the request of Assemblyman Raia. And I believe Senator Klein is the sponsor in the Senate. It simply would allow us to fly this flag, of course, below the American Flag in the month of September as a way of remembering. If the goal is to submit it to this committee, I would ask our Veterans Service Director when is this committee scheduled to meet next?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

The third Thursday of May. I don't have the date in front of me. It would be the third Thursday of May.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Okay. Right. As Legislator Montano has indicated, we will have time. So I guess it would be up at our first meeting -- committee meeting in June. When is our next committee meeting after this meeting? So we could consider it at our next committee meeting; is that correct? The filing deadline -- this has been filed. We're going to table it. So it would be before us at our next committee meeting. The only amendment was that it would fly below the American Flag, because I heard some people were going to raise objections to that, because it wasn't specifically stated in the resolution, which I didn't think I had to state, because that's protocol. But I put it in to prevent someone from raising that objection.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

The amended version has meet the filing deadline for amendments?

**MS. SIMPSON:**

Yes, it was filed earlier today.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Okay. Thank you.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

And just be aware that below the American Flag at Armed Forces Plaza right now, below the American Flag flies the POW-MIA Flag. And the below the POW-MIA Flag flies the Honor and Remember Flag.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

It doesn't say where below as long as it's below. So that's why you leave things vague, because it's in its implementation that it gets executed.

All right. Well, on that case, I don't have any objection to this being tabled so that your committee

could report. What I would ask our Veterans Service Director to do is contact my office so we can supply you with all the backup correspondence on this from the State Assembly and from the State Senate, because it's at their bequest that I sponsored this resolution.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Mr. Chairman.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Legislator Barraga.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

I'll withdraw my motion to approve.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

We will deal with this at our next committee meeting. I'll be back here at our next committee meeting. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Okay. Anybody else? Yes, I have to agree with the Director. Since it's been my privilege to serve as the Chairman of this committee, this is the procedure that we have always followed any time there has been any kind of suggestion as to any type of display at our Armed Forces Plaza, it has gone before our Veterans Advisory Committee as this should do as well. So the only motion before us is the motion to table, which has been seconded, so I'll call the vote. All in favor? Opposed? Any abstention? Motion to table is approved.

**TABLED (VOTE: 5-0-0-0)**

**1378, Adopting Local Law No. 2012, A Local Law to strengthen safeguards for residents of planned retirement Communities (Romaine)**

Legislator Romaine is here, but this has to be tabled for a public hearing.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Yes, but I'm happy to explain the bill now.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

I'll make the motion to table for public hearing, seconded by Legislator Anker. On the motion, Legislator Romaine.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Very quickly. We had a passed a number of resolutions affecting senior citizen communities as it relates to the charges that the impose on their -- on people in that community where the people don't own the land, but they own the homes.

Very simply stated -- this is in litigation -- it looks like the County may prevail in this litigation. My concern is if it prevails and they're subject to fines, that they'd simply impose those fines on the residents of those communities. So as a result, I've drafted this piece of legislation that says that that's something that they would be prohibited from a doing. Obviously, other people shouldn't pay for your sins, you should pay for your own sins so to speak.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Okay. Anyone else? Okay. The motion is to table for a public hearing. I'll call the vote. All in favor? Any opposed? Any abstentions? IR 1378 is **TABLED FOR PUBLIC HEARING (VOTE: 5-0-0-0)**.

That is our agenda. It is with great pleasure that I welcome Vicki Fleming to our committee today. Vicki is the 4-H Youth Development Program Director with the Cornell Cooperative Extension. And welcome, thank you for being with us today.

**MR. FLEMING:**

Thank you, Legislator Stern, for inviting me today. And while all of you are familiar with 4-H youth Development and have even visited at the farm, I am -- I do pressure the fact that I can come to talk to you about one of our new initiatives.

I'm going to give you some background on 4-H regardless just to put it all in context. So it is the oldest youth organization in the United States and one of the largest programs with more than 6.5 million people ages 5 to 19. It has three primary areas; science engineering technology and math actually has been included, healthy living and citizenship. It promotes four essential elements for youth development; independence, belonging generosity and mastery. And the 4-H programs are distributed a number of ways. It might be in a community club, in somebody's house, it may be school-based through the programs similar to what we do at the farm with our enrichment and outreach programs, after-school camp settings and in military installations worldwide, which is where we're focused today.

Some of the things that make 4-H unique, which is a question we often get, STEM, which is again, that science engineering technology. National 4-H has an initiative to reach one million new scientists, so it is obviously something that's talked about everywhere, but it's something that 4-H is also focused on. So we do programs like robotics, rocketry, geo-spatial sciences, renewable energies. Any science-based project that you can possibly think of, we've probably done that.

4-H has a strong connection to Cornell. We take kids up as often as possible through a number of programs. One of the best is called Career Explorations, and that happens at the end of June. This year we're taking 11 youth up, and they'll basically spend three days as a college student at Cornell. And they will pick a track and they will work with professors, and they'll come out with some sort of project or culminating activity.

The other -- another program that is a cornerstone for 4-H is public speaking, that's public presentations. They present at a club level, a County level, and then district level. And actually, we held our event on Saturday. There were 139 kids from the Southeast District, which is Ulster, Orange, Sullivan, Dutchess, Suffolk County, Westchester, Rockland. And we sent up about eight youth, and when we have a State program, they would then qualify to go onto State.

Agricultural is still one of the cornerstones of 4-H in that that's where it began. It's also one of the only organizations that reaches out with agricultural programs. And that's important, because today we're talking about sustainable agriculture, knowing where your food comes from, how to buy local and making informed decisions. So having strong routes in agriculture is important.

And just a fun fact, we have some alumni that are 4-H members or were 4-H members growing up, and they include Al Gore, Faith Hill and David Letterman and also 14 Governors, 33 University Presidents and Chancellors, 31 CEOs and four astronauts.

Today I'm here to talk to you about Operation Military Kids. Basically, we started with it a year ago, we were turning 75, 4-H in Suffolk County, and we wanted to do a community service project. And one of the national initiatives for 4-H is the hero pack, and I brought one with me today. Basically, we either sew or purchase the pack, and then we fill it with items that are conducive to having a child supported while one of their family members is deployed. And we're talking suddenly military, we're not talking about kids that are located on bases that have the opportunity to have that

connection, to have a community around them that understands what's going on, that have social programs that are a part of the base activity. They are in their own homes, they may or may not have had their family member deployed before. You know, it may be that they're in reserve status and this is the first time that they've been called back.

So this contains communication materials, a camera so they can take pictures while their loved one is away, something fun like a stuffed animal, toys. And it helps -- the other piece of it is that the 4-H member or the youth person that has put it together is finding a way to reach out. So they're writing a letter that's included, and they're also part of the process of getting it to that person. So it may be that they're distributing this pack and find out that it's their neighbor, and they never knew that their family was in the military. So it makes that connection and helps the kids know that they're accepted.

So Operation Military Kids has -- this is one of their programs, but they also have been reaching out in a number of other ways. So, again, a year ago we did this hero pack project. We were approached by New York State Operation Military Kids because of our large population of deployment here. So they asked us to begin this Long Island regional support network, and we have a number of mandates that we have been given as part of a grant that we received.

So you can see the statistics. There are 43,000 school-aged military-connected youth in New York, 25 of them are geographically -- 25,000 are geographically dispersed. And in the Long Island regional area, which does branch all the way into New York City -- we are working with the New York City as well -- you can see the numbers there, we are second to the Kings County, which is Brooklyn. So it's a pretty substantial amount here in Suffolk County. And over 9000 youth, you know, in this whole region that we're trying to reach.

So some of the core elements for Operation Military Kids, we just talked about hero packs so just to quickly go through that. Ready, Set, Go is a training that basically gets a group of people together that are interested in reaching out to military youth and talks about what the cycle is, what the kids are going through. And as we heard the Director say, they're not always self-identifying for a number of reasons. And we even heard during this training that several of the military families are asked not to put stickers on their cars or even talk about the fact that they have a family member that's deployed, because it can make them a target. So they're not necessarily reaching out.

Kids may be acting out in school. So what are those teachers going to do, how are they going to what the reasons are behind it? If they find out that they are a military family, maybe they will find ways of reaching out and understanding more about what's going on in the home life. So this training helps them learn those skills, helps them identify those signs and figure out ways to reach out to the youth.

We held one in Suffolk County a couple of months ago, we'd like to hold more. We had a very low enrollment, so we're looking for ways to reach out to people, caregivers that would be interested in this program.

Speak Out for Military Kids is designed for teens. And basically, the original premise was that there would be a two-day retreat and the teens would be brought together with both military and non-military families -- or coming from both military and non-military families to talk about what it is they are feeling, and then find ways to get it out to people. So they can do that through a public service announcement or speakers bureaus or maybe they're going to do a You Tube video, or maybe they're going to develop actual written materials and make pamphlets. So it's a way of getting those kids together, talking about those issues and figuring how they are going to reach out.

They have a mobile technology lab, which kind of goes in tandem with that Speak Out Military kids, because it gives the tools to actually do what it is they decide they want to do. So there's several

laptops, there's video cameras, there are iPads, there are -- they have also started to include robotics kits so that I guess just to bring in the technology in again, reach those science engineering technology principles to engage of youth.

So this mobile technology lab can go out to events. If you are interested in having it come out and have a reason for it to come out, we can get it through New York State and bring out to your site. Some of the other programs that are a part of this grant, we have a babysitting course, it's called Getting Ready to baby sit, and it helps youth, to sort of empower them to go out and earn their own money and give them the skills to do this job of babysitting.

Boots On and Boots Off are one day programs that basically introduce the kids to what it's like being deployed. So Boots On, they're going to get dog tags, they're going to kind of maybe pack their pack and learn about their mission. They are going to kind of, maybe not physically, but emotionally learn how to leave. And then Boots Off is the opposite; you know preparing for your loved one to come home and what that's going to be like.

They have also participated in -- there's some galaxy camps, and one of them is held at the Westhampton Beach Air Force every year. New York State Operation Military Kids comes down and does a day. And this year, we're going to be doing a day as well. So we are either going to do some sort of science thing like rocketry or robotics or we're going to bring them to the farm, because they are -- the Operation Military Kids from New York State is doing nutrition, so we were going to try to make the connection to farms.

Also connecting the kids to 4-H, again, the idea that community around can be supportive; even if they don't necessarily know what you are going through, they can, you know, understand what it's like to maybe lose one of your parents for a while and help them know that there are other people out there of their age that might have some of the same interests as they do. And just family days; we're trying to tap into a lot of the -- the bases do yellow ribbon events when they have deployments, and we are trying to tap into of those.

We also -- one of the other initiatives that's not on here is healthy living. We're supposed to do a number of those programs. At the farm, we have developed four sort of competitions for the summer and into the fall called food challenges. And basically it's going to bring kids in to take either mystery ingredients or maybe they're bringing their own ingredients to create some -- it's sort of along the lines of Chopped or Iron chef, if anybody watches those, for kids to get them excited about eating fresh foods. If they are cooking it, maybe they will eat it. So that's sort of the idea.

So how can you help? For once, I'm not coming to you and saying, "We need money." As we heard, it's very hard to reach these. They are -- you just can't call the Department of Defense and say, "Give me your mailing list." So we are trying to reach out to these families and let them know what we have. We've distributed 139 hero packs. We have, you know, more to give out. We're willing to go to events and distribute these. It's kind of the grassroots way of really showing them just initial support. But we have all these other programs. We want to get a group of teens together, we're trying to get that on the calendar.

The Ready, Set, Go trainings would be for any sort of caregivers that might want to make that indirect connection. You know, we'll be training the trainer kind of thing. And also, the mobile technology lab can go out. So if any of you are having an event and you want something like that there. It was great that we got to participate in the Monster Golf event, because I -- besides handing out the packs, I also made some connections with some of the other people, you know, the Soldier Project and some other really important organizations that are involved. So if any of you have any interests or any families that you know of and you can help us distribute the information, if it's okay if I send you fliers when we have events and you can, you know, forward them on that,

would be great.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Any questions? Legislator Montano.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

I'll be quick. Just curious, this grant that you referred to, I was just wondering how much is the grant, where did it come from, and how long is it for.

**MS. FLEMING:**

The grant was for -- it's only about a six month grant, and it was for about \$6000 for a staff member to begin this regional support network.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

What happens after the six months?

**MR. FLEMING:**

We will still get some support from New York State, they'll send us hero packs and materials, and they'll bring the mobile technology lab down, but we won't have staff support.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

What agency awarded the grant?

**MR. FLEMING:**

It was through National Operation Military Kids that went to New York State and then filtered down to us.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

All right. Will you be able to continue -- I thought it was one question, it was not, but I'll be quick. And I apologize for my phone going off, I had just touched the button and knocked off the vibrator that it rang.

But getting back to this, once the six months are up, how do you -- or do you anticipate being able to continue the program without funding?

**MS. FLEMING:**

4-H youth Development is committed to working with kids. We are committed to working with kids regardless, and we will continue to reach out to the population. As far as we are concerned, it's another population of youth that need to have development. So we were -- despite the fact that were zeroed out in the budget, we do have revenue coming in through our farm programs, and we're able to maintain what -- you know, the clubs that we currently have and will continue to reach out in any way we can to this population we well.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Do you anticipate that you will be needing further funding from the County, or are you looking for funding from the County to continue this program? Smile.

**MR. FLEMING:**

Well, we're looking at getting funding back for the core program for 4-H Youth Development, and that would include this program.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Okay. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Legislator Anker.

**LEG. ANKER:**

It sounds like a wonderful program. It is a wonderful program from what you're -- you know the different aspects of what you're doing. As a former -- I don't think I had a 4-H in my high school, but I was a member of FFA, which is the Future Farmers of America. And I had my special blue jacket, and it was a wonderful learning experience on agriculture, horticulture, all those things involved.

I have a question relating to trying to get the word out. Have you been in fact with the Superintendent's Association, it's when the superintendents from all the schools get together and they meet and they discuss different topics. Have you reached out? If you can, contact my office. We can try to get you over there and at least have a packet ready, mail it to them, and this way they'll have it available to them.

**MR. FLEMING:**

That would be great.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Vicki, thank you. Everybody has Vicki's information that was made available to all committee members? If there are anymore, we'll make sure that we can get additional information to all of our colleagues who are not a part of the committee to make sure that everybody has them. But thanks so much for -- first of all, for your assistance with us the other day. You were an important part of the event that we held, so we really, really appreciate it. Of course, thank you for being with us today.

**MR. FLEMING:**

Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Anything else? Anybody else? Very good. We are then adjourned. Thank you.

(\*THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 1:52 P.M.\*)

{ } DENOTES BEING SPELLED PHONETICALLY