

VETERANS & SENIORS COMMITTEE
OF THE
SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE
MINUTES

A 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 held in February 26, 2014.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Leg. Steven H. Stern, Chairman
Leg. Thomas F. Barraga, Vice Chair (excused absence)
Leg. Sarah S. Anker
Leg. Al Krupski (excused absence)
Leg. Thomas Muratore

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Jill Moss, Budget Review Office
Massiel Fuentes, Budget Review Office
Thomas Ronayne, Director/Veterans Service Agency
Beth Murphy, Suffolk County Department of Labor, Licensing/Consumer Affairs
Bob Martinez, Aide to Leg. Muratore
Michael Pitcher, Aide to the Presiding Officer
And all other interested parties

MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Lucia Braaten, Court Stenographer

MINUTES TRANSCRIBED BY:

Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer

MINUTES PROOFED BY:

Anne Marie Farrell, Legislative Aide

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THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 3:56 PM

CHAIRMAN STERN:

I'm going to call the Veterans and Seniors Committee meeting to order. Please rise for the Salute to the Flag led by Legislator Anker.

SALUTATION

I'd ask everybody to please remain standing for a moment of silence, that we keep all the brave men and women fighting for our freedoms overseas in our thoughts and prayers.

MOMENT OF SILENCE OBSERVED

Okay, welcome. Welcome, everyone. Thank you for joining us today. We first start out by saying for the record that Legislator Barraga and Legislator Krupski are not with us today; they have excused absences.

I have no cards before us, so let's begin with the Director.

PRESENTATION

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Good afternoon. Thank you, as always, for your invitation to appear and speak before you. I do not have a great deal of information to provide to you today, but I think one thing that importantly I had mentioned previously at a previous Committee that our office has really ramped up our efforts with regard to intergovernmental collaboration, partnership; not that it has not always existed in Suffolk County. We've been blessed to have a very -- a very supportive environment within County Government with my colleagues and other agencies and departments.

But fairly recently, several months ago, Suffolk County Department of Labor and Consumer Affairs and Licensing had brought on a member of their staff who was to be specifically tasked with liaising with my agency to provide direct linkage and direct services for employment, resume writing in connection with resources, training and educational resources within the community. And I have to say that the -- the relationship has evolved well beyond where we initially anticipated that it would and has been very fruitful. We've been able to help a great many more veterans than we might have been able to do so prior to this arrangement being put in place.

If I could, I would like to invite to join me at the table Beth Murphy, who is the liaison through the Department of Labor to my office. And if I could ask Beth to come up and join me and introduce herself, and maybe between us we can share a bit of what we have jointly been able to accomplish in the past several months.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good.

MS. MURPHY:

Good afternoon, everyone. I apologize for us being a little late. But my name is Beth Murphy. And I was hired in September. Commissioner Chu and County Executive Steve Bellone, who is a veteran, saw the need at the Suffolk County level, and not at the State level, because we do have a State rep at the Department of Labor in our offices, for the collaboration working with Tom's office, but the need with 30,000 veterans on Long Island unemployed. The post 911 is the highest percent with over 10%. These individuals come back at the age 24. They have the highest rate. It's actually 30% at the age 24.

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So when I first started in September, I saw unbelievable amounts of veterans, after I went and scoured all the resources out there, that come back and are being offered jobs at \$10 an hour. And the Commissioner is working diligently with myself -- and Tom has been a great resource, because he has access to a lot of the individuals that come to see him. So when employment is in need, he's been sending them to myself.

So I am the rep. The problem is that a lot of veterans do not know the services of the Department of Labor, so that's where I've come into play. There's a new initiative called the Gold Star Initiative, Gold Card, that if you ask a veteran, they don't know about it. It's a Federal initiative. And it is six months of intensive service at a one-stop employment service in the country. They do not know about this. And it's six months where they get job placement, resume writing, military translation of skills, which a lot of them don't know how to do, translate, let's say, infantry into a skill set in the civilian world. So I've been doing all of that. And Tom has been great, because I just don't work on that alone; I do a lot of other things. The Peer to Peer Program, I started to sit in on a few things. So, really my goal is to help reduce the unemployment rate on Long Island.

The County Executive is a veteran and he is very determined to help. And it's been an exciting role. And anything that I could ever do to help -- but my -- my problem that I'm seeing is Civil Service, there are different things that are blocking veterans. Their training is not being translated into the civilian world with skill sets that are more than most. So that is something that I'm working on. And Tom and I have sat down on -- with discussing ways to move through that. That's a big roadblock, big roadblock.

So last week I had a veteran, just a quick thing and I'll turn it back to Tom, 36 months he had to go to training to work on cars. BMW would not hire him. He fixed Humvees. He fixed every aircraft in the military. He was a sergeant. He had 60 people under him. He was amazing -- he is amazing and he cannot get a job. I just -- he went to diesel mechanic school for 36 months and had to use his GI bill.

So we're seeing all different things. And it's great that I'm in this position. I'm excited and I thank you for letting me speak, but it's a role that, I think, as we move through it, I'm learning more and more and I'm doing many things to try to help each and every one of those veterans that walk in the door.

So thank you. That's just one thing, but Tom, one of many.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

One of the things that I'm very happy that over the time, and I -- in full disclosure, I happened to have known Beth for a while when she was previously working with our senior population in one of the towns. But Beth and I -- and I think this is gratuitous, that we share a philosophy; and that is that when we encounter barriers to accomplishing our joint mission, we don't -- we don't look at barriers as obstacles. We look at them as solutions waiting to be found. And we, you know, again through the support of outstanding staff and support of the Legislature, and certainly a very committed County Executive, we've been very fortunate in Suffolk County to have had some of the opportunities become available to us that we have.

The employment piece is hugely important. It is key to so many other -- so many other elements of the potential for success that these veterans face when they return home. Absent that employment piece, it's nearly impossible for them to put the other pieces together. Housing, re-assimilating into their community, re-engaging with or starting, creating a new family. Those were parts of their lives that they cannot fulfill without the employment piece. So we've taken on -- we've recommitted ourselves to ensuring that if there is a veteran able and willing to become employed, that we do whatever is necessary on our side of it to ensure that we work with him until

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he does find employment.

And thank you for over the years all the support that I've received from you individually, each, and from this Committee.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good. Well, thank you. Thank you, Director, and, Beth, it's a pleasure to have you with us. You know, we -- when we have this conversation among ourselves, with our Director, with so many of our professionals who are dedicated to assisting veterans and their families, you know, time and time again we have the conversation, you know, what can we be doing? What should we be doing to assist our veterans, especially those that are returning home? Can we make a stronger outreach with health services? Can we do more on the Social Services side? And I know, Director, you would agree with us that inevitably we're told time and time again that the number one, two and three issue for our veterans are jobs. And you're right, employment really is the key to helping with or even preventing so many of the other issues that our veterans and their families are faced with here in Suffolk County. And so this is a terribly important initiative. And it's great to see that -- that there's a concentrated effort.

When we're talking about barriers, and you had mentioned Civil Service, you know, as perhaps one of them, I was wondering if either of you had an idea, or based on your experience, what would you say is the number one barrier that veterans are facing when it comes to being able to apply their skills and experience in our current job market?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I don't know that I can honestly say that there is a single main -- main barrier. I think there are a number who share equal weight in the equation. Certainly the acceptance back into the community on the part of employers -- and even though both of our ground wars are presently winding down, we face a challenge. And I speak several times a week, generally, with business owners, members of various chambers of commerce, small business owners, large -- managers of large organizations. One of the concerns that is still present in our community is the issue as it relates to the reliance -- or the disproportionate reliance that we have seen in these present wars on National Guard and Reserve Forces.

As we're all aware, Suffolk County, Long Island as a whole does not have a significant active duty military presence. The vast majority of what we have on-site, on the ground on Long Island, are National Guard and Reserve elements. When these National Guard and Reserve Service members are called to duty, when they are activated, these are what most of us refer to as citizen soldiers. They are our neighbors; they are our police officers; our local attorneys; the fellow who owns the bakery up in town. These are our next door neighbors. And when they're called to duty, the impact on the businesses can be quite substantial.

Certainly when you factor the requirement under Federal Law that they -- that they conform to USRA, the Uniform Services Reemployment Act, the employer, certainly small businesses, when an employee is called away, the employer by Federal law must hold that position for that veteran for a period of five years. That's quite a burden to place on a small business. You know, it affects everything; it affects productivity; it affects payroll; it affects so many areas of their business.

So when we see service members or veterans on Long Island applying for positions, that concern is -- it seems to be almost omnipotent in the population of people doing the actual hiring; where if I do hire Mr. Ronayne or Mr. Stern, at what point does he call me in the morning and tell me that he received a letter in the mail or a telephone call and he won't be coming to work today? Nor will he be coming to work in March, April, May, June or July. So there's a concern on the part of the ability of the folks doing the hiring, that when they do make a commitment to bring somebody aboard, that

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that person will, in fact, be able to make a commitment to that position.

There's also, I think, a tragically disproportionate belief that there is the prevalence of mental illness amongst veterans. You know, we all see and read so much about PTSD and TBI, Traumatic Brain Injuries. And the truth is, it is a problem. However, the numbers, the percentage of service members affected by these conditions, while the initial diagnosis could be as high as one-third of our returning service members, those with serious elements probably fall closer into the 5 to 10% range. That is not the perception. And I suppose the media has some responsibility in how this information is presented to the public. We don't often see success stories in the press. We see the tragedy and we see the failure. We see the folks who come home and struggle. We see the features on homelessness. And that tends to be -- you know, perception is reality. And we tend to see a lot of people who, based on what information they are exposed to, is the extent of the information that they have available to them. And they think that's a rather uniform circumstance, when it is not the case. The majority of our returning folks are strong, ready, willing and able physically and mentally. They're anxious to return to work and to reengage their prior lives, their previous lives.

You know, it's also important to remember that this population, while returning, historically, when we have -- when we have wound down from wars, our returning -- our returning forces have been generally quite young. The folks who enter military service directly out of high school or straight from college, realistically nobody -- the majority of folks returning home would not be older than their early to mid-twenties.

Going back again to the argument of our disproportionate reliance on the National Guard and Reserve Forces, these citizen soldiers in many cases have become career military as a second career folks. So they're not necessarily teenagers or early twenties. These are people in their 30s, 40s and 50s. A 50-year-old guy, if I were to come home from the Middle East after a two or three year separation and try and reenter my chosen field, I don't know -- well, maybe in my case it's not a fair comparison being in Veteran Services, but the average person, I think, would find it quite difficult, because age then becomes a factor. The fact that jobs that were once plentiful seem to have not returned in the numbers and in the fields that we once saw them.

So I think the perception and the understanding of -- on the part of employers as to who these veterans are when they return is a very significant factor. We have been working as hard as we can, and certainly with Beth's assistance, education is the key. We need to get this information out to the folks who are doing the hiring and offering these positions. But, again, sometimes it's a matter of just going back and banging on that same door time and time again. We're having some successes, but I would say that the perception of who the service members are when they're returning home is a big factor.

And then certainly Beth touched on the difficulties in employers and and service members translating the equivalency of military skill sets into comparable civilian work environments is a challenge. And a lot of -- a lot of the fault of that, I think, falls to both the military and to the veterans services community for not doing a more proactive job of teaching the veterans how to do that. Even things, resume writing and interview workshops, such as that, when we conduct those, it's always startling when you see the level of experience that these individuals are returning home with; yet they don't -- they don't view themselves as possessing that type of experience.

We've got young people -- 25-year-old people who have been in the military five, six, seven years who have achieved ranks of Sergeant, who have dozens, sometimes hundreds of people working for them. They control budgets in the multi-million dollars. And yet when they come home, they're working as the grocery bagger, non-skilled type positions, not realizing that the ability to transfer the skill sets, the training and the experience that they've obtained in the military, if they only had a better -- a better sense of how to market that. And, I think, part of what we're doing with Labor

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and through Commissioner Chu's efforts are refining how we can best market these skills, the skills that these individuals possess so that we can make the candidates more appealing.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And so that's an important part of this initiative to kind of bridge -- bridge that gap.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yes.

MS. MURPHY:

I will be spending a week at Fort Hamilton. And I've contacted the Coast Guard. Every single veteran that comes into my office talks about the military translation of skill sets. I had a fellow in my office listing in the infantry 17 artillery pieces of ammunition and did not understand why that would not be appropriate for the job he was applying for. And it was a life coaching session. I have a life coaching degree, a counseling degree, a business degree, a teaching degree. But every part of me as a person went into helping him, because no one in the military, as he said, helped him to understand that. So they're coming into the Department of Labor thinking that this was okay for a civilian job, where no equipment of that sort would be used and how it would scare an employer, possibly scare them to even get the interview.

So it's a huge problem. They tell -- they all tell me that getting out of the military, the last thing they want to do is sit in a week transition class where they learn about their dental, they learn about all their benefits; and then someone from the Department of Labor at the Federal level comes in and talks about a resume, they're not listening, every one of them, they're not listening, they're not ready. They said "if you were to come in for the -- on Long Island and do this six months after we're out, that would be just a great thing that you could do for us. Because you'd listen, we could ask questions, we're in a clear frame of mind. We don't want to just go home and see our wives and our children. We want to engage at that point." Before no one's understanding that.

And if I can tell you every single time the young veteran, too, that's gone eight years, their peers have moved on. They've gotten degrees. They've had marriages. They've had children. They come back eight years later and no one's translating their skill sets. They're going for \$10-an-hour jobs and in tears that they can't live on Long Island.

This is what's coming every other day into my office. And it's appalling to see Sergeants in the Navy and the Army that can't get a job because they don't know how to translate their skill sets; or the employers are not looking at their skill sets. They don't know how to see the leadership that these individuals had in the military.

So I am calling upon different governmental -- like in National Grid, the governmental agencies within -- or the relations people, and I'm also going to probably do an employment roundtable, where individual employers understand the benefits of hiring a veteran; the reasons that we need to employ veterans; and that they're not all suffering from PTSD. That's one of the things they'll say to you, some of the employers, they're afraid. So that fear we have to work on as well.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And so, Beth, the services that are provided, whether it's job coaching, skills training, these are services that are offered where, when, how?

MS. MURPHY:

So I will be going in March to look at how the military -- the Army is doing -- the translation of that getting them out. But I have been getting books on resumes, translation of skills and I've been calling Colonels and talking to Tom and different people if I don't understand how to translate some

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of their military background. But I am the single person doing it. So it is a little busy. I had a 75-year-old come in yesterday in a wheelchair. So the word is out that I'm there but -- so the challenges are great. So I could get that individual probably some type of work. But some of them come in with a lot of disabilities as well. So my goal is to work on first the veteran and both at the same time because the disability, there's a lot of individuals coming back with -- you know, because they're surviving the wars; they're coming back injured. That's a whole 'nother piece to this.

So I've been doing workshops. I have a psychologist I'm bringing in that works with veterans, Dr. Michael {Stolt} and he -- no, not Michael {Stolt} -- Michael {Delfaco} -- that's your guy -- Michael {Delfaco's} going to come in and help me with some of the individuals with PTSD that I deal with. I have a training in counseling, but he's trained in {Holis} so he worked with them at the hospital. So he's going to help me on that end. Because I do get -- if you want to categorize A,B and C veterans, I get some that are not employable that walk in the Department of Labor. So I am almost like a feeding central station where if you need skill sets, we do training; I talk about the GI bill. If not, I talk about employers. I work with business services to try to show them the jobs. But if they need a lot of help, I've been individually spending sometimes two hours with a veteran where I need to broaden it into group sessions. So, that's my goal, to start doing it in a broader way.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

So you're not just coordinating; you're actually providing.

MS. MURPHY:

I'm providing the services. I'm doing -- and then referring them to services for the underserved. And my goal -- and I thought about this and I wanted to bring this up to the Commissioner, is a database where employers -- and this is like a corporate mind set that -- database where employers could go into the Department of Labor with the veterans that we've screened and employers could look for a veteran. And we've done their resume. They're in a database. Put in a code. And they come in and we're helping the 30,000 unemployed veterans.

I'm getting calls from Whitestone, because when you do help somebody, it gets out there. But the thing is it's got to expand then, because you can't have one person run all the programs and do what I want to do. So, it's all good. It's all exciting. But we have to figure out how to make it -- because the translation of skills is key. And the key is to get them when they come home, quickly, quickly, before they get disgruntled and disengaged. Because it's a population that I notice. And because I have background in counseling, but I also lost my husband in 911, they immediately break their wall down because I have a loss, and I would never share it, but my instinct -- the connection becomes instantaneously from post-911. They trust, they engage, they share, they want to help and then they tell their friends. So it's a beautiful, beautiful collaboration, but you want to help not just one, you want to help many, like Tom does on a daily basis. So it's great that Sammy Chu put me -- Commissioner Chu put me in this place, but on a larger level, Suffolk County, we really have to work on helping the translation of skill sets, getting them quickly, and doing something on an employer level, like Job Summit, to get these companies to understand the importance.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And so right now a lot of the activity that you're seeing, people are coming to see you, there's word of mouth and there's referrals back and forth, at this point has there been any larger effort in terms of marketing public relations to let our wider Suffolk County community know of these services that you're offering?

MS. MURPHY:

No. And the website was the next thing I wanted to go to the County Executive, because I have got Human Rights Office calling me. I heard -- there's got to be a better way to get the word out than,

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like, the disconnect, "I didn't get your number. I lost your number." It should be on a website.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Well, there has been some --

MS. MURPHY:

For Labor. Not for -- yeah.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

For the Veteran/Labor joint -- you know, joint effort.

MS. MURPHY:

(Inaudible)

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yeah, through our office, through the web page, through our office, through our agency. Certainly all of the facilitators and trained staff on the Joseph Dwyer Peer Support Program have been instructed to make referrals. They have -- we've also been expanding the types of outreach that we do. And, you know, I think as our outreach expands, it's also an education for us. We're always being exposed to details and information that maybe had not yet -- had not previously been as clearly understood as we're finding it.

One place that I've spoken to -- spoken of in the past has been our effort in the area of serving our incarcerated veterans. We've been expanding our efforts working in the jails with the cooperation of our Sheriff, but we're finding that the needs of the incarcerated veterans, most of these guys are not really bad guys. They're guys who have lost their way. We're seeing an unusually high percentage of these fellows who are incarcerated, not for crimes -- the traditional types of robbery and crimes against persons, crimes against property, a lot of alcohol and drug use, a lot of DWI, those types of things, where we believe that is a clear linkage to their military service. They're almost exclusively combat veterans. Their alcohol and drug use, we firmly believe, is simply a case of self-medicating as a result of their exposures. And as we expand our efforts in that population, we're seeing results.

One of them is that the Department of Labor has scheduled a program targeted specifically to providing employment opportunities and reengaging past offenders into the work population. If you compound some of the concerns that I've presented earlier with the fact that I've got a criminal history, I've got a conviction, it's tough to put that guy to work. We've been working with employers and with -- through Beth's efforts at Labor to create opportunities for these populations. But, again, as we expand into these populations, it's not because we don't have other things to do, but these are all places where these veterans in need exist. And my personal view is that my charge through my office is that we have an obligation to serve these individuals regardless of where they are. It's our job to go out and find them. And as we are locating them and identifying them -- identifying and engaging them, we are also learning, learning on, you know, just what the ideal approach to some of them -- some of them is. The Clothing Couture.

MS. MURPHY:

Oh, yes. Let me just -- that's where I was. Sorry. When I got the call that we were -- veterans, or the general population, the Commissioner decided to open up a Career Couture in the Department of Labor so it's three doors from my office. And it's -- we'll probably be opening in the next week. Beautiful clothing from EAC and all these people are donating, and new clothing, and gently used suits for women and men and shoes.

So it brings back a memory. I had a veteran a couple of weeks ago that had seven hundred dollars

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to his name. And he said I can't even go on a job interview. I don't have a suit. So this is a place where you can send veterans or the general population that are in need. And the County Executive and Commissioner Chu realized that this would be a great place to put it right where we're looking for jobs.

So, it's a wonderful thing. By appointment only. And it will be open in a week. So I'll be working on that level. Because I look at the veteran as a whole. And it's very different. And Tom does that as well. That's why we work so well together. You just don't -- when they come in for a job, when they have no home, they have family problems -- there's a myriad of things, but employment is a critical factor. And I see so many that come from services for the underserved that are going to lose their house. So they're coming to me almost in tears that, "please, get me a job. I heard you can get me a job in a week." I mean they're saying things that, you know, they're hearing good things, but it's difficult when they're already at that place. You want to get them before it's already hit that level.

Tom, I just want to say the Fresh Start Job Fair is March 18th at Suffolk Community College. That's for incarcerated individuals, ex-offenders. Veterans are welcome as well. The veteran ex-offenders. But we're doing workshops, resume writing. And they are 'til the 21st this week and one more the following week. To help prepare them, because as an ex-offender, there's gaps in their resume. So -- and how to go on the interview. And we're doing all that with them as well. So that's -- that was four Fridays. And the ex-offender job fair is on March 18th. Tom and I are going to do a job fair for veterans. And that -- and then the Employment Summit almost -- with the Long Island employers to understand how we need to help our veterans.

So there's a lot of great things on the table. It's a commitment that I know the County Executive is really wanting. And I'm excited to work with Tom, because every day you see the needs of the veterans. With 30,000 unemployed veterans, it's just too much, too much so --

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I think to close, one of the things that we should make you aware of is, you know, as we've been describing, some of the veterans in our population are simply in need of that helping hand. There are clearly others who are nontraditional and perhaps accessing the traditional, conventional entry into employment stream is not the best option for those individuals. We met a while back, about six weeks ago with an old friend, Beth Dilapisi and some representatives from the Army -- Army National Guard on a program known as Vet Fran, which is franchise opportunities through nationally-known labels, who are the -- the parent organizations are providing very special incentives for veterans to enter their franchise markets, sometimes to the extent of waiving the initial franchise fee entirely. In other instances, I think, Pizza Hut is offering \$50,000 equipment cost forgiveness. You know, some really outstanding programs.

So if we have veterans who may not necessarily be appropriate for the conventional employment stream, we are looking at alternatives to that. And the franchise opportunities that exist certainly is one of those areas, self-employment. We've been meeting with Stony Brook University discussing developing something akin to an entrepreneurial boot camp for veterans in Suffolk County on the campus at Stony Brook. So we're trying to -- we're trying to look at this with both eyes open. And I think that certainly our efforts have been paying off. We've been seeing successes.

But as I said to Legislator Muratore before we began, it's a bit of a double-edge sword. We're seeing terrific response. We're seeing a great number of folks coming out and attempting to access our services, but I think the double-edge of that sword is it's outstanding that people finally are seeing there are doors to knock on, there are places that they can go for this assistance. The tragic part of it is that there are so many of these individuals in need in the first place.

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So we'll continue to work hard. We'll continue to keep you informed. And as always, I'm available for questions or anything else you may need.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

We have a question. Legislator Muratore.

LEG. MURATORE:

Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you so much for what you both do for us, but my concern is -- we seem to do so much for veterans, returning veterans. Are there any models out there that do more than we do that are successful that we can go to? You know, a lot of people come to Suffolk County or hear about what we do here in Suffolk County. And then we kind of like set the pace. Is there a community, is there a county, is there a state out there that does more for veterans than we do here in Suffolk County?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I'd love to know about them if they're out there. We've done -- we do a fair amount of research. And I spent a good amount of time trying to collaborate with colleagues from around the country. I can tell you that San Antonio, Texas has some outstanding programs and full disclosure. And I've said this to them. I'm shameless. If they have a good idea, I'll be the first one to steal it from them.

LEG. MURATORE:

Why don't we do that? Why don't we steal it from them?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Oh, we have; in essence we have. And they very graciously have invited us to steal as much as we would like.

LEG. MURATORE:

Because I remember when I was in the Police Department, we would share training with other jobs. And if a job was doing something that was ahead of us, we would send somebody to that particular organization and get trained by them and then come back and train our people. If we have something like that --

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

We have a conference -- we have a conference coming up in Albany that will be -- most of my counterparts throughout the State will be in attendance. And this is part of what we'll be spending one of those days on is discussing exactly this: "What are you doing that we are not doing? What are we doing right? What are we doing wrong? What should we be doing that we're not doing? What are we doing that we shouldn't be doing?" And I couldn't agree with you more. You know, we don't know what we don't know. And the only way to learn those things is to speak with others, other like-minded folks who are trying to accomplish at the end of the day the same goals and the same objectives that we are, but may have a different path. So we're wide open to suggestions, but we're looking every day. If I could use the word shop, we're always shopping for new ideas.

LEG. MURATORE:

I mean, it seems to me that we're also lacking womenpower and manpower. I think we need to hire some more people -- to put some more people in place to do what Ms. Murphy does and what you do. And do we have people available to do what both of you do?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

We -- and, again, through the generosity of the Legislature, we were able to to hire new Service Officers before the end of 2013. And I have two pending SCINs for part-time positions that we are

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still in the process of attempting to fill. One of the things that we've been working on is finding the appropriate people for the positions. We have had a number of candidates. And, again, there's an irony in this that we've been interviewing veterans who are not ideally suited for the work, but beyond the Civil Service requirement, I believe that there are certain characteristics of a candidate that must be present for somebody to be successful in what we do. And that passion is important. What we do is important on an individual basis for each of the clients that we serve. We have been meeting, and I do have interviews scheduled next week with two additional Iraq and Afghanistan veterans after which I expect to be able to make offers. So I'm hopeful that by the time we go around to the next committee cycle, I'll be able to report to you that we've filled those two remaining SCINS.

LEG. MURATORE:

So when you fill those, will you have enough then? People? No. I'll say it for you. How about you, Miss Murphy, will you?

MS. MURPHY:

I have to say as I grow, as this grows, and Stony Brook University wanted me to work with them and I'm going to teach a vets bill veterans, we're giving them training through Bank of America and United Way. And I met with Rick Wertheim and he said "could you come here and teach?" So there's so many opportunities that one person -- when you have a Department of Labor, you have a staff of career counselors, but I'm the only one there dealing with veterans. So as this gets exciting and bigger, I do believe it could be a great opportunity to put even -- veterans, when they walk in the door, if they're not attended to immediately, some of them will leave. So I'm trying to redo the paperwork, the form to be different for a veteran. There's -- there should be a veteran board. There's a lot of things, but -- it's all good, but as it expands and as you want to do more, you're going to need more manpower obviously to do all that. And it's a wonderful, wonderful thing.

He's -- Tom is growing in leaps and bounds, but at the Department of Labor right here, the New York State reps see them for unemployment and that's it. They're not doing what I'm doing. And it's a very different role. They have to see scheduled deployments and they have to talk about three jobs -- you know, "did you look for jobs? Did you go on an interview?" Very, very different work. They're not re-doing resumes, interviewing, role-playing, any of that. Even negotiating salaries, I'm doing all of that. So the thing with that is as that grows, you can't -- you don't want to turn people down for appointments.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

And one of the things also that I think it's important to do is, certainly if I have additional resources, I'll find effective places to use those resources. I think it's also important to also be aware of what you have existing and make sure that they're being utilized to their full potential. And that we're doing things in an efficient manner and an effective manner.

So when we encounter things -- and a good example would be the State employment folks, we have no authority over what the State does with their people, but we can certainly work collaboratively with them to assist and suggest to them that the work that we do here in Suffolk County we've had successes working in a particular fashion, "perhaps you could work more closely with us and achieve a better result." And we've had some success in that.

So I think it's a matter of looking at how we're utilizing resources. And when we encounter other folks who -- there's a lot of people out there right now doing different flavors of veterans services. There's a lot of well-intentioned, well-meaning people out there, but a lot of the nongovernmental, not-for-profit type services are being duplicated, and maybe not as effectively as they could be. And that's another area that we're working in. So I think as we maximize or improve efficiency within the community, that enhances our ability to better do our job.

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LEG. MURATORE:

Okay. Again, thank you for everything you do. And if you ever need anything, please come to us and let us know and, you know, we'll see what we can do and if we can entice people to give you the necessary resources you need to get your job done. Again, thank you.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Anker.

LEG. ANKER:

And, again, thank you for both of -- your work that you've done is just vital. You know, without you, I don't know where we would be. I mean, I said the same thing when Suffolk Community College came in front of us yesterday. And, you know, how -- what would Suffolk County be, you know, without the Community College? And what would Suffolk County be without Vets Services? You provide so much. And with that in mind, I just wanted to also mention here that Suffolk County, the services they provide, they are -- and they train the vets. How is that going? And are you working with them over in the -- what is that department that they're focusing with vets?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

John Lombardo, who runs the Technology Training Center, it's a great program. They have been very, very accommodating as well to veterans who come into the student body. They -- if they have an appropriate cohort, if they have a number of veterans to form a class, they have even expressed a willingness to deviate from the traditional semester calendar and form classes almost spontaneously. If I present -- if I present enough candidates for him this week, he'll form a class on Monday and begin, which is quite unusual. So they are doing a very good job. We do work with the Student Veteran Organization. We do work with the Administration. Dr. McKay has been very supportive of our efforts. John Lombardo has been -- and Larry Cavanaugh have both been terrific, as have the staff liaison and the Student Veteran Association. But, again, it's a daily grind. Every day brings a new challenge.

LEG. ANKER:

Well, again I thank both of you for the work that you've done. And, you know, just as Suffolk Community College is a resource, we also want to be a resource for you. So if you have any issues or problems, you know, connecting, reaching out, we're here. We're, you know, here to support you. I know -- I'm working on -- as part of the Jobs Opportunity Board, we're working to create a website for -- to connect, you know, the kids to jobs. And, again, you know, it sounds like that's what you're working on right now. So, if we can -- if you want to collaborate, more than happy to work with you. I -- we've -- you know, I've worked on the Scam Alert website and different websites. But we need to do more because, you know, in the paper today it talks about how our young adults, they're leaving Long Island. They can't find jobs. They can't find a place to stay. And it's the same thing with our vets, you know. Because -- what is the age range of the vets that you're helping? Is it the younger -- younger vets that are coming back?

MS. MURPHY:

Yes, but you know what's coming back now? Some that can't sustain Social Security payments. I had the 75-year-old that couldn't afford where he's living. And he's in tears crying and he's 75, disabled with COPD, diabetes. He had every ailment: Back injury, scoliosis. And now I have to try -- so I looked at his resume. And he had acupuncture. He worked in the hospital. So I do have that fellow that worked in Target 70-years-old, I do have that population. But most of them up until 40-years-old, and a couple now, I'm starting to see that are 20-year Coast Guard, and they're young. And they're struggling. I just got him a third interview at H2M, the company on

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Long Island. So I'm really reaching out with business services trying to understand the companies and the mindset. Because he couldn't get a job on his own. Unbelievable talent. He was trying to get a job as a codings inspector, a very detailed position. And they don't know the networking because their networking has been very internal. So they're networking. So we teach networking over at the Department of Labor. I'm teaching them LinkedIn. I was kidding them. I put myself in LinkedIn and I'm getting job offers. I don't need a job. And they're like really?

So you're teaching them what all the -- the skills needed. And that's a 20-year Coast Guard veteran that couldn't get a job. Now, he's my AA and he can't get the job. So you can only imagine the ones that come in that need training, because they're not -- they're being told their training is not okay to the civilian world. So then we're sending them to the Department of Labor and they get a top priority. But why are we training them when -- if we had a committee and this, you know, a Coast Guard veteran cannot go in to be a security guard. If you sit on the New York State webinars, it doesn't -- they cannot be a security guard, but other forms of service they can. So -- it's just -- there's so many gaps and things that I'm just every day --

LEG. ANKER:

Right. Sounds like there needs to be some intervention and maybe changing the code or changing the curriculum, or whatever they call that, that creates that opportunity for our vets.

MS. MURPHY:

Yes.

LEG. ANKER:

You know, there needs to be something. And, again, that will have -- that's a continued discussion we'll have.

MS. MURPHY:

Yes.

LEG. ANKER:

But, again, thank you so much for coming out.

MS. MURPHY:

Thank you.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay? All right. Very good. Thank you. Thank you both for being with us today and, of course, for your continued service to our veterans and their families here in Suffolk County. As my colleagues have said, we continue to look forward to working with you. And, of course, anything that we can do to be of assistance along the way, you'll always be sure to let us know. And I know, Director, that we're looking forward to next cycle, our next committee meeting, an update on the Joseph Dwyer Program and spending some time with the new Director there and learning how the program is going and, again, what we could do to be of greater assistance.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Absolutely. I look forward to that presentation. And I will close by saying just two things: Please, if you are at all able to join us on Friday evening, this Friday February 28th at the Dennison Building in the Media Center at 7 PM, we will be hosting our annual Veterans Appreciation Night. The County Executive and I will be presenting awards to a number of veterans -- and nonveterans, individuals

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from our -- throughout our community who have in some way distinguished themselves through service to our veterans, our armed forces, our military community.

And I will -- I'll leave you with a tease. We will have one recipient on Friday evening who will be presented with the key to Suffolk County. That award has only been presented three times to my knowledge in the past. The first recipient was Mr. Steve Clark. Steve was a Suffolk County Police Officer who founded 911 Veterans. Steve was terminally ill. He was actually able to join us. County Executive Levy and I at the time presented him with the first ever key to Suffolk County in, I believe, 2009. And only two have been presented since then. So this will be the fourth ever key the County presented. And the story is absolutely worth making the trip over to the Dennison Building on Friday night for.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good. All right. Thank you.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Thank you.

MS. MURPHY:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

All right. Good. Okay. No other business being before the Committee, we are adjourned. Thank you.

**THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 4:45 PM
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