

New York City Veterans Advisory Board

Minutes for the August 10, 2022 meeting held virtually,
representing the meeting for Brooklyn

Members

Present:

Joe Bello (Bronx)

Paul Dietrich (Staten Island)

Absent:

Charles Hernandez (Bronx)

Wendy McClinton (Brooklyn)

Mercedes Elias (Queens)

Andrew Walcott (Brooklyn)

John Rowan (Queens)

Todd Haskins (Manhattan)

Peter Kauffmann (Queens)

Jennifer Kamrowski (Manhattan)

Note: Awaiting board member to be appointed by Speaker's Office.

Minutes

- Joe Bello (VAB Board Member) commenced the meeting at 6:07 pm.

Joe begins meeting introducing himself and other members of VAB present.

Presentation:

Joe turns the meeting to Paul Vallone from DVS to provide updates.

Paul Vallone, Deputy Commissioner for External Affairs begins with announcing President Biden has signed the PACT ACT into law: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/08/10/fact-sheet-president-biden-signs-the-pact-act-and-delivers-on-his-promise-to-americas-veterans/>. Ellen Greeley briefed the success of three Build-a-thons, building 120 folding tables and numerous stools to give to recently housed veterans. Paul briefs that staff had a meeting with Attorney General Leticia James who is going to start a task force for veterans subject to abuse of their financial assets or difficulty obtaining benefits they are entitled to. Queensboro President Donna Richards has expanded the BRC in Borough Hall to double as a resource center. DVS budget has been approved. Ellen briefs reinvigorating Veterans on Campus and planning a BBQ at Fordham University for all student veterans in NYC on Sept 10th. Ellen is planning a Bronx crisis team similar to the team previously created in Staten Island.

Joe opens up the floor for questions (provided below in public comments). Joe provided update on AIR commission process. The commission was never formed and there was no funding for it, therefore it looks like Brooklyn and Manhattan VA facilities will stay open for now.

Public Comments: The following comments were submitted to the board during the virtual meeting.

Samuel Cottes: If DVS is doing BBQs, can they do one in every borough?

- Response: Ellen Greeley clarifies the BBQ will be at Fordham Lincoln Center campus centrally located, not the Rose Hill campus.

Can we start working with Supportive Services for Veteran Families?

- Response: Joe Bello responded that we can invite them to future meetings to brief as to what services they provide. There is always a standing invitation for them to join.

Ashton Stewart: Briefed link to discussion with Commissioner Hendon, Dr. McInerney Network Director VISN 2 VA NY/NJ Healthcare Network; and Benjamin Pomerance, Deputy Director for Program Development at New York State Division of Veterans' Services: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VigPNV4XdP8>. Kudos on passing of the PACT ACT.

Paul Dietrich: After attending an event with Coast Guard, he found junior enlisted are having trouble feeding their children. Will be working with VSO's and collecting food to help with this issue on Staten Island.

- Response: Ellen Greeley responded DVS has been donating food every other week to the spouse's club on Staten Island from Hello Fresh. If they can get transportation plan, they could deliver once a week. Joe Bello mentioned that Bob Woodruff Foundation has funded some food delivery from God's Love We Deliver. Paul Vallone mentioned that the city approved grant funding they can apply for in order to supplement transportation and food costs. Samuel Cottes stated they can apply for help through Community Health Action of Staten Island (CHASI).

Would like to see where Dwyer funding is going now that it has been approved in the budget.

- Response: Joe Bello briefed that DVS is creating the process to approve the distributions based on their brief to the VAB during the executive session.

Can DVS create a referral process to track following up on issues for veterans?

- Response: Ellen responded they (DVS) will follow up on it.

Terrience Griffith: How is the VA addressing the important issue of increasing veteran suicide over the years?

- Response: Joe responds that the VAB is a city board. Normally we invite a VA representative but they were not available. DVS has briefed they are in process of obtaining Dwyer grant to allocate resources for mental health treatments. Ellen provides additional information on setting up crisis response teams to help address this.

Susan Wallace: Asked for an update on occupational (licensing) issues she brought up last meeting. Is concerned Department of Labor is not being treated as a protected class, is this something that can be done by the state?

- Response: Joe and Ellen confirm this is protected by the city. Paul Vallone mentions that because the state has established a Department of Veteran Services, he is hoping that the

new agency can follow the protection by the city. Paul stated he will present these issues with they meet with the state DVS over the next few months.

Dondi Mckellar: Will DVS or any agency assist in conversation on cannabis and equitable dispersement of licenses for veterans? Federal level cannabis is not recognized. At this time, veterans have no platform.

- Response: Paul Vallone responds that it is a new licensing program and DVS is looking to get veteran's preference for it.

Kathy Dean: Wanted clarification on funding to City Councilmembers for veterans.

- Response: Paul Vallone briefed breakdown of funding for veterans.

Joe thanks attendees and closed meeting.

Meeting adjourned.

Next meeting: 6 pm October 19, 2022

Submitted by: Mercedes Elias, Secretary