

VETERANS & CONSUMER AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
OF THE
SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE
MINUTES

A meeting of the Veterans & Consumer Affairs Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held hybrid via Zoom video-conferencing/in-person in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York on May 9, 2022.

Members Present:

Legislator Nick Caracappa - Chairperson
Legislator Anthony Piccirillo - Vice Chair
Legislator Sarah Anker
Legislator Bridget Fleming
Legislator Leslie Kennedy (Excused)
Legislator Al Krupski
Legislator Robert Trotta

Also in Attendance:

Kevin McCaffrey - Presiding Officer
Frank Tassone - Clerk/Suffolk County Legislature
Brett Robinson - Chief Deputy Clerk/Suffolk County Legislature
Bill Duffy - Counsel/Suffolk County Legislature
Bob Martinez - Aide to Legislator Caracappa
Ali Nazir - Aide to the Presiding Officer
All Other Interested Parties

Minutes Taken By:

Gabrielle Severs - Court Stenographer

1 (The meeting was called to order at 1:06 p.m.)
2

3 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

4 Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining us today at our
5 Veterans and Consumer Affairs committee. We're going to start with
6 the Pledge of Allegiance if you'd all rise and then remain standing
7 for a moment of silence. The Pledge of Allegiance will be led by
8 my co-chair Legislator Piccirillo.
9

01:05PM 10 (Pledge of Allegiance)
11

12 I ask for this moment of silence today for all our law enforcement
13 officers all serving our country, all those who made the ultimate
14 sacrifice, and also I want to take a moment to recognize a special
15 young man who unfortunately passed away. A moment of silence for
16 10-year-old little league player Lazar LaPenna who collapses and
17 died during a game last Friday. Lazar died due to an epileptic
18 seizure caused by his excitement over scoring a hit. The 4th grade
19 student at East School had just been diagnosed with epilepsy and
01:06PM 20 managed the condition that causes seizures using medications.
21 Lazar died just two days after celebrating his 10th birthday. Our
22 thoughts and prayers are with his father, Greg, and his mother,
23 Monique, and all his friends and fellow schoolmates, so we'll take
24 a moment of silence in all their names.
25

26 (Moment of Silence Observed)
27

28 Thank you.
29

01:07PM 30 Mr. Clerk, can we have roll call, please.
31

32 **CLERK TASSONE:**

33 Yes, Mr. Chairman.
34

35 (The roll was called by Clerk Tassone.)
36

37 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

38 Here.
39

01:07PM 40 **LEG. PICCIRILLO:**

41 Present.
42

43 **LEG. KRUPSKI:**

44 Here.
45

46 **LEG. FLEMING:**

47 Here. Good afternoon.
48

49 **LEG. ANKER:**

01:07PM 50 Here.
51

52 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

53 (Excused.)
54

55 **LEG. TROTTA:**

56 Here.

1
2 **LEG. KENNEDY:**
3 (No response.)
4
5 **CLERK TASSONE:**
6 Six.
7
8 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**
9 She has an excused absence, Legislator Kennedy. Mr. Clerk, are
01:07PM 10 there any correspondence? I believe we do have someone that filled
11 out -- oh. All correspondence have been submitted accordingly.
12 Sorry about that.
13
14 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**
15 It's okay. Thank you. Public portion. Do we have any speakers?
16 I know we have one here signed up. Any online?
17
18 **MR. DELUCA:**
19 We have none online.
01:08PM 20
21 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**
22 All right. So at this point, I'll invite Ms. Cathie Norton Doherty
23 (sic) to come on up to the podium. Welcome.
24
25 **MS. NORTON-DOHERTY:**
26 Is that good? Thank you for allowing me to speak for a minute
27 today. I'm here on behalf of the Women Veterans Advisory Board
28 that was formed through this legislature two years ago. We're kind
29 of defunct. We've not been active, or unable to meet, since
01:08PM 30 September, which, quite honestly, turned out to be just some very
31 bad political stuff that we seem to be caught in the middle of, and
32 the legislator that was chairing us stopped us from meeting. So I
33 think it's always a bad time for women veterans to not be heard or
34 have a voice or be part of the legislative loop in this county, but
35 I think with the current state of affairs in this world right now,
36 it's a worse time than ever. So I have reached out to the chair,
37 Legislator Caracappa. I have asked him to review the resolution
38 that originally formed us, revisit it, and get us going again so
39 that we can work on behalf of the women veterans in this county.
01:09PM 40 Thank you.
41
42 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**
43 Any questions?
44
45 **LEG. TROTТА:**
46 I have a comment.
47
48 **LEG. THORNE:**
49 Legislator, if I may.
01:09PM 50
51 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**
52 Hold on one second. We have a comment from Legislator Trotta.
53
54 **LEG. TROTТА:**
55 I don't want you to feel bad, but I get the same response from the
56 women's advisory group, from the arts council. I mean, a lot of

1 times, they're good intention putting these groups together and
2 there's no one really overseeing them, and when that happens, you
3 know, people's lives get busy and it moves on, so it's not
4 indicative of just the women's veterans. I get this all the time.
5 I get people calling me up, I put them on committees, and they
6 don't meet or they don't show up or half the people show up.

7
8 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

9 We have a very active board, though. Our board members themselves
01:10PM 10 have been looking to meet. We just haven't been able to meet. We
11 currently have a chair that was voted in who is not meeting or not
12 allowing us to meet without her, so we do have --

13
14 **LEG. TROTТА:**

15 Maybe you can vote her out and get someone else in.

16
17 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

18 We're trying. We're trying.

19
01:10PM 20 **LEG. TROTТА:**

21 All right. Well, I just wanted to say it's not -- I hear this all
22 the time about these boards.

23
24 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

25 I know. It's a shame because the intentions of us ever coming --
26 wanting to be formed in the first place was that we knew we had a
27 network of women veterans that had some really great ideas of -- we
28 have so many services in this county, so many useful services and
29 yet we have women veterans living in their car, and they are just
01:11PM 30 not being properly connected to the services the county had, and
31 that was one of our original intentions, and we've just not been
32 able to get there yet.

33
34 **LEG. TROTТА:**

35 That's a lot of the problem with government is they do a lot of
36 these things and private people sometimes do it a lot better.

37
38 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

39 Yeah. Thank you.

01:11PM 40
41 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

42 Legislator Fleming.

43
44 **LEG. FLEMING:**

45 Thank you. Thank you so much. If I can be of any help, Chairman,
46 with reinvigorating the women's advisory committee of the veterans,
47 I'd be more than happy to do it. I have to take exception to
48 Legislator Trotta's observation about these groups not being
49 helpful. I know you were very, very active. As a matter of fact,
01:11PM 50 in part because of your organization, we were able to advocate at
51 Northport, for instance, of options in OBGYN care, which we still
52 haven't brought completely over the finish line.

53
54 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

55 Actually, just as recently as Friday, the women veterans in the
56 county started to get phone calls that as of I think May -- the end

1 of May, they can make appointments with that new female
2 gynecologist --

3
4 **LEG. FLEMING:**
5 Oh, you see. So --

6
7 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**
8 -- so we finally got there; six years later, but we got there.

9
01:12PM 10 **LEG. FLEMING:**
11 Congratulations. I mean, that's really meaningful, and so I want
12 to disagree that it wasn't helpful because we hear this is huge --

13
14 **LEG. TROTТА:**
15 For the record, I never said it wasn't helpful. I said a lot of
16 times they just don't meet. I never said that.

17
18 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**
19 Yeah, and we go to the side.

01:12PM 20
21 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**
22 Okay. Let's play nice.

23
24 **LEG. FLEMING:**
25 So if I may, we also had a veterans task force for retired and
26 retiring veterans. This doesn't have to do with you necessarily,
27 but just to note along those lines of groups not being helpful or
28 being helpful, I think the women's veterans group was
29 extraordinarily helpful, brought to our attention a lot of
01:13PM 30 important things including the issues with the Northport OBGYN care
31 where women did not have a choice as to who they could go to, and
32 there was no option for a female doctor for OBGYN care. There was
33 also concern about where the women's area is and having to walk
34 through sort of a gauntlet of male soldiers or veterans, so I think
35 there are --

36
37 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**
38 And they changed that too, actually. They changed the seating.

39
40 **LEG. FLEMING:**
41 So you see --

42
43 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**
44 We went with kind of a laundry list and little by little.

45
46 **LEG. FLEMING:**
47 It was extraordinary. So the extent that this group be
48 reinvigorated, it is extremely important.

49
01:13PM 50 I did want to just note that the task force for retired and
51 retiring veterans was a task force that was formed by the Suffolk
52 County Legislature. I was the chair of it and received a letter
53 from the Presiding Officer's office informing me that I was no
54 longer serving on it and that I would be replaced by Legislator
55 Trotta. As recently as this Friday, we had a veteran contact our
56 office with concerns. We directed him to Legislator Trotta's

1 office, and we understand -- we got a call from the Presiding
2 Officer office indicating to us that that task force is probably
3 going to die, and so this that gentleman came back to us and we
4 took care of his issues through my district office, but I think we
5 do have some really good work happening in veterans affairs under
6 these various task forces. Unfortunately, that one in particular
7 seems to be in complete limbo. At least you've gotten some
8 reassurance that the women's advisory committee will be
9 re-established. I think the work of the retiring veterans
01:15PM 10 committee was halted midstream. There was a survey that was
11 underway that was out in the field that was fairly effective.
12 There were a number of other issues but particularly the survey did
13 start to develop an understanding of the real needs and concerns.
14 We've got such a huge veterans population here in Suffolk County,
15 and I think it makes really good sense to have an intentional
16 focus.

17
18 It's a shame -- I would like -- since it came up, Mr. Chairman, I
19 would like to understand what is happening with the retiring
01:15PM 20 veterans task force. I've got the instruction that I am not to
21 serve on it, but my understanding from anyone else who has tried to
22 follow up is that there is no follow up, and to me that's very
23 troubling because I think the retiring and retired have real needs
24 that we are addressing but that can be supplemented. A number of
25 legislative task force have been extremely effective. We just got
26 an additional \$3.5 million transportation funding from the state in
27 part because of the the work by a legislative task force, so I
28 understand the new majority is not as interested in these kind of
29 efforts, but I do say in this particular area, the veterans, there
01:16PM 30 were two good organizations that were doing good work that were
31 shut down. I'd love to see both of them invigorated.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

34 Well, thank you for your comments. This is the first I'm hearing
35 about any of that, so I will, if you don't mind, I would like to
36 get with you and discuss it further; and I can assure you if
37 there's any task force out there, veterans or otherwise, but what I
38 have control over is the veterans. If that task force is out there
39 and they are active and they are help serving the needs of their
01:16PM 40 fellow veterans, that task force will remain in place, and I'd love
41 to have the contact numbers of those people because it is important
42 to me, it is important to this county, and more importantly, it is
43 important to the veterans of this county, and we do have the
44 largest populations in New York State of veterans. So I have
45 already made my commitment to all the veterans including Thomas
46 Ronayne, who heads up the veterans organization. He's the chair of
47 the Suffolk County Organization. I met with Cathie several times
48 and heard her needs, and that's why I've given my commitment to
49 reinvigorating the women's organization as well because it is
01:17PM 50 needed.

51
52 And I'm not sure what you meant by the majority is not interested
53 in some of these task forces, but I can assure you when it comes to
54 the veterans, there is a very high, very, very high concern for it
55 and interest in it, and we're going to do some good things.
56

1 We have a couple other legislators who would like to talk, so
2 before I go on with my comments --

3
4 **LEG. FLEMING:**
5 Mr. Chairman, if I could just --

6
7 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**
8 Elaborate? Sure.

9
10 **LEG. FLEMING:**
11 -- respond to -- yeah, no, I just wanted to say I'm going to be --
12 thank you for your interest, and I'd be happy to share with you the
13 correspondence I received from -- I received correspondence from
14 the Presiding Officer's office. I responded. I then got amended
15 correspondence on that and basically was told that this task force
16 would be headed up by Legislator Trotta and now I'm told that it
17 will -- actually, what was quoted to my office from the Presiding
18 Officer's office is that it will probably just die, so if we can
19 follow up on that, I'll share with you my file on it, and I'd love
20 to get it reinvigorated if we could.

01:18PM

21
22 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**
23 Please do. Legislator Trotta, you had something else --

24
25 **LEG. TROTTA:**
26 I don't even want to respond to such nonsense, so I'm not going to.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**
29 Okay. That's fair. Thank you for that. I know Dominick Thorne,
30 you're up. Let me get to Legislator Anker first, please.

01:18PM

31
32 **LEG. ANKER:**
33 Hi. I just want to thank you for all the work you've been doing.
34 It's been a pleasure to be able to work with your organizations and
35 your folks there. I'm the daughter of a disabled navy vet, and
36 from what I'm hearing too within the whole military, there needs to
37 be voices from those that are within, and you are our voices,
38 whether it's government that didn't do a great job with pollution
39 and now our veterans are dealing with it; Agent Orange, we're
40 hearing a lot of that in the local news the past few days; to woman
41 being treated violently. There's so many reasons why you need to
42 continue to do what you are doing and I encourage you
43 wholeheartedly to do that.

01:19PM

44
45 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**
46 I appreciate that, Legislator Anker. You've always been supportive
47 of our veterans issues, Warrior Ranch, everything we have come to
48 you, and I 100 percent agree with you. I won't take up the time,
49 and these ladies could back me up on it. Mental health right now
50 is a huge issue. Active duty can't speak out for themselves. We
51 had 10 sailors on one aircraft carrier in less than 10 months
52 commit suicide, and when they were addressed by the master chief of
53 the navy, the rest of the crew that survived was basically told to
54 buck up and be thankful they weren't marines in a foxhole. So I
55 have correspondence with sailors that are on that ship. None of
56 their mental health needs are being addressed right now in regards

01:19PM

1 to those suicides. There is a standard of about 3,000 ships
2 company on an aircraft carrier when they are out to sea. When
3 they're in the shipyards, it's about 400. They lost 10 out of 400
4 in 10 months, so I appreciate you saying the work that we do. We
5 have to be their voices, and if we're not, nobody is speaking for
6 them so.

7
8 **LEG. ANKER:**

9 It truly makes a difference. You know, I worked with Melissa
01:20PM 10 Pandolph (ph) --

11
12 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

13 Amazing.

14
15 **LEG. ANKER:**

16 -- who is now -- isn't she amazing? But again, you know, we were
17 looking to do a specific military PTA or PTO within the schools
18 because the kids' needs were not being addressed. Their parents
19 would go off and then the school didn't know about these kids.
01:21PM 20 They didn't know how to address it. But like you had mentioned
21 mental health and then also what's really important right now is
22 the housing.

23
24 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

25 Right.

26
27 **LEG. ANKER:**

28 You know, everyone is saying, Oh, we're housing all of our
29 veterans, but guess what? The women are not finding the housing
01:21PM 30 that they need, you know, the separate housing.

31
32 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

33 They're not, because if they have children, they can't stay in that
34 house.

35
36 **LEG. ANKER:**

37 I mean, you can put an overall net and say, Oh, but we're taking
38 care of our veterans, but --

39
01:21PM 40 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

41 We're not there yet.

42
43 **LEG. ANKER:**

44 We're not there yet. There's holes in those nets, and again you
45 are helping provide that insight and we're here to help, so looking
46 forward to continue working with you guys.

47
48 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

49 Thank you. Appreciate that.

01:21PM 50
51 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

52 Thank you. Legislator Thorne.

53
54 **LEG. THORNE:**

55 Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it. Hello, Cathie. How are
56 you?

1
2 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

3 Hi, Dominick.

4
5 **LEG. THORNE:**

6 So I have had the luxury of knowing you for some time, as you used
7 to be my neighbor. You know, when we talk about veterans' issue,
8 there can't be a sound byte or a commercial for whatever else
9 you're going to be doing in life. I, in general, am concerned
01:22PM 10 because I believe there is a shortage -- and please correct me, and
11 I know you will, correct me if I'm wrong -- but there's generally a
12 shortage of just -- housing for veterans that may have issues like
13 sexual abuse (indiscernible) in their -- so they can't really
14 comingle them whether they have kids or not. Is that still an
15 issue in this county, and what do you propose we do about it?

16
17 And before you answer that question, let me be abundantly clear. I
18 am a member of this caucus, and as you know, I am a abundantly
19 behind our veterans whether they be female, male. The very thought
01:22PM 20 that we wouldn't be is quite disturbing.

21
22 But anyway, Cathie, if you could answer the question about female
23 veterans and their housing, where are we at with that?

24
25 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

26 Well, they can still be housed at the Beacon House. There's a
27 number of different Beacon Houses, but there are ones that have
28 beds for women veterans. They are in houses still with male
29 veterans. We definitely had women vets come to us that would
01:23PM 30 prefer sleeping in their car as opposed to sleeping in the same
31 shelter as men. Housing for women veterans with kids, with
32 families, that's definitely gotten better, with pets. There's
33 women in the county who can speak on that better than myself, like
34 Marcelle -- what is Marcelle's last name? Leis -- who has gone
35 leap and bounds.

36
37 Personally, I think we are still lacking a transitional house for
38 women veterans, a support house for when they do come back to
39 Suffolk County, maybe six-to-nine-month type thing. We have two
01:24PM 40 other houses in New York State not on Long Island that I could give
41 good examples. The Guardian House up in Ballston Spa and the
42 Capital Region House for women veterans that just opened a few
43 months ago, and that is exactly what we need here in Suffolk
44 County. So it's a transitional house that gives them time when
45 they get out of the service to come back here, get on their feet,
46 you know, find their own place and not necessarily people dealing
47 with substance issues or alcohol issues. So if they go to a
48 regular DSS-type shelter, they may wind up in a hotel or different
49 type of shelter with people with those issues, and that's not
01:24PM 50 really what I think women veterans deserve when they come home
51 after 30 years active duty, so that we're still lacking.

52
53 **LEG. THORNE:**

54 I agree with you wholeheartedly. I guess my question more
55 directly, because I got fired up with some other stuff, is that is
56 there housing for directly and only for female veterans?

1 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

2 Well, you know, Dominick, that's tricky because I'm told by Frank
3 at the Beacon House that there is, but it's in a neighborhood in
4 Bay Shore, and apparently it's not had anybody in it in quite a
5 long time, but I'm told that there is. I just don't know anybody
6 whose ever stayed there, so I can't really speak on it, but I'm
7 told that there is. I just wouldn't even know where to direct
8 somebody to go to it if they needed it.

9
01:25PM 10 **LEG. THORNE:**

11 So we have one house in the County of Suffolk explicitly just for
12 female veterans; is that correct, to your knowledge?

13
14 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

15 Right, and it would be run by the Beacon House. It's a Beacon
16 House house.

17
18 **LEG. THORNE:**

19 There's one.

01:25PM 20
21 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

22 Right.

23
24 **LEG. TROTТА:**

25 Is it empty?

26
27 **LEG. THORNE:**

28 That's certainly something I'm sure the chair will be looking into.

29
30 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

31 I've been for years, for years --

32
33 **LEG. THORNE:**

34 All right. Well, thank you so much, Cathie.

35
36 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

37 So I'm being told by these ladies who also know really well.
38 They're going to get up and speak a little bit later. They're not
39 with our Veterans Advisory Board, they are here for other but very
01:26PM 40 knowledgeable in it as well and they are saying no. Honestly,
41 like, I've never seen it to be an active house. I've had women
42 living in their cars when I'm told that there's beds available in
43 that house, but I am told by Frank at The Beacon House that that
44 house did exist, so that's the last I heard. And then the shelter,
45 I love the Beacon House. They do amazing work, and for male
46 veterans, they've been superb in Suffolk County, but, like, there's
47 little issues that make it not safe or comfortable for women
48 veterans to stay at shelters like that. Not just that it's like 80
49 percent men and then only four beds for women but one issue that we
01:26PM 50 had tried to bring to light at The Beacon House at Northport was
51 that the women's bathroom was actually in the cafeteria of the
52 building, and the only time that the women veterans staying there
53 could use the showers was when the cafeteria was closed to other
54 men, and the craziest thing about all of it besides it being in the
55 cafeteria was that the way the door opened, you could actually see
56 the stalls inside the bathroom. So we, as women veterans, at that

1 time weren't formed here in the county so we went to Congressman
2 Lee Zeldin, and we said, Can we just change the hinges on the door
3 so that it opens so that you can't see the stalls? And apparently
4 that takes like a congressional to get work done at the V.A. That
5 took like three years. The Beacon House was shut down at Northport
6 for, like, all kinds of health things or whatever, and that was one
7 of the things that they actually fixed during that time. We had
8 women who wouldn't shower in there, and they were, like, going into
9 the main building at Northport and showering in the sink because
10 they didn't want to use the bathroom there, and that's the kind of
11 thing women veterans deal with. We try to be their voice and speak
12 up about those issues.

01:28PM

13
14 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

15 All right. Well, you are doing a fantastic job, and thanks to you
16 coming forward. In the past month, Cathie, and us having
17 conversations together with Tom Ronayne and Suffolk County
18 Executive Steve Bellone, I think that reinvigorated a lot of
19 things, including the conversation at Northport V.A. where the GYN
20 now is there, so again that's the important part of having this and
21 having people who want to remain active and want to make a
22 difference, so I applaud you for that.

01:28PM

23
24 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

25 Right. Thank you. Thank you for taking the time to listen the
26 past month because I was annoying, I know.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

29 We are going to do more than that. No, not at all. Stop. Are you
30 kidding me? I applaud you. That's why we're here.

01:28PM

31
32 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

33 It's important to get us going. There's a large percentage of us
34 in this county, and we have some things that can make it better for
35 the rest of us.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

38 No doubt in my mind. I'm looking forward to hearing our two
39 speakers coming up shortly because I've already met at least one of
40 them. I know she's amazing and what she's done for -- we'll get
41 into that in a little while. Legislator Krupski.

01:29PM

42
43 **LEG. KRUPSKI:**

44 Yeah. I just wanted to say thank you for your advocacy because,
45 you know, if people don't do the work you're doing and speaking out
46 for people, nothing gets done. The ridiculous story about the
47 doors, it's just such a simple thing, and it took so much effort to
48 do that.

49
50 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

51 It did, and I have lots more like that.

52
53 **LEG. KRUPSKI:**

54 Simple but important, so thank you for that.

55
56 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

1 And thank you again always for your support too. You've been very
2 supportive to us.

3
4 **LEG. KRUPSKI:**

5 Well, you're welcome. It's the least I can do, believe me, because
6 people who have served our country, they deserve a lot of respect,
7 and those little details, little qualify of life things really make
8 it better for people overall. The bigger picture, all the way
9 services are delivered, that's really complicated. Those little
10 things really help people, so thank you so much.

01:30PM

11
12 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

13 Thank you.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

16 All right. Well, thank you so much again for your time.

17
18 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

19 Thank you.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

22 We look forward to working with you again in the very near future.

23
24 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

25 I do as well. Thank you.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

28 We have some really good work to do together, and I'm looking
29 forward to it.

30
31 **MS. NORTON DOHERTY:**

32 We do. Thank you, Legislators.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

35 And then thank you to all my colleagues up here for being so
36 supportive of our veterans as well. All right.

37
38 Are there any other speakers? Anybody else have any questions? Is
39 there anybody in the audience that would like to address the
40 legislature at this time. Seeing none, we're going to move on.

01:30PM

41
42 Appointments, we have none. Presentations. Today we have the
43 privilege of having -- I'm going to try and get this name right.
44 Dani, I'm so sorry. See, I knew it. I had it. I practiced it.
45 Say it for me.

46
47 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

48 Koulermos.

49
50 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

51 Koulermos. That's so easy, but it just doesn't look right. It's
52 intimidating like Caracappa. Dani Koulermos, U.S. Army Veteran and
53 the Support Services for Veterans Families outreach coordinator,
54 Association For Mental Health and Wellness. We also have Melanie
55 Corinne, United States Marine Corps veteran. She is going to be
56 speaking about the Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Project. They're

1 both going to be providing an overview on programs and their
2 services to our veterans, so I'm going to invite them up. Our
3 clerk and Bobby will take good care of you. We have our topnotch
4 IT guys on the ready.

5
6 Good afternoon, ladies. I appreciate you coming out. I think they
7 are setting you up once again. We have Dani from the support
8 services for veterans families, and we have Melanie; she's going to
9 be talking about the Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Project, so
01:32PM 10 whenever you guys are ready, the floor is yours. When you see the
11 green button. There you go.

12
13 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

14 All right. There you go. I need the army to help me, a marine.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

17 Hey, this is a partnership, right?

18
19 **MS. CORINNE:**

01:32PM 20 Oh, it definitely is. Thank you so much for inviting us. We are
21 really excited to be here. I'm going to give a little introduction
22 on me and talk about Dwyer, and then I'm going to hand it off to
23 Dani, who is going to give an introduction on her and talk about
24 veteran homelessness and SSVF.

25
26 So my name is Melanie Corinne. I'm a marine corps veteran. I was
27 an Arabic linguist and served in military intelligence. I got a
28 degree from Fordham in creative writing, which sounds useless, but
01:33PM 29 it got me to intern on CBS Blue Bloods in the writer's room, which
30 was really great, and I bring to this job a background in media and
31 entertainment, and that's kind of a weird background, and the
32 reason I specify that is because the whole purpose of Dwyer is
33 providing peers to relate to veterans, and I don't think people
34 understand that veterans are a really diverse group. We have
35 veterans that work with us at Dwyer Project that come from
36 amazingly different backgrounds, and so we leverage everything in
37 our lived experience to help our brothers and sisters whether it's
38 on a one-to-one level or whether it's in a group in a community.

01:33PM 39
40 So Dwyer, as many of you know, was founded after Joseph Dwyer from
41 Rocky Point -- and I don't know if the camera zooms in, but I'm
42 going to turn around so that you can see the picture on the back of
43 my T-shirt. There is a famous picture of him on the pamphlet --
44 oh, yep, perfect -- and he came back from the war with PTSD and
45 with opioid addiction, and when he passed away, that was an
46 unnecessary death. We don't want that to happen to anymore of our
47 brothers or sisters for any reason, and no one can relate to them
48 and help them back to a better path than their brothers and sisters
49 in service.

01:34PM 50
51 So Dwyer Project is under the Mental Health and Wellness
52 Association of Suffolk County. As of this year, every county in
53 the state is going to have one. Before it was only about 26
54 counties, and we are peer support. We are not a replacement for
55 clinical support or police services. We are not crisis
56 intervention, but short of those things, we are the best things

1 that communities can invest in for their their veterans is peer
2 support. Just like Cathy said, nobody understands female veterans
3 better than female veterans. Nobody understands the veteran
4 experience other than other veterans, and that is how we meet our
5 brothers and sisters in the community no matter where they're at,
6 no matter what point they're at in their life to meet them where
7 they're at with trauma-informed care and help them create the life
8 they want for themselves, and we do that in a few ways.

01:35PM 10 Dwyer Project. You should have in your possession a schedule. We
11 hold weekly schedules throughout the island, throughout Suffolk
12 County, and those are groups that are open to the public that any
13 veteran can show up to, and those groups provide camaraderie, they
14 provide support. Sometimes veterans are isolated. We have people
15 that come to those groups that do not get out of their houses
16 expect to go to those groups, and so it's a really strong way to
17 meet people where they're at and find out what they need in their
18 community. We also, for veterans, not every veteran is the same and
19 some veterans don't feel comfortable so we provide one-on-one
01:35PM 20 support for anyone that reaches out to ask. We will do checks-ins,
21 we will talk to them at their lonely, we will help facilitate the
22 resources they need. If we can't do it ourselves, we will work to
23 find the partners that can. They want their disability
24 compensation upgraded, we will reach out to Tom Ronayne's office
25 and be like warm handoff. They wan horse therapy, we will reach
26 out to Palomine and Warrior Ranch. They want a guide dog, we will
27 reach out to Paws of War and Vet Dogs to, you know, to get them the
28 support they need, and we do in every area.

01:36PM 30 I would like to read you the Dwyer Project mission statement. It
31 is to assist veterans, service members, and their families to
32 achieve and sustain personal health, wellness, and purpose in their
33 post-service lives through the support of trained veteran peers.
34 And that's the cool thing is for any veteran that comes to us in
35 our community in our county, they get to have full agency over how
36 they want us to support them. We're only human; we'll do our best.
37 I can't give them a million dollars. They want education, they
38 want to brainstorm to do, you know, a masters and they want support
39 with that education, we will route them to, you know, our local
01:37PM 40 schools, we will help them plan whatever they want. If they need
41 housing or supportive services, we will get them to those agencies
42 that will vet them for those programs. We will work with private
43 agencies to see if there are beds and if they qualify. We are a
44 switchboard to unite veterans and their tissues, and a lot of
45 times, the issue with veterans not coming forward is because they
46 don't feel comfortable. They're distrustful of the government and
47 of systems, but when they need an individual person and shake our
48 hands and see us and spend time with us and get to know us, they're
49 a lot more willing to trust those community services, so, really,
01:37PM 50 peer support is the key to get veterans engaged.

51
52 And as everyone in this room has just said and talked about,
53 veterans are very different. A female veteran suffering from MST,
54 military sexual trauma issues, needs completely different
55 trauma-informed care than an older Vietnam veteran that might be
56 needing palliative care or to be housed, right, at an older age.

1 So there's a huge difference in the individual veteran experience
2 whether it's a branch difference: Marines have a very different --
3 not more abusive but marines come out with different baggage than
4 maybe someone in the coast guard, right. Coast Guard does amazing
5 work, by the way. They're the coolest branch. I will fight
6 someone on that. They are really cool.

7
8 Every veteran branch has different baggage, different cultural
9 experiences that they're going to need people to meet them where
01:38PM 10 they are at in different ways. The difference is generational.
11 Vietnam vets need different things than veterans that have gone to
12 Iraq than veterans that have not deployed. A lot of veterans that
13 attempt and commit -- is commit the right word?

14
15 **MS. KOULERMOS:**
16 Complete suicide.

17
18 **MS. CORINNE:**
19 Complete suicide. Trauma-informed language. A lot of veterans
01:39PM 20 that attempt or complete suicide are in garrison and have never
21 been deployed. If you're a civilian, it's hard to understand that
22 idea that many veterans that attempt suicide have never even
23 deployed, but for those of us that serve, we understand why that
24 is, where that's coming from. Homeless veterans, one-third of them
25 are -- have a background in military sexual trauma. That means
26 that they were betrayed or experience pain and suffering at the
27 hands of the people in their commands that were supposed to protect
28 them. That's a trauma-informed baggage that peers are very
29 equipped and qualified to meet them with and to hold space for, and
01:39PM 30 so it's really easy for us to build trust and get these veterans
31 the help they need. We are in the weeds them. They are our
32 brothers and sisters, and we really, really care about them, so I'm
33 really privileged to be here speaking to you about this. But I
34 want to hand it over to Dani Koulermos to talk about homelessness
35 because as we just talked about, that's a huge issue, and when we
36 get a referral, someone comes to us and says, *I'm homeless* or We
37 need help, at Dwyer, we reach out to Dani, so I want you to tell
38 you about her and the work she does.

39
01:40PM 40 **MS. KOULERMOS:**
41 Thank you, Melanie. I'm going to steal her mic. It's okay. We'll
42 do the slides after. I'm Dani Koulermos. I'm U.S. army veteran.
43 I was military police officer while I was in. Everyone seems to
44 call me the MST subject matter expert, which is language we used in
45 the army. I'm an MST survivor myself. I have a backgrounds in
46 clinical art therapy from LIU, and I also was the veteran counselor
47 at VIBS. I switched over to eradicating homeless veterans after
48 becoming a homeless veteran yourself. People think you live in
49 Suffolk County, you get paid \$3600 a month for BAH, which is our
01:41PM 50 housing allowance when you go to college as a veteran who has an
51 honorable discharge; how can you be homeless? My situation as
52 single mother, I was living in my parent's house who fell into
53 foreclosure. Even though I was top of my class and I look like a
54 successful mom who worked two jobs, I was still a homeless veteran.
55 I'm a stable veteran, but I also understand what we need here in
56 Suffolk, the gaps in service for female veterans, and everything

1 that she had just spoken on is absolutely true. I was very pleased
2 to be a part of the Suffolk County Women's Advisory Commission for
3 the subcommittee for veterans under Steve Bellone, and for my ask
4 for 2001 was transportation for women veterans to go back and forth
5 to the V.A. who are on busses alone because they don't want to be
6 with other males because it's really, really hard to get
7 transportation to the V.A. right now because if you're not V.A.
8 disabled, then you don't qualify for a lot of the programs.
9 Housing was my second. Also speaking about having female only
01:42PM 10 housing for women and children and for their their service animals
11 or even for their assisted animals who aren't technically service
12 animals.

13
14 And then the last was the resources and accesses to mental health
15 besides the V.A. One thing I really want to put forward is if you
16 have a dishonorable discharge or other than honorable discharge,
17 your percentage of programs that you're eligible for are
18 nonexistent. So if you are honorably discharged, yes, you can have
19 services from the V.A. That doesn't mean you are going to get paid
01:42PM 20 each month and that you can have a house. It doesn't mean that you
21 have access to every program in New York State. So it is very hard
22 to be able to determine whether or not a veteran is eligible for
23 different programs unless you are a veteran or you are close to the
24 veteran community, and it's really difficult because people say,
25 Oh, well they've got the V.A. or Oh, they've got this, and a lot of
26 times they don't have and they fall through the cracks, and that's
27 where the substance abuse comes along and the suicidality. As she
28 said, one of three veterans who have MST are homeless. Military
29 sexual trauma is a huge issue in the military but people don't know
01:43PM 30 about it, people don't talk about it. We have a lot of advocacy
31 now to start making MST groups because of these homeless veterans.
32 Once they can get the support of other veterans, they might be able
33 to apply for veterans for disability that money may be able to get
34 them into a room or a or go back to college. Voc Rehab is an
35 amazing program. I was able to get my master's degree on Voc Rehab
36 and I'm so thankful for my manager for that to be able to push me
37 through. For SSVF, the supportive services for veteran family
38 members, we are aimed at getting veterans who are on the street
39 homeless into sustainable housing. Long Island is extremely
01:44PM 40 expensive and people say, If I can't afford an apartment as a
41 normal working person, how can a veteran who is only on social
42 security or veteran disability at 20, 30 percent meaning only less
43 than \$500 afford an apartment. Well, we have partnerships with
44 rentees who will give one room to a veteran out of a household or
45 have an apartment that's rated for them to be able to live there
46 because they feel that we served our country and we deserve to be
47 able to give back and we appreciate everything that they do for us.
48 We have case management to get them into a part-time job if they
49 can handle it or if they need help with navigation in health care,
01:44PM 50 so I work partly with Mental Health and Wellness Association and
51 EOC of Suffolk to be able to help all veterans in Suffolk County,
52 and if we can't help we can always, you know, advocate for other
53 agencies which is SUS, which is Serving the Underserved, which is
54 Nassau and Suffolk who also have an SSVF program or other partnered
55 agencies who may be able to help if we can't. We help anyone even
56 if they have an other than honorable, but we can't help the

1 dishonorable veterans.

2
3 **MS. CORINNE:**

4 Then she'll throw them back over to us at Dwyer, and we will reach
5 out to the New York State Department of Veterans Services and have
6 the attorneys there for free work those veterans' cases to try to
7 appeal their discharge, but in the meantime they're still homeless.

8
9 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

01:45PM 10 So Dwyer is very important in the sense that they don't care about
11 your discharge. It does not matter. You have signed your name and
12 you served your country. You deserve to have support, and for
13 someone who's a disabled veteran, that means so much to them
14 whether or not they have their dishonorable or honorable discharge.
15 So I'm very grateful for Dwyer. I, myself, went through the Dwyer
16 Project about five years ago, and without their support I don't
17 think I'd be here today. It was really hard to transition back in
18 from the active duty life to civilian life all alone as a single
19 mom, and I have gone strides and crossed mountains since then, so I
01:46PM 20 do pay a lot to the Joseph Dwyer Program and having peers who
21 understand you, but we also need support in a lot of areas,
22 transportation being huge. We can't have veterans get to the
23 programs if they don't have transportation, so there is a lot of
24 areas that we do need help with, but I don't want to take away the
25 time of that. I just want to go through the programs real quick,
26 so I'm going to do the slides. Do you want to talk?

27
28 **MS. CORINNE:**

01:46PM 29 Again, I just want to reiterate how we work together and again not
30 everyone that has a dishonorable discharge deserves it. I'm sure
31 everyone in this room has been caught up in personality politics at
32 some point in their life whether it's high school or, you know,
33 even now, whatever it is, that doesn't change in the military, and
34 there are a lot of veterans that have -- yeah, that can't access
35 their benefits because maybe a commander didn't like their
36 attitude. So they were willing to die for their country, but, you
37 know, because of the just bad chemistry because between them and an
38 officer or in other cases, people that have experienced sexual
39 assault or have PTSD or have traumatic brain injury, they'll start
01:47PM 40 acting out and then they'll be punished for acting out as a result
41 of the injury that was caused in the military through their
42 honorable service. As a marine, I have seen people that are
43 basically Captain America be treated like garbage the day they get
44 injured after four, five years of honorable really, really intense
45 service, so we meet those veterans where they're at. So when the
46 system can't help them, we try to find ways to support them and
47 Benjamin Pomerantz who was the interim director of New York State
48 Department of Veterans Services before they got their new
49 appointee, he's an attorney that does these bad paper discharge
01:47PM 50 appeals. We really help with as much as we can because the veteran
51 experienced is nuanced. There are Vietnam veterans that have
52 served honorably that because they were queer were -- they lost
53 their status as veterans, and they still suffered Agent Orange, and
54 they were never able to get the compensation that other non-queer
55 veterans who served were able to get. There are -- I mean,
56 everyone remembers that quote by Leonard Matlovich, the Vietnam

1 veteran. He said, "They gave me a medal for killing two men and a
2 discharge for loving one.

3
4 A lot of Dwyer works with Sage veterans. It's a program in New
5 York State for elderly, LGBT veterans that need -- that served
6 honorably in Vietnam. There's a lot of nuances to the veteran
7 experience, and I really, really want to let you guys know what we
8 work with every single veteran as best as we can. We don't turn any
9 veterans away for any reason. There's no gatekeeping, no bar to
01:48PM 10 entry. Anyone can come to the Dwyer Project, and it doesn't matter
11 their generation, their branch, their discharge status, doesn't
12 matter what they did. If they need support, we are here for them.
13 Sorry. I get a little excited.

14
15 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

16 Some of the things that Suffolk County United Veterans, the
17 overview, is the Joseph P. Dwyer Project, which is the peer
18 project, and the SSVF which is eradicating for veteran
19 homelessness. Veteran housing, there's special housing out -- we
01:49PM 20 have three different housing areas that have veterans who are
21 living with veterans, and they can have care. We also have a
22 veteran food pantry, which is Charlotte's Food Table, out in
23 Ronkonkoma for veterans once a week on Tuesdays. They can come see
24 us from 2:00 to 7:00 and receive food for food and stability. We
25 have case management for veterans who do need help, who need that
26 hand-holding, who need that support and that little oomph to get
27 over the hump of dealing with mental illness or physical imparities
28 and they need someone to be alongside them to get them through,
29 whether it's education, employment, or finances.

01:49PM 30
31 And then we also have our amazing veteran community resources.
32 Melanie already spoke upon a lot of them being Paws of War, Warrior
33 Ranch, Palomine. We speak with all of the veteran agencies here in
34 Suffolk. We have great advocacy with Project Nine Line and
35 everyone who really just wants to support the veterans as veterans.

36
37 I wanted to talk -- do you to talk a little bit about this part of
38 the Dwyer?

01:50PM 39
40 **MS. CORINNE:**

41 Yeah. So it did originally start -- Dwyer did originally start as
42 a support for veterans with PTSD, but we opened it up to greater
43 than that because it's not just veterans with PTSD and TBIs that
44 need our support, and again veterans can come to us at any level
45 whether they are low functioning, homeless, can't -- you know,
46 they're struggling to advocate for themselves or whether they're --
47 they have high-figure salary and they're working a great job and
48 they look like they are perfect from the outside and they just need
49 a little bit of support. We don't gate-keep based around -- nobody
01:51PM 50 needs a disorder or a mental health diagnosis to come seek support.
51 That's what I want to specify because again it's not just people --
52 it's not just veterans with PTSD, it's not just veterans with TBIs
53 that suffer from addiction because of their experience of service.
54 Veterans --

55
56 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

1 Also miss community. Veterans also miss community, the
2 camaraderie, the service. You know, we went in and we served. We
3 had a rank, we had structure, and then we leave it, and then it's
4 really hard to get back into transition into real life when you
5 don't have that anymore. And so being around people that have that
6 same shared experience, you know, you can kind of feel a little bit
7 at ease and familiar, and that also is the picture at the bottom,
8 the right hand corner, of Joseph Dwyer.

01:51PM

10 This is for the SSVF program. It's eligible for low income
11 veterans who are homeless or about to be homeless, so it could be
12 veterans who are in rental arrears. We help them catch up so that
13 they cannot become homeless and stay within the housing that they
14 are in, so it's really important that they're not on the street,
15 but we want to keep them off the street.

01:52PM

17 So this is the just the breakdown of how much money they can make,
18 2022. One person can't make more than \$50,000 a year and it goes
19 on so forth depending how many people are in their family. One
20 important thing about our program is that you determine who your
21 family is, so if you have a caretaker who is your best friend, you
22 have a caretaker who is your aunt, you have a caretaker -- you're a
23 stepdad but you are not married and you have this child you're
24 taking of, that makes the household bigger. The household being
25 bigger makes more money available so that you can meet that
26 criteria where you can be eligible for our program.

01:53PM

28 These are the veteran housing SCUUV, which is Suffolk County United
29 Veterans. The mission is to regain entry to society and attain
30 residential stability, self sufficiency and a common independence.
31 We do want to see veterans getting a life again because they had so
32 much before than they have lost, and they want to become normal
33 civilians and have that happy ending, so we like to, you know, give
34 them home and give them a chance. We also have -- that's their
35 food pantry, Charlotte's Table, our of Ronkonkoma, the Mental
36 Health and Wellness, which is Raven if you'd like to speak to him.

01:53PM

37
38 **MS. CORINNE:**

39 Tuesdays, 2:00 to 7:00, veterans can go for their special day, and
40 if that's not enough, there's also -- Long Island Cares also has a
41 veteran appreciation day, and Long Island Harvest also has for --
42 they do drop-offs to veterans.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

45 While you're on that subject, sitting in the back of the room is
46 Michael Haines, director of intergovernmental affairs, and he works
47 with Long Island Cares and the Harry Chapin Food Bank, and I know
48 he serves all residents of Suffolk County; so thank you, Michael.
49 I appreciate you being here.

50
51 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

52 We love Michael. Michael's a great guy.

53
54 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

55 We love Michael. Who doesn't love Michael.

1 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

2 Yeah. He does so much for our veterans. They have events all the
3 time to get us and the community together at Long Island Cares,
4 which is huge because Zoom is so great, and we can all get together
5 from different places but you're all in the same room. That
6 connection is so much more authentic, so we definitely appreciate
7 all the events that Long Island Cares and Michael has put together.

8
9 This is just the case management, as we talked about. Hand-to-hand
01:54PM 10 warm handoffs just obtaining documents that veterans may need going
11 to the V.A. or any kind of healthcare crisis that you may need help
12 with.

13
14 These are some of our resources, I should have said before, that
15 help us along the way and understand -- the deep understanding of
16 veterans.

17
18 That's the end of our presentation. Thank you so much.

01:55PM 19
20 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

21 That's awesome, and you're right on time too. You timed it
22 perfectly. We do have some questions, if you don't mind.

23
24 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

25 Yes, questions.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

28 First up, we have Legislator Kara Hahn. We can't see her, but
29 she's out there -- there she is. How you doing, Legislator? Go
01:55PM 30 ahead, Kara. The floor is yours.

31
32 **LEG. HAHN:**

33 Thank you, ladies. Melanie, I know we were at the stand down. I
34 met you there, and thank you, Michael, in the back for the
35 opportunity and the absolute privilege to deliver the food at that
36 event. It was very moving. So Dani, you also mentioned, and
37 Melanie mentioned this to me at the stand down, about
38 transportation, and so I'm curious. I know we can work on getting
39 some of the poor veterans access to transportation whether it's
01:56PM 40 micro options or busses, but in the meantime, I would like to know
41 more about mobile services. So you did mention something about
42 dropoffs. I wasn't sure if it was Long Island Harvest or Long
43 Island Cares. But do you partner with organizations like Meals on
44 Wheels or other organizations that are already doing some mobile
45 delivery sometimes to the elderly and other disabled individuals
46 but maybe to include veterans who might need it and not have access
47 to transportation? Or is there a need for a mobile services van or
48 something that could go to VFWs and communities as opposed to
49 having veterans have to drive to, you know, a Riverhead site and a
01:56PM 50 Hauppauge site, and we know how geographically dispersed this
51 county is.

52
53 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

54 Well, Long Island Cares and Long Island Harvest are both really
55 great with that. We've never had a problem where veterans didn't
56 seek food who aren't food insufficient but transportation wasn't --

1 isn't usually a food issue as much as it is to get to medical
2 appointments, leisure, going to college, getting employment.
3 That's really the transportation issue not really food stability.

4
5 **MS. CORINNE:**

6 We have a few veterans that come to our group intermittently
7 dependant on car issues, so they are looking for support, and a lot
8 of the support we give them ends up being phone support, Zoom
9 support because they have car trouble or they can't get there.
01:57PM 10 Some veterans have depression or anxiety. They can't get out of
11 the house that day, and, you know, we work remote a lot, so a lot
12 of times calling Zooms, that's normal. We meet people in person.
13 But for those veterans that want to be there in person, Dwyer has a
14 small, small Uber card grant. We have some Uber gift cards that we
15 can get people to our groups, but I know veterans that are so low
16 functioning that they can't work an Uber app. They can't work the
17 Uber app. I know veterans that -- they are on fixed income and
18 they can't afford the SCAT bus. The SCAT bus is \$4 each way.

19
01:58PM 20 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

21 Seventy-five cents.

22
23 **MS. CORINNE:**

24 I have veterans that tell me they cannot afford that little amount
25 of change to use a SCAT bus, so we do have some things, but a lot
26 of the community -- the food -- Long Island Harvest and Long Island
27 Cares, both of them have mobile food pantries. Rotary Club does
28 mobile food outreach events. It's not the food insecurity. It's
29 just a quality of life.

01:58PM 30
31 **LEG. HAHN:**

32 Getting appointments and -- you're right. So I remember you
33 mentioning dental services and mobile dental -- and how you need to
34 have a hundred percent disability in order qualify through the V.A.
35 for dental, which is just -- knowing the connection that dental
36 health and overall health, we have to find a way to help change
37 that.

38
39 **MS. CORINNE:**

01:59PM 40 On that topic, I did reach out to some of our community partners.
41 I don't want to say anything preemptively because, you know,
42 they're very excited, but some of our community were, you know,
43 network-- again, private. This isn't necessarily like within the
44 control or power of government, but privately networking with
45 dentist friends. So we have a dentist that volunteered to do work
46 for one veteran at cost, and so this private group to support
47 veterans is going to -- they're going to try to fundraise, take
48 care of this one veteran and look into if a private program or
49 application for grants would be a thing. So there are -- there
01:59PM 50 needs to be more support for veteran dental. We have veterans that
51 self-medicate, right? I know veterans that have overcome crystal
52 meth to straighten themselves out and get into housing communities
53 and they have -- they need dental support.

54
55 There are veterans that come to every single event with the best
56 attitudes and their teeth are rotting out of their head. These are

1 people that served our country that are living on fixed income that
2 even Stony Brook, which gives great veteran -- because they are the
3 school. They give, I think, 40, 50 percent discount to veterans,
4 which is wonderful, but for someone that's living off of a fixed
5 income, it doesn't matter if a root canal treatment goes from 6,000
6 to 3,000, so that's a problem area.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

9 Legislator Hahn, do you have contact information for any of these
02:00PM 10 organizations? Did you want to speak to Melanie about some of
11 these issues?

12
13 **LEG. HAHN:**

14 Oh, yes. Yes, I do. I wanted just to -- I was asking -- I think
15 that that's something that we, the county, can work to help with
16 making these connections on the dental care and on the
17 transportation especially.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

02:00PM 20 There's many issues. You are right.

21
22 **LEG. HAHN:**

23 Yeah. So I think that that falls within our wheelhouse, the
24 transportation piece to this, and there has to be an answer that
25 the county can help provide, whether it's a microtransit for
26 veterans or some sort of free service for those that qualify or
27 something.

28
29 **MS. CORINNE:**

30 I do plan to reach out to you, and I know that Legislator Fleming
31 talked about the transportation grant. I have looked at other
32 programs in other counties across the country that do
33 transportation programs, so I was going to research more of that
34 and then bring that to our next meeting.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

37 Yeah. We'll have you back. We just have to be mindful of the
38 time.

39
02:01PM 40 **LEG. HAHN:**

41 Okay. Sorry. Thank you.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

44 We do have other legislators who would like to ask a question as
45 well. Thank you, Legislator Hahn. They are all excellent
46 questions, and we need to have some better programming in there.

47
48 We also have Legislator Fleming. Did you want to say anything?
49 Followed by Legislator Thorne.

02:02PM 50
51 **LEG. FLEMING:**

52 In the interest of time, let me just say thank you very much for
53 the efforts that you've made, and I'm happy to help in whatever way
54 I can particularly on the transportation issue. But one quick
55 question I had for you, at the end of last year, the inspector
56 general for the Department of Defense issued a report that was very

1 critical of the transition from folks who were coming back from
2 active duty and particularly with regard to suicide screenings or
3 mental health screenings, are you aware -- I don't know that
4 everywhere in the United States has something like your
5 organization, which may fill the gap that was recognized in that
6 report. But I know one of the recommendations in the report was
7 that organizations be identified for that soft handoff or for
8 support in transition. Is this something that you're aware of?
9 Can we support it in any way here at the legislature?

02:03PM 10

11 **MS. CORINNE:**

12 So that is -- Dani and myself can attest to the poor transition
13 support and structure of the military, and both of us having
14 transitioned the last six, seven -- five?

15
16 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

17 2017.

18
19 **MS. CORINNE:**

02:03PM 20

21 Okay. Seven years. But one of the main issues with that is that
22 active duty is federal, it national. So if 100 people are leaving
23 Camp LeJeune each day, there's no federal authority that reaches
24 out to the individual counties where those 100 people say that
25 they're going to ensure warm handoff. There's a pilot program
26 called "ETS Sponsorship" that has an enrollment with the -- they
27 have a pilot program through the army where they're actually doing
28 just that. They are reaching out to sponsors of which Dwyer is
29 partner. Dwyer Project is partnered with ETS as the point of
30 contact sponsor for Suffolk County to provide a warm handoff to
31 veterans returning to Suffolk County. It is a pilot program. They
32 have been working on their infrastructure and maybe that's -- ETS
33 would be a great program to have because that catches people from
34 all across the U.S. that are ETS and getting out of their military
35 service and going to individual counties. There was something else
36 about that. In the interest of time, I will just stop here, but
37 please reach out more because that's a good program.

02:04PM 30

38 **LEG. FLEMING:**

39 Let's follow up offline. That would be great. Thanks. Thank you,
40 Mr. Chair.

02:04PM 40

41
42 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

43 Thank you for the excellent questions. We do have Legislator
44 Dominick Thorne.

45
46 **LEG. THORNE:**

47 Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and again to keep it brief, let me thank
48 both of you and all of you for your incredible service to the
49 country and still serving when you come home. Through the chair,
50 if you may, maybe forward it to Legislator Caracappa, I think every
51 legislator ought to have all of your information as well as any
52 pamphlets you may have so if a veteran or a female veteran or any
53 veteran walks in our office, we have the latest and greatest
54 information. But I did want to just pop in and say thank you very
55 so much for what you do. Our hearts and minds are with you, and we
56 will support you as best as we possibly can. I yield back. Thank

02:04PM 50

1 you, Mr. Chairman.

2

3 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

4 Thank you so much.

5

6 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

7 Legislator Trotta.

8

9 **LEG. TROTТА:**

02:05PM 10 Just recently, actually yesterday's paper, there was a story about
11 them closing a 26-bed facility in Yaphank. Do you see this as a
12 good sign that there's allegedly fewer homeless vets?

13

14 **MS. CORINNE:**

15 That was one of our facilities, and the -- actually, you know
16 what? I don't know what is --

17

18 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

19 The Vets Place?

20

21 **MS. CORINNE:**

22 Yeah, right?

23

24 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

25 The Vets Place did close.

26

27 **MS. CORINNE:**

02:06PM 28 It's good because that was a facility for veterans, and people that
29 were getting sent there were not veterans and they couldn't be
30 turned away, so that facility was allocated for veterans in theory,
31 but in practice, more than half of the resources were not being
32 supportive of veterans.

33

34 **LEG. TROTТА:**

35 That's what it said.

36

37 **MS. CORINNE:**

02:06PM 38 So the mission was not being met. Marcelle, our boss, has said
39 over Covid, over 30 different homelessness supportive facilities
40 have closed, so it's not just that place. This is an issue that
41 has been exasperated because of Covid. I think that affordable
42 housing access for veterans and normal civilians is a huge issue on
43 the island. It's not just veterans.

44

45 **LEG. TROTТА:**

46 I mean, it's coming from -- it's only what I read, but it said that
47 there was a shortage of homeless veterans, which I thought was a
48 good sign.

49

02:06PM 50 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

51 Suffolk County is the second place in the entire United States
52 behind California for veterans, so we have the largest veteran
53 community in just a small place, Suffolk County here on Long
54 Island, so to say that it's not being reported because of Covid or
55 other reasons but there's definitely homeless veterans.

56

1 **LEG. TROTТА:**

2 It's counterintuitive to what you're saying is that there's
3 homeless veterans yet they're saying they didn't have enough
4 homeless veterans, they had to put regular homeless.

5
6 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

7 Not in that specific area.

8
9 **MS. CORINNE:**

02:07PM 10 And respectfully, not all veterans will meet the qualifications.
11 Some of them will refuse to go because they can't leave a pet, so
12 you'll have a veteran in dire need of housing, but they would
13 rather -- we can't force veterans to do things. We do not. We do
14 not make a habit of forcing veterans or robbing them of their
15 agency. If a veteran would refuse to go to a shelter because they
16 want to stay with their pet, a dog maybe, and they would rather
17 live out in the woods with their dog than in a home, we can't force
18 them to give up the animal.

19
20 **LEG. TROTТА:**

21 I got you. There's bigger issues. I got it.

22
23 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

24 Part of my specific job as an outreach coordinator is to go out to
25 sites where I see encampments of veterans, 30, 20, 10 veterans
26 living out in the woods together making a community that they would
27 rather be in than be in society, so yes, there's a huge issue with
28 veterans. They're just not seeking the services of going to a
29 homeless shelter because they don't feel comfortable trusting that
02:08PM 30 homeless shelter, whether it's their sobriety that might be at risk
31 because there's drug use inside of that shelter, or it's a female
32 who doesn't want to be around males, whether they are married or
33 not married, or they have a spouse who they want to be with but
34 they are not married so they can't make the qualifications, if they
35 have children, they would rather sleep on the couch of a friend,
36 but because they're not seeking the services of homeless shelters
37 doesn't mean that there's not a need for supportive services of
38 veterans.

39
02:08PM 40 **MS. CORINNE:**

41 And that's why the peer element is so important, because a lot of
42 these people -- a lot of our fellow veterans are very distrustful
43 of systems of government, and we have to build that camaraderie
44 sometimes for six months, sometimes for a year before they will
45 even consider opening up to the idea of systemic support.

46
47 **LEG. TROTТА:**

48 Thank you.

49
02:08PM 50 **MS. KOULERMOS:**

51 Yeah. Absolutely.

52
53 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

54 Yes, Legislator Anker.

55
56 **LEG. ANKER:**

1 Again, I also had that question because I saw that in Newsday. You
2 know why did they close the -- it's called Veterans Place, I think.

3
4 **MS. KOULERMOS:**
5 Vets Place.

6
7 **LEG. ANKER:**
8 Vets Place. You know, and I was thinking, Well, maybe they can
9 just make it an all women's location or -- you know, because like
02:09PM 10 what you're describing, there's specific groups of folks that need
11 their needs met as far as shelters and food and healthcare. Do you
12 see the government working and partnering, like with your
13 organizations, looking into that, breaking it down so it's more
14 doable for those particular individuals?

15
16 **MS. KOULERMOS:**
17 I don't really see -- I see it with being a county issue more. The
18 counties would have to make it specific and eligible for their
19 constituents or the people because Nassau County is so much
02:09PM 20 different than Suffolk County, so the needs are different in each
21 county, so it's not something that federal would really be able to
22 know because it's here, so lower level, their needs.

23
24 **MS. CORINNE:**
25 And that's the thing about Dwyer too, is every county is different.
26 We get grants from the state, but every county handles things a
27 little differently, so probably the same with our populations.
28 There might be some counties out there without a high percentage of
29 female homeless veterans, so they don't need the sort of housing.
02:10PM 30 Suffolk County definitely does.

31
32 **LEG. ANKER:**
33 As you're talking, I'm e-mailing our commissioner on those specific
34 issues that you're discussing. Hi, Tom and Melissa, if you're
35 listening. But again, it seems like we can change the county's
36 requirements, it sounds like, and we will. It looks like we have a
37 very supportive group here within the legislature, but you need to
38 let us know how and of course why. We need to hear why and all
39 those specifics, but let's start making those good changes because
02:11PM 40 we have a good system. It can be made better, and you will help
41 us, and we greatly appreciate it.

42
43 **MS. KOULERMOS:**
44 I do appreciate it, and a lot of times I have veterans who are in
45 Nassau County and they say, I'm homeless in Nassau County. Well,
46 if you're homeless in Nassau County, you're going to be homeless
47 here in Suffolk too. A lot of the barriers that we see is the
48 county line, so defining what we can do can be really beneficial to
49 help and the PTA/PTO thing you had mentioned before with kids, I
02:11PM 50 think was amazing, especially for me. My daughter is seven. I'm a
51 disabled veteran, and so is her father. If she had the extra
52 support in school being a military family would really make her
53 education a lot --

54
55 **LEG. ANKER:**
56 You know, we could try it again but the barrier -- because there's

1 always these things that stop us to progress into the goal that we
2 want to be is that the government was not providing the information
3 because they are not allowed to. I know you mentioned something, I
4 think Bridget has mentioned, I think it's ETS to try to locate
5 where those people are coming out of the service. Well, when
6 Melissa and I were looking into this seven, eight, nine years ago,
7 we were trying to figure out how we could let the schools know
8 where these military families are. But again, again it's due to
9 privacy and confidentiality, that is a huge problem.

02:12PM 10

11 **MS. CORINNE:**

12 A lot of veterans do not self disclose. A lot of veterans -- we
13 have 80,000 veterans in Suffolk County roughly or in the area. A
14 lot of veterans were -- I know even as a student veteran going to
15 Fordham, Fordham served about 650 student veterans and probably
16 about 200 of them self identified, so there's a huge disparity.
17 That was just one student veteran population, and when I spoke to
18 them, I was a chapter leader there. A lot of veterans told me,
19 Well, I don't want to engage with veteran space because they don't
20 understand my needs. Also I don't feel good about identifying as a
21 veteran because I don't think that will get -- there will be a
22 stigma or I won't get the services I need, I won't get the support
23 I need. It could be the same here. There's a lack of support for
24 veteran families for child care. There's a lot of problem areas
25 that it would be great to do a follow up to address.

02:12PM 20

26
27 **LEG. ANKER:**

28 Absolutely. We've got work to do, so thank you for helping us.

29

02:13PM 30

31 **CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:**

32 Absolutely. And as you can see up here and hear up here, you have
33 a lot of support, so we are truly grateful for the noble work --
34 not only your service that you provided this country but the noble
35 work you are doing to provide services for those in need who have
36 served this country as well on all different platforms, so we thank
37 you for all of it, and we will have you back in the very near
38 future because our work has only just begun. We're looking forward
39 to it. I think everybody is excited about seeing where we can take
40 this. So thank you, ladies, Dani and Melanoe, very much for your
41 presentation today and joining us today; and, look, this county
42 will, we will do more because we can and because of people like
43 you.

02:13PM 40

44 So I just want to thank everybody, and I also just want to take one
45 second today to recognize Josepg Cognitore (ph). He's the
46 commander of his post. Hey, Joe. How ya doing, buddy? So thank
47 you for your service as well, my friend.

48

02:14PM 50

49 So thank you to all. Thank you to all my colleagues up here, and I
50 know we're running behind. I apologize, but this is important work
51 that we are doing, so Public Works, we apologize. But anyway,
52 thank you all very much. Any further comments or questions?
53 Seeing none, let me run through the rest of the -- we have no
54 tabled resolutuons, no introductory resolutions, procedural
55 motions, home rule messages, tabled subject to call resolutions, so
56 seeing no further business, we are adjourned. Thank you.

(The meeting was adjourned at 2:15 p.m.)

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