

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
JOINT COMMITTEES ON PUBLIC SAFETY
AND HOUSING, NEIGHBORHOOD
DEVELOPMENT AND THE HOMELESS

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tuesday, September 11, 2012
1:15 p.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR., CO-CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE BLACKWELL, CO-CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS
COUNCILMAN WILLIAM K. GREENLEE
COUNCILMAN BOBBY HENON
COUNCILMAN KENYATTA JOHNSON
COUNCILMAN DENNIS O'BRIEN
COUNCILMAN DAVID OH
COUNCILMAN BRIAN J. O'NEILL
COUNCILWOMAN MARIA D. QUINONES-SANCHEZ
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA

RESOLUTION 120042 - Resolution authorizing
Council's Committee on Public Safety and
Committee on Housing Neighborhood Development
and the Homeless to hold joint hearings on the
City and State's preparedness for the influx
of returning veterans from war, including Iraq
and Afghanistan.

- - -

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COUNCILMAN JONES: Good

3

afternoon.

4

(Good afternoon.)

5

COUNCILMAN JONES: We will now

6

convene a Joint Committee of Public

7

Safety and Housing and Neighborhood

8

Development and Homelessness Committee is

9

now called to order. I note that a

10

quorum is present in the form of

11

Councilman O'Brien, Councilman Oh,

12

Councilwoman Sanchez, to my right

13

Councilwoman Blackwell, Councilman

14

Greenlee and Councilman O'Neill.

15

Before we get started, we'd

16

like to give a pledge of allegiance to

17

our flag. Thank you. Would you all

18

stand.

19

(Pledge of Allegiance recited.)

20

COUNCILMAN JONES: Would the

21

Clerk please read the title of the

22

resolution.

23

THE CLERK: Resolution 120042,

24

authorizing Council's Committee on Public

25

Safety and Committee on Housing

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2 Neighborhood Development and the Homeless
3 to hold joint hearings on the City and
4 State's preparedness for the influx of
5 returning veterans from war, including
6 Iraq and Afghanistan.

7 COUNCILMAN JONES: And before
8 we read in the first panelist, our
9 Senator, I would like to offer a moment
10 of silence for the anniversary of 9/11.
11 Eleven years ago, 2,996 victims were
12 taken from us in Shanksville,
13 Pennsylvania, the Pentagon in Washington,
14 DC and the Twin Towers at the World Trade
15 Center in New York.

16 Will we please stand for a
17 moment of silence.

18 (Moment of silence.)

19 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you.

20 Brief opening statement. The
21 greatest commitment a citizen, a veteran,
22 can give in the United States is to put
23 his or her life on the line to preserve
24 our way of life. It was the incident at
25 9/11 that set into motion a series of

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2 military actions that many Americans were
3 sent forth to defend our country.

4 Fortunately, many of them are returning
5 home today, which leads to the question,
6 is there significant resources in the
7 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, nationally,
8 and particularly in the City of
9 Philadelphia to care for our veterans.

10 I would like to acknowledge the
11 work of Councilwoman Blackwell, who for
12 many years serviced our veterans,
13 established veterans homes, and hosts the
14 Veterans Administration in her respective
15 district.

16 I'd like to also acknowledge
17 the important voice of Councilman Oh at
18 this hearing as well, who has served in
19 the military and better understands the
20 needs of our veterans and our returning
21 heroes.

22 I would like to also
23 acknowledge Councilman O'Brien, who
24 served as the Chairman of Veterans
25 Affairs and Emergency Preparedness

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2 Committee for the Commonwealth of
3 Pennsylvania, and all members of Council
4 who house, service, and care for our
5 veterans and returning heroes from recent
6 wars.

7 This afternoon together our
8 Mayor is working on Mission 365, which is
9 a program to forge creative partnerships
10 that he will be announcing opportunities
11 for training of our veterans later on
12 today.

13 It is our responsibility to
14 honor your service and assure your
15 healthcare is the best in the world, that
16 each of you has the dignity of a job or
17 educational training to prepare you for
18 jobs of the future and that you always in
19 the City of Philadelphia have a place
20 that you can call home.

21 As our President said in his
22 acceptance speech in Charlotte, North
23 Carolina, when you take off your uniform,
24 we will service you as well as you
25 serviced us, because no one who fights

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2 for this country should have to fight for
3 a job or a roof over their head or the
4 care that they need when they come home.

5 That is why -- that's okay to
6 clap for that.

7 (Applause.)

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: That is why
9 this afternoon this body, crossing party
10 lines, republicans and democrats, are
11 working together to make sure that this
12 happens for you. It is not by
13 coincidence that we chose the day of 9/11
14 either. We are committed to assessing
15 the service offered to our veterans,
16 identifying areas of improvement to
17 better service our returning heroes, as
18 well as existing veterans in the
19 Commonwealth and City of Pennsylvania.
20 It is our duty to accommodate you, to
21 support you. And with that, I'm honored
22 to hear the testimony here today.

23 Will the Clerk call the
24 first --

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: May I

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2 make a statement.

3 COUNCILMAN JONES: I'm sorry.

4 Other members of Council will make

5 statements.

6 Councilwoman Blackwell.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

8 you.

9 Good afternoon.

10 (Good afternoon.)

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: We

12 certainly would not only say welcome to

13 new veterans coming home but all those

14 like Ed Speller and many of you who have

15 served our country in the past. We thank

16 you for your sacrifice and commitment to

17 doing the heavy lifting to make all of us

18 in this country feel safe. We view you

19 as heroes.

20 We know that as survivors, that

21 you have given us images of strength,

22 dignity, and pride, and certainly as has

23 been said, we realize that you should not

24 come home and not have the support that

25 you need.

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2 Solutions come about by
3 identifying problems, evaluating methods
4 used to address them, determining where
5 gaps are, and coming up with ideas and
6 bridges to certainly move that gap. By
7 scheduling this hearing, it is our hope
8 that we can educate the public about the
9 issues that face you, our veterans, by
10 listening to your stories and those of
11 your loved ones, by listening to your
12 concerns and hearing your needs to help
13 make your life better and those of the
14 people you hold dear.

15 By bringing in various experts
16 and service providers, we hope we can
17 gain a better understanding of the
18 challenges you face and also do our part
19 to make sure that we make life better for
20 all.

21 I want to thank all the vets
22 and the veterans homes and organizations
23 in my district and certainly around the
24 City. We in Council want to be proactive
25 and prepared in whatever it is you may

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2 need so that we may do our best to serve
3 you.

4 Although the number of men and
5 women who return is not assured us, from
6 this day forward we promise you that we
7 will do our best to help you in every way
8 we can.

9 Thank you again and welcome.

10 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
11 Councilwoman.

12 (Applause.)

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: The Chair
14 would like to also recognize Councilwoman
15 Bass who has joined us.

16 Are there any other comments?

17 (No response.)

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: Will the
19 Clerk read in the first panel.

20 THE CLERK: The Honorable
21 Shirley Kitchen, State Senator.

22 (Senator Kitchen already seated
23 at the witness table.)

24 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
25 Senator, for gracing our hallowed halls.

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2 Will you begin your testimony.

3 SENATOR KITCHEN: Yes. Good
4 afternoon, Madam Chair Blackwell and
5 Mr. Chairman Jones and members of the
6 Committee. Thank you for inviting me
7 here to participate in this important
8 discussion this afternoon. As stated, my
9 name is State Senator Shirley Kitchen and
10 I represent the 3rd Senatorial District
11 in Philadelphia. I am also a member of
12 the Senate Veteran Affairs and Emergency
13 Preparedness Committee.

14 I want to first express my deep
15 respect for our men and women who are
16 serving in our military. On this, the
17 11th anniversary of the September 11th
18 terrorist attacks on this nation, we
19 remember the thousands of innocent men,
20 women, and children who lost their lives,
21 but we also reflect on the many, many
22 more who have defended and are still
23 defending our freedom.

24 We have the finest military on
25 the planet, and our service men and women

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2 are protecting this great nation here at
3 home and overseas in some of the most
4 remote and dangerous places on earth.

5 Most of our troops have come
6 home from Iraq, and we are preparing for
7 troops in Afghanistan to come home for
8 good. They are coming home to a job
9 market that is slowly improving but still
10 sluggish. The latest numbers show that
11 the overall national employment rate for
12 veterans is 6.6 percent, which is better
13 than the national average of 8.1 percent.
14 But post 9/11 veterans face an
15 unemployment rate of 10.9 percent. And
16 our young veterans are disproportionately
17 impacted by our economy. They are
18 competing against new college grads and
19 folks who have been laid off and folks
20 who have more defined skills. Our
21 veterans need our support on the federal,
22 state, and local level to help them
23 prepare and remain in the civilian
24 workforce.

25 Because they spend a great deal

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2 of time in training in different aspects
3 of the military, our veterans are very
4 trainable. So we must find ways to help
5 them communicate those skills on a resume
6 and in an interview. We must give them
7 one-stop-shop access to all the services
8 that are available especially to them.

9 I've held several veteran fairs
10 in my Senate district that put
11 participants in touch with organizations,
12 but the services are often disconnected.
13 They are not well advertised and, quite
14 frankly, returning veterans have a
15 problem putting together the services
16 that they need. We all need to pitch in.
17 We can do that by authoring local
18 business tax credits and incentives for
19 hiring veterans.

20 Pennsylvania does offer some
21 employment. Specially trained veterans
22 employment representatives located in PA
23 CareerLink offices provide veterans with
24 the full range of employment services,
25 but we often get complaints that

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2 sometimes veterans are treated as though
3 the worker may not care or they're not
4 going out of their way to service or, you
5 know, really find the type of employment
6 that they need. And also another concern
7 is, our veterans seem to need assistance
8 in other aspects, such as mental health
9 and transitioning.

10 Now, a lot of our returning men
11 and women have been subjected to the
12 horrors of battle. It has to be
13 difficult to transition into life at
14 home, and it must be hard on their
15 families, who simply want to resume a
16 more stable lifestyle.

17 In my office, we see a lot of
18 homelessness. We tend to work with
19 transition. Sometimes it involves a
20 mental and emotional adjustment and, in
21 several cases, training. And also we're
22 looking at -- we talked to the Secretary
23 of Corrections that when a veteran do run
24 into problems, that if they have to be
25 incarcerated, they should be separated

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2 from the general population.

3 Now, we are working on some
4 bills, which I'm not privy to say at this
5 time, but we have done research and we
6 are looking into some bills that we can
7 do more of on the state level. Also, I
8 was given a copy of House Bill 2347
9 introduced by Representative Boyd. I was
10 just given this a few minutes ago by
11 Larry Holman from the Vietnam Veterans of
12 America. And I do want to say we do see
13 a lot of homelessness from Vietnam
14 veterans and problems also, and I think
15 that it was really a good idea here today
16 that we can come together and work
17 together and maybe we can -- well, not
18 maybe. We have to solve these problems
19 and we can put our resources together and
20 work together.

21 Thank you, Madam and
22 Mr. Chairman.

23 (Applause.)

24 COUNCILMAN JONES: I forgot,
25 Senator --

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2 SENATOR KITCHEN: Also, I must
3 say -- excuse me. I forgot to mention
4 this, because I don't want to start a
5 family fight. My colleague, the
6 Appropriations Chair for the Democratic
7 Caucus, Senator Vince Hughes, also
8 submitted written testimony.

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you so
10 much. You got me excited, I started
11 clapping. I had to remember we're not
12 supposed to clap, but when it comes to
13 this subject, sometimes the pride swells
14 and we clap anyway. So thank you for
15 that, and we're looking forward to the
16 proposed legislation. And one of the
17 things that we like to do at the City
18 level is to work in tandem and work with
19 our state representatives and senators to
20 do companion legislation once we get a
21 sense of what that is that we can help
22 complement what the state does. So we're
23 looking forward to that.

24 COUNCILMAN O'BRIEN: Can I ask
25 what the appropriate procedure would be

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2 to amend that rule, because I'd like to
3 clap.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: Well, we're
5 going to take the prerogative of the
6 Chair. We can clap.

7 (Applause.)

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: The Chair
9 recognizes Councilman Squilla is here,
10 for the record, but also recognizes
11 Co-Chair Councilwoman Blackwell.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
13 you, Senator. Three is important. I
14 have the 3rd Councilmanic District; she
15 has the 3rd Senatorial District.

16 SENATOR KITCHEN: And we do
17 work together.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes,
19 we do.

20 We certainly want to thank her.
21 We thank you for acknowledging Senator
22 Vincent Hughes, whose testimony will be
23 made part of the record. And certainly
24 we commend you for all that you do. Your
25 reputation for helping people is

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2 citywide, and we thank you.

3 SENATOR KITCHEN: Thank you.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
5 Senator.

6 Any other questions for the
7 Senator?

8 (No response.)

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: Clerk, will
10 you please read the next panel of
11 testimony.

12 THE CLERK: Commissioner R.
13 Edward Speller, Marsha Four, and Joseph
14 Buckley.

15 COUNCILMAN JONES: Will you
16 please approach the witness table.

17 (Witnesses approached witness
18 table.)

19 COUNCILMAN JONES: Good
20 afternoon. Have a seat.

21 While we get seated, we have
22 Judge Joe Waters of the Veterans Court
23 who has joined us here today. Thank you
24 for taking the time to come over.

25 Give him a round of applause.

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2 (Applause.)

3 COUNCILMAN JONES: Okay. Would
4 you state your name for the record and
5 begin your testimony, please.

6 MS. FOUR: My name is Marsha
7 Four. I'm the Executive Director of the
8 Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service and
9 Education Center.

10 COUNCILMAN JONES: Please begin
11 your testimony. We'll go one at a time.

12 MS. FOUR: Okay. Yes.
13 Committee Chairs Councilwoman Blackwell,
14 Councilman Jones, Committee members, City
15 Councilmembers, veterans and advocates,
16 certainly my full testimony has been
17 submitted for the record. I also want to
18 bring awareness of a new group that's --
19 fairly new group that's been formed, the
20 Philadelphia Homeless Veteran Coalition,
21 made up of members of our community
22 agencies that work exclusively with
23 homeless veterans.

24 Today I will only be addressing
25 two topics for consideration that are

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2 very close at hand to all of you, and
3 they can bring a colossal advantage to a
4 proactive plan of coordination which can
5 be an umbrella for all the work that can
6 be accomplished. One is the appointing
7 of the position of the Director of the
8 Veterans Affairs Commission. This
9 position should be one capable of making
10 a significant contribution to the process
11 of preparedness, or it could not be.
12 This hinges on a careful selection
13 process. It will require a focused and
14 energized veteran, man or woman, who has
15 a clear grasp of the goals and expected
16 workload and outcomes of the office; a
17 strong and aggressive proponent able to
18 represent the City on all veteran-related
19 fronts; one with strong organizational
20 and leadership skills. Without these
21 skills, energy is fractured and less
22 effective.

23 Over 76,000 veterans reside in
24 Philadelphia County, the highest of any
25 county in our state, and it's obvious it

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2 is growing. There is increasing
3 conversation in the veteran communities
4 surrounding the obvious vacancy of this
5 director position. In spite of the
6 overwhelming need to pump up the volume
7 on outreach services and advocacy,
8 veterans are beginning to feel a
9 less-than-aggressive response by the City
10 with this empty seat in the Advisory
11 Commission.

12 I urge City Council give
13 additional strength and muscle to its
14 convictions and play an active role in
15 working toward an appointment of a
16 director. It is, after all, the lead
17 City office to which all veterans turn.
18 And, unfortunately, 50 percent of
19 emergency dollars that the state provided
20 to the counties for emergency services to
21 veterans was returned to the General Fund
22 last year.

23 I also speak to the membership
24 of City Council's Advisory Committee on
25 Veterans. With respect and recognition

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2 for the work that is done and
3 accomplished by this Advisory Committee,
4 I am not aware if they have an
5 established strategic plan and how that
6 is being put into action. I actually
7 searched long and hard on the web to find
8 something on this, but I couldn't locate
9 it at all, nor could I actually find a
10 membership roster of those who sit on the
11 Commission -- on the Advisory Committee,
12 or documents that describe the issues
13 they discuss and place before City
14 Council.

15 Now, I assume these documents
16 exist, because they do, but I'm
17 interested in how they are disseminated
18 to the interested parties and advocates
19 in this community and what network is
20 obviously needed to be put in place to
21 see that this information is put out and
22 that contributors of thoughts and ideas
23 can be present at their meetings.

24 Not knowing who exactly is
25 seated on the Advisory Committee leaves

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2 me at a loss and the suggestion that
3 follows.

4 If the Advisory Committee also
5 consists of men and women who are active
6 as veteran service providers, actually
7 work daily in the veteran arena, have
8 day-to-day direct interaction with
9 veterans, have vested in hands-on
10 services and programs, then the following
11 is moot. If not, I would ask you to
12 consider these qualifications for
13 positions on the Advisory Committee,
14 expanding the number of designated seats,
15 if necessary.

16 With an expansion, City Council
17 unleashes the Advisory Committee's
18 capability to tap into a new stream of
19 thought and current veteran trends,
20 providing the enhancement of its capacity
21 to remain informed and prepared to offer
22 substantial recommendations to City
23 Council.

24 In closing, I believe that
25 Philadelphia has within its reach the

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2 ability to become a nationally recognized
3 model in its approach to organizing a
4 comprehensive plan of support for our
5 veterans. This can be accomplished by
6 utilizing its strength and leadership,
7 aggressively implementing a consolidated
8 plan to actively coordinate all of the
9 resources available to it.

10 It is a massive project to
11 undertake, of course, but it's not beyond
12 our reach. We have people able to do
13 that and fulfill that need. It is
14 vitally important that the office of the
15 Veteran Advisory Commission and the
16 Veterans Advisory Committee play a role
17 in this planning process.

18 I'd like to thank City Council
19 and the Committees for the opportunity to
20 provide this testimony. Thank you.

21 COUNCILMAN JONES: Are there
22 any questions?

23 (Applause.)

24 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you.

25 (Audience member asking

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2 questions.)

3 COUNCILMAN JONES: Excuse me,
4 ma'am. That's not how we do it. I meant
5 from members of the Committee. She'll be
6 available after our testimony, but we
7 have to do this in this format. I
8 apologize for the miscommunications.

9 Any questions from members of
10 the Committee?

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I do
12 want to say something, but perhaps I
13 should wait until after Ed Speller -- no,
14 maybe I won't.

15 I agree with what you said,
16 Marsha. Thank you.

17 MS. FOUR: Thank you, ma'am.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: And
19 certainly thank you for all you do with
20 Stand Down, but I think we should have a
21 transparent agenda. I've been talking to
22 Ed Speller for several years on the very
23 subject you mentioned, and we talked
24 about that, and we've been in
25 communication with the President. I also

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2 feel that the Veterans Advisory Affairs
3 needs its own space. Vets need a place
4 to go no matter whether they need
5 housing, job, benefits, information,
6 whatever. They need their own office.
7 We've been talking about this for years
8 too. I know space is an issue, but still
9 veterans need their own space so that
10 they can go in a place that's theirs,
11 they know this is their office and this
12 is where they get their services. So I
13 agree.

14 MS. FOUR: Yes, ma'am. Thank
15 you.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
17 you.

18 (Applause.)

19 COUNCILMAN JONES: Are there
20 any other questions?

21 (No response.)

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: Sir.

23 COMMISSIONER SPELLER: Good
24 afternoon.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: Good

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2 afternoon.

3 COMMISSIONER SPELLER: I

4 appreciate your invitation extended to me
5 to speak before this Committee. You have
6 to know that this is the first time I
7 ever spoke in anything like this, but
8 I'll get through it, I'm sure.

9 Basically I talk about the
10 homeless veteran situation. And as a
11 precursor to that, I just want to say I
12 was like 25 years with the Commonwealth,
13 and much of that time was involved with
14 special projects, most notably as the
15 Eastern Regional Veterans Coordinator
16 governing the 11 CareerLinks, formerly
17 the Office of Employment Security at the
18 time, and one of my duties was to
19 supervise the local veterans employment
20 representative and disabled veterans
21 outreach programs. The purpose was to
22 specifically and effectively assist
23 veterans in finding employment.

24 I became involved with Stand
25 Down while employed by the Commonwealth

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2 and secured annual participation of the
3 vet reps to the Stand Down event while
4 becoming a volunteer myself back in 1994.
5 The title of Director of Stand Down came
6 in 1999 when the founder and my mentor,
7 Marsha Four, stepped down, and as a
8 result of that, I'm somehow dragged into
9 this for the last 10 to 12 years, which
10 was great.

11 For those of you who are not
12 familiar with Stand Down, our ultimate
13 goal -- first of all, we're a non-profit
14 organization, all volunteers, whose
15 purpose is to assist veterans in need.
16 Our goal is to put ourselves out of
17 business, so to speak, by working to
18 eliminate the problem of homelessness
19 among our military and ex-military
20 brothers and sisters who have fallen on
21 hard times and who need a boost here and
22 there to get back into the mainstream.

23 At present, they live in the
24 state of flux. Many are removed from
25 family and friends and live sort of a

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2 nomadic existence. In many instances,
3 their family may be not that far away
4 from where they are actually living on
5 the streets, but oftentimes that veteran
6 cannot reintegrate to what was the norm.

7 Our Stand Down is an annual
8 event geared towards assisting these
9 individuals who do not or will not seek
10 the assistance of the establishment but
11 find comfort in our three-day Stand Down
12 event. Here they receive a myriad of
13 services from various agencies who come
14 together and extend a helping hand in
15 whatever way they can to encourage these
16 individuals to reconnect.

17 Community response has been
18 overwhelming. Assistance, support, and
19 contributions have come from a multitude
20 of services to include the City of
21 Philadelphia, Bucks County, county
22 officials, veterans organizations such as
23 the American Legion, VFW, Disabled Vets,
24 and Delaware Valley Vietnam Veterans, as
25 well as other veteran service

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2 organizations. Help is received from all
3 branches of the military, the Office of
4 Emergency Services and Shelters, local
5 unions, area hospitals, local, state, and
6 federal agencies, corporations, and
7 hundreds of volunteers. The U.S.
8 Department of Veterans Affairs is
9 committed to Stand Down through its
10 medical centers both here in Philadelphia
11 and Coatesville as well as county
12 offices. The boroughs and townships also
13 support our cause.

14 The issues surrounding these
15 individuals are many, and they usually
16 have multiple obstacles to overcome.

17 In speaking with homeless
18 veterans, a common thread emerges; that
19 is, for lack of a better word,
20 hopelessness. They feel that this is as
21 good as it gets. Stand Down tries a few
22 days a year to brighten that day --
23 brighten their day. By doing that, we
24 try to provide them with three days in an
25 environment that allows them to rest,

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2 reflect, eat, sleep, socialize, and tend
3 to the many needs without being looked at
4 as someone unworthy.

5 What we encounter are
6 individuals with combat issues,
7 psychological problems, problems in their
8 home, including divorce due to their
9 inability to cope and alienation from
10 society who sent them to war, only to
11 shun them when they return home.

12 Studies show that there is an
13 increase of suicides stemming from these
14 wars. Multiple deployments have a lot to
15 do with this trend. According to a
16 report entitled "Losing the Battle: The
17 Challenge of Military Suicide" by
18 Dr. Margaret Harrell and Nancy Berglass,
19 from 2005 to 2010, service members took
20 their own lives at a rate of
21 approximately one every 36 hours. The
22 Department of Veterans Affairs estimates
23 18 veterans die by suicide each day.

24 Homelessness is probably not
25 decreasing as we were being told to

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2 think, but just like decreasing
3 unemployment rates. The only time you
4 can count people who are on unemployment
5 is as long as they're on unemployment.
6 Once they leave that situation, you can't
7 count them anymore, and the same thing
8 applies to the number of veterans who are
9 getting help and then fall off the radar.

10 A report from Veterans Inc.
11 indicates the risk of women veterans
12 becoming homeless is four times greater
13 than male veterans. The percentage of
14 all military personnel represented by
15 women is approximately 20 percent, and
16 the number of women veterans as of
17 September 2009 was 7.9 percent.
18 According to the report, 7 percent of the
19 nation's homeless population is comprised
20 of women.

21 The number of homeless veterans
22 continues to increase. Recent studies
23 have shown that between 529,000 and
24 840,000 veterans are homeless at some
25 time during the year, and on any given

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2 night, more than 300,000 veterans are
3 living on the streets or in shelters in
4 these United States. Approximately 33
5 percent of homeless males in the United
6 States are veterans and are twice as
7 likely as other Americans to become
8 chronically homeless.

9 Statistics vary from region to
10 region because homeless veterans tend to
11 be transient. According to the
12 Department of Veterans Affairs, an
13 estimated 107,100 homeless veterans live
14 across the country, 13 percent are women.
15 More than 10,000 veterans who served in
16 Afghanistan and Iraq are homeless or
17 involved in programs keeping them off the
18 streets. This is according to the U.S.
19 Joint Economic Committee report released
20 May 24, 2012.

21 Troop reductions impede
22 employment opportunities because the
23 troop reduction and withdrawals from
24 these aforementioned combat zones make
25 reenlistment difficult and subsequent

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2 employment difficult.

3 Nearly one-third of U.S.
4 veterans between the ages of 18 and 24
5 are not employed. Pennsylvania has
6 estimated 9 percent of young veterans,
7 roughly 5,000 men and women, are in this
8 age group. Female veterans are having
9 the hardest time. The report states
10 women are unemployed at a rate of 36.1
11 percent, which is two and a half times
12 the rate of non-veteran females.

13 In the end, if there is no
14 support system in place, the likelihood
15 of homelessness is in their future.

16 We talk about duplication of
17 services as a bad thing, but it isn't
18 when you look at it from the overall
19 picture. There are a number of
20 organizations in the City whose goals are
21 to work with our returning veterans and
22 veterans from other campaigns. Their
23 attempt to provide services to these
24 veterans may overlap with each other and
25 may be construed as duplication, but,

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2 however, looking at the big picture, all
3 agency efforts to help veterans only
4 proves and strengthens Philadelphia's
5 commitment to serve our veterans in their
6 time of need.

7 All roads by all of these
8 resources lead to the same goal, and that
9 is to uplift and nurture these brave
10 warriors back into society with all the
11 skills we have at our disposal by any
12 means necessary to make them productive
13 citizens again.

14 My experience is in assisting
15 homeless vets. The population is one
16 that changes constantly because of the
17 nomadic nature of the group. Even though
18 we have a vague number of the population
19 in our area, monitoring them for the sole
20 purpose of statistics becomes a nearly
21 impossible task.

22 One of the things to slow the
23 tide of veteran homelessness suggests a
24 joint effort between the City and local
25 businesses to actively recruit and hire

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2 veterans in jobs that will exceed the
3 marginal salaries that keep them in a
4 category of minimum wage and impedes
5 their ability to improve themselves and
6 become self-reliant.

7 Make available more
8 transitional housing, not shelters,
9 giving the homeless a sense of normalcy
10 in a home-like environment. Also, hire
11 skilled successful veterans who can
12 relate to other veterans in need of
13 services, such as Marsha Four, to narrow
14 the chance of failure.

15 Keep in mind, the homeless
16 veteran, particularly the combat veteran
17 with multiple tours of duty who have
18 experienced many types of traumas, both
19 physical and psychological, are in need
20 of customized care. Helping them
21 understand the road back may be hard and
22 tedious, but letting them know that they
23 are being helped because they are
24 appreciated by the communities they chose
25 to defend for the freedoms that we enjoy

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2 today. This will go a long way in their
3 successful recovery.

4 Thank you.

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you.

6 The Chair recognizes

7 Councilwoman Blackwell.

8 (Applause.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
10 you very much. Certainly I want to thank
11 Ed Speller and again Marsha Four. I
12 don't know how many years it's been,
13 maybe around 2000, maybe around '98 or
14 '99. That little woman back there,
15 Brenda Cooper, is the one who took me --
16 and I worked with the homeless
17 community -- said, I want you to come
18 with me. And that is when Stand Down was
19 at Lighthouse Field, and Stand Down has
20 been to the Veterans Hospital and now
21 we've had to go to Norristown for space.

22 COMMISSIONER SPELLER: Bucks
23 County.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Bucks
25 County in order to have enough space

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2 certainly to try to have a wonderful
3 weekend for these people who are
4 homeless.

5 You all know homelessness is my
6 passion and commitment to God in and out
7 of season. I'll always deal with
8 homelessness.

9 And I think that the saddest
10 thing is that over all of these years, we
11 still see some of the same men with the
12 same psychological problems, physical
13 problems who can't get a job, who wait
14 every year to feel like they're somebody.
15 They can go get all the clothes they
16 need, the food they want, hear music, and
17 fellowship one with the other, people who
18 have been through like experiences when
19 they entered the service. And it's
20 really sad, because many of these people,
21 especially men, they have had jobs and
22 they had lives before they went into
23 service. So they lost everything from
24 going into service, and yet they have to
25 come out and don't even have places to

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2 live. They're part of our -- on Sunday
3 nights, when everything is over, we look
4 for Brenda and say, Hey, listen, can you
5 drop so-and-so off at a shelter or can
6 you drop them back in Philly wherever he
7 wants to go.

8 It's just not fair. And I'm
9 very happy that our President has made
10 this focus on trying to help veterans,
11 because maybe one day, while we're still
12 alive and able to function, we'll see an
13 end to this terrible issue called
14 homelessness and we'll see vets who can
15 come back to town and get the respect
16 they need and be prioritized, not put at
17 the bottom rung of the ladder because
18 they have issues.

19 So there's no way we can say
20 thank you, but it's all we have. God
21 bless you. Thank you.

22 (Applause.)

23 COUNCILMAN JONES: Yes, sir.

24 COMMISSIONER SPELLER: Just one
25 other thing. I'd just like to recognize

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2 that Joe is behind me, was on the
3 Advisory Commission, and we have another
4 individual -- you want to stand up and
5 tell them who you are.

6 RONNIE LANDERS: My name is
7 Ronnie Landers.

8 COMMISSIONER SPELLER: --
9 (continued) that are part of the remnants
10 of what we still think of as the Veterans
11 Advisory Commission.

12 Thank you.

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: I want to --
14 I guess -- I want to try to wait, but,
15 again, some of these questions beg
16 answers immediately.

17 In your comments, how would you
18 rate the level of coordination at the
19 federal level, state level, and then
20 local level? Are we communicating,
21 talking to each other, coordinating
22 service?

23 I understand your comment about
24 duplication sometimes is -- repetition
25 can be good, but --

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2 COMMISSIONER SPELLER: I don't
3 think that's a bad thing.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: I just need
5 to get a sense of, and members of this
6 Committee need to get a sense of, how are
7 we doing by way of communicating the
8 needs and types of services.

9 MS. FOUR: Is that to any of
10 us?

11 COUNCILMAN JONES: That's to
12 any of you.

13 MS. FOUR: Much that happens at
14 the federal level certainly is necessary,
15 because we need legislation and
16 regulation that drives many of the
17 programs that exist. However, the
18 oversight and accountability as it moves
19 down the steps is one that is diminished,
20 I'll say. And I think that as hard as
21 one works at the local level, it is
22 sometimes a confusing proposition when we
23 look at federal guidelines and agencies
24 and the utilization of those processes.

25 I think that in the City, there

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2 is -- we have so much advantage here. We
3 have so many vested in this interest, but
4 we need a funnel. We need a funnel to
5 bring them down into a place where
6 everybody knows who they are, what they
7 do, where to go to get help.

8 That was one of the biggest
9 issues actually the Deputy Adjutant
10 General for Veteran Affairs in
11 Pennsylvania, General Gould, mentioned in
12 some of his comments, saying that in
13 working with the veterans and especially
14 the Guard that he has communication with,
15 they don't know where to go, who does
16 what, how they can get assistance.
17 Outreach is vital, because they are not
18 getting it.

19 COUNCILMAN JONES: So if I
20 understood your answer, you believe there
21 are services and resources out there.

22 MS. FOUR: They have to be
23 coordinated. It's not there.

24 COUNCILMAN JONES: So the case
25 management aspect of this --

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2 MS. FOUR: Well, it's not just
3 the case management of the individual
4 veteran. It's the umbrella that we're
5 going to live under that the City can
6 coordinate that will define and devise a
7 structure to actually bring them all
8 together, to actually have some oversight
9 as to what is happening, what needs to be
10 done, what are the trends, how can we
11 coordinate this within our City Council.
12 You have the power.

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: So I would
14 ask the returning of the money, can you
15 elaborate on that? I heard that in your
16 testimony, that we're returning money.

17 MS. FOUR: There is a veterans
18 assistance program at the state level and
19 there are budget items -- a budget line
20 item, and I think the last fiscal year
21 that I remarked about was \$400,000.
22 About 50 percent of that was returned to
23 the General Fund because it was not
24 utilized by the County Directors of
25 Veterans Affairs for those veterans that

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2 could have used that assistance.

3 Outreach. Outreach. Outreach.

4 You have to go out to them. They don't

5 know where to come to get it. They don't

6 even know that it's there to get. And so

7 it's very important that we start

8 coordinating some of these efforts so

9 that we can make use of all dollars that

10 are available to us, not only from the

11 City but the state and the federal

12 government.

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: I just get

14 upset when I think that there are

15 resources available, but we did not draw

16 them down. That to me is insane.

17 COMMISSIONER SPELLER: And that

18 umbrella that Marsha is talking about,

19 what has to happen is, the umbrella can

20 be put in place, but you have to come and

21 leave your attitude out the door, because

22 you have to do this as one unit as

23 opposed to separate entities. Otherwise,

24 it goes back to square one and it won't

25 work.

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2 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you.

3 I'm sorry. I just --

4 MR. BUCKLEY: Part of my
5 remarks today, we're going to be
6 addressing --

7 COUNCILMAN JONES: Why don't
8 you take advantage of that, start your
9 testimony. State your name for the
10 record.

11 MR. BUCKLEY: Then I can go
12 right into it. I'm Joseph Buckley. I
13 work for the Veterans of Foreign Wars
14 Department of Pennsylvania. I am a
15 department service officer in
16 Philadelphia, and my main office is at
17 the VA regional office on Wissahickon
18 Avenue. I am the Outreach Coordinator
19 for the VFW for the five counties,
20 including Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester,
21 Montgomery, and Delaware Counties. I'm a
22 veteran constituent representative or
23 consultant to U.S. Representative Allyson
24 Schwartz. I'm also a staff consultant in
25 Veterans Representative Affairs to State

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2 Senator Mike Stack. I'm all over the
3 place. I feel like I'm doing outreach 24
4 hours a day, because literally sometimes
5 I wake up thinking about this stuff.

6 Having said that, I kind of
7 introduced myself. I want to thank the
8 City Council and the members and the
9 Philadelphia Veterans Commission for
10 allowing me to come here and address this
11 hearing today and to specifically address
12 the resolution. The resolution is
13 something -- it's a beginning that needs
14 to be continued. It can't be an empty
15 promise. You can't -- it's essential and
16 it's specific in its intent the way we
17 read it, but it cannot go empty from this
18 point.

19 I saw balls start rolling about
20 six months ago when I started being
21 involved with the City and bringing the
22 new director of the Veterans
23 Administration in Philadelphia to City
24 Hall, and we tried to start bringing
25 things together, and things are

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2 happening. The coordination that my
3 colleagues have talked about has got to
4 be addressed, and we've started to do
5 that.

6 We need more input. We need
7 more coordination or resources and
8 references from the state to go along
9 with the City and to go along with the
10 federal government. We're missing that
11 one critical link, and that is the state.
12 It seems like they're out there doing
13 their thing. They expect the federal
14 government to be out doing their thing
15 and the City to be out doing -- and it's
16 not working that way. It's not -- it's
17 just not working.

18 Recently, we started having
19 these developments. We had the City
20 Council people up to the VA regional
21 office, and it was wonderful to give them
22 a tour and tell them what each department
23 does. It wasn't a dog and pony show. It
24 was the real deal.

25 The issues that we're finding

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2 that we have to address -- and, by the
3 way, I've got some statistics briefly
4 that were available to me. In 2013 and
5 for the first two or three months of
6 2014, we are expecting 14,000 returning
7 veterans to the City from theatres of
8 war, 14,000 to this city. I've got to do
9 nothing but applaud the City Council for
10 taking a proactive stand to this. It
11 surprised me. It shocks some people.
12 Because when I came back from my theatre
13 of war, which was Vietnam, nobody was
14 prepared for us and nobody wanted to deal
15 with us. And I'm not crying over that.
16 I'm just saying that to see what we're
17 ready for and to see the proaction now
18 does somebody's heart good.

19 We've got to be ready for the
20 influx of these veterans and the veterans
21 who have already returned and are
22 starting to saturate the system with the
23 unique diseases, disorders, and
24 disabilities such as TBI, traumatic brain
25 injury, that heretofore hadn't been

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2 addressed specifically but rather in a
3 larger sense.

4 It took the Department of
5 Veterans Affairs roughly 20 years to
6 recognize diabetes Type 2 as presumptive
7 to exposure to Agent Orange. It took
8 them almost 40 years -- and it's just
9 been in the past two years -- 40 years to
10 recognize coronary artery disease as a
11 result of exposure to Agent Orange. We
12 don't even know yet what presumptive
13 disorders, diseases, and disabilities are
14 afflicting and will be afflicting our
15 returning service people today from the
16 theatres of war, but we are prepared in a
17 quicker fashion to recognize them.

18 I applaud Councilwoman
19 Blackwell for her stand, as I've read it,
20 on homelessness. I've got a poster
21 hanging outside of my office at the VA
22 regional office and it says -- and I want
23 everybody to hear this -- "The words
24 'homeless' and 'veteran' should never be
25 used together."

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2 (Applause.)

3 MR. BUCKLEY: It's unfortunate
4 and we're doing everything we can to
5 address it, and there are some aspects of
6 it that we can't address successfully.
7 Some people are still choosing to be
8 homeless.

9 In terms of immediate needs of
10 what we foresee as the returning
11 population of veterans from the theatres
12 of war that we're drawing down from now,
13 not to forego what Mr. Spellman said, is
14 the alarming suicide rate. These are the
15 issues. The homelessness is an issue.

16 But we've also got to -- there
17 are ancillary issues that we've got to
18 address and, again, knowing where to --
19 each -- the City, the federal government,
20 and the state agencies getting together
21 and knowing how to make these referrals,
22 not just turning someone over to somebody
23 because they don't know how to answer it.
24 We have to have coordinated answers.
25 They can't go to five different people

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2 and get five different answers. It's not
3 going to work. It's going to defeat the
4 purpose.

5 Issues in terms of counseling,
6 not just mental health, medical, and
7 housing, but financial counseling,
8 educational resource and referral. These
9 are other issues that have to be brought
10 into play when we're addressing the
11 greater issues.

12 Again, as Ms. Four and
13 Mr. Spellman have said and made it clear
14 enough, there has to be a coordination,
15 and along with the coordination there has
16 to be a uniformity. I know I've said it,
17 but I can't keep repeating it enough.

18 Ms. Four and Mr. Spellman also
19 mentioned outreach. They're not going to
20 come to us. They're not going to come to
21 you. We've got to make a coordinated
22 effort to go to them, and the information
23 that we're disseminating has to be
24 efficient, effective, and correct. So
25 that's why I'm asking that the resolution

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2 be resolute and unwavering. You've got
3 this ball rolling. Don't let it stop.
4 Don't let it stop.

5 I had a conversation with my
6 friend Wanda from the Commission and with
7 Congressman Oh's representative, Chris,
8 about a month and a half ago --

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: You gave him
10 a promotion.

11 MR. BUCKLEY: That's good.
12 That's good. But in the conversation, I
13 said that Philadelphia can be poised to
14 be the number one city in the country to
15 be considered vet friendly. This is
16 attainable. It is attainable. And I
17 made the comment if we shoot for the
18 stars in this regard and we only make a
19 moon landing, we've gone a long way. But
20 if we shoot for the moon, we're not going
21 to make it.

22 That's all.

23 (Applause.)

24 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you
25 all for your testimony.

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2 The Chair now recognizes, I
3 believe, Councilwoman Bass first and then
4 Councilman Oh.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

6 Thank you so much to all three
7 of you for being here today and for your
8 very important testimony. I just had a
9 couple of questions.

10 You mention that about 14,000
11 veterans will be returning from Iraq and
12 Afghanistan in 2013.

13 MR. BUCKLEY: And '14.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And '14.
15 And is that total cumulative? Is that
16 over the last few years in terms of
17 what's been returning or are you saying
18 in those two years, all of the sudden,
19 we're going to have a significant
20 population that's going to need critical
21 services?

22 MR. BUCKLEY: We are going to
23 have a significant population, and those
24 figures, those statistics, starting this
25 month.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. And
3 that's very important for us to know so
4 that as we advocate and talk about future
5 budget needs, that's something that we
6 need to certainly have on our agenda. So
7 we need to make sure that -- and I know
8 that you and the Chair Lady are certainly
9 on top of that, but just that we need to
10 make sure that we have that dialogue,
11 that that's what the expectation will be.

12 And also in terms of your
13 statement in terms of the City of
14 Philadelphia could be the number one or
15 the most veteran-friendly city in the
16 nation, I just was curious as to if you
17 had any particular recommendations that
18 would help us get there. Because you as
19 the expert, you would know what we can do
20 to make our city much more veteran
21 friendly. So I'd certainly like to know,
22 and I'm sure the panel would like to
23 know, what is it that we can do so that
24 we can follow those recommendations.

25 I believe that Philadelphia has

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2 a lot going for it. You know, I was in
3 another city just recently. When I came
4 back, it's just amazing. We have so much
5 that's happening, so much that we can do,
6 so much potential, but we just need to
7 hear from you in terms of what we can do
8 on this issue to be even better.

9 MR. BUCKLEY: I think that my
10 testimony prefaced that last phrase that
11 I used about Philadelphia being the --
12 could be the number one city in terms of
13 vet friendliness. I think that the
14 points need to be hammered is that this
15 ball is rolling, this resolution is out
16 there, and people are aware of it.
17 That's why I said don't let it become an
18 empty suit. Please don't let it, because
19 it will discourage a lot of people.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

21 MR. BUCKLEY: As I said, the
22 proactivity in this regard of the City
23 government that I have just seen in just
24 the last six months has been exemplary,
25 and that's why I say moving forward if we

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2 can keep this momentum going and help in
3 this coordination of resources and
4 referral, that will do it. That will do
5 it.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. And
7 to everyone else who is here, if anyone
8 has any specific additional
9 recommendations that they would like to
10 make. I think that we need to hear from
11 you. Please don't assume the City
12 government has all the answers, because
13 as everybody knows, we don't. We need to
14 hear from you to make our city better.

15 So, ma'am, did you have a
16 particular suggestion?

17 MS. FOUR: Yes. I think
18 Council needs to give some very careful
19 deliberation on this issue, and I don't
20 think it's without a valid reason that
21 Council might think about putting
22 together an actual strategic planning
23 subcommittee or working group to address
24 this very issue in a very succinct manner
25 that can then look at all of the aspects

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2 that are involved in coordinating this.

3 I think there has to be some specific
4 action taken to look at this very
5 important issue.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

7 Well, thank you very much. The only
8 other thing I just wanted to mention is
9 that I really do also appreciate you
10 bringing forth the issue in terms of the
11 relationship between returning veterans
12 and homelessness and also unemployment
13 rates and depression and suicide. And,
14 you know, my thought is that as every
15 person enters and chooses to have a
16 military career, when you enter the
17 military, there's a plan for you. You
18 don't just show up and they say, Well,
19 we'll figure out something for you to do.
20 As soon as you go, there's a plan for
21 you. And just as though there is a plan
22 for you when you enter, there should also
23 be a plan for you as you exit. And so I
24 think that it does require the branches
25 of the military to look at what are those

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2 exit plans going to be and to be much
3 more serious about them, in my opinion.

4 So thank you very much.

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you
6 for those comments, Councilwoman.

7 The Chair recognizes Councilman
8 Oh.

9 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
10 much, Chairman.

11 Thank you for coming and for
12 your testimony, and my question is really
13 directed to everybody in this room. And
14 I believe that what I've heard is that
15 there is a lot of things that are good
16 going on here in the City of
17 Philadelphia, that we are moving forward,
18 but that there's something lacking that
19 we should address. And the idea of the
20 task force of providers who are actually
21 at the forefront of providing these
22 services I think is a very good idea in
23 the sense that you would know quite well
24 what the City's role should be in terms
25 of when you talk about coordinating, how

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2 should we coordinate, and that is what
3 I'd like to also better understand from
4 you and from the people that are here.

5 What could the City
6 realistically do? I'd like to say that
7 the City has done a tax credit for
8 employers who hire returning veterans.
9 The City has established a Veterans Court
10 in the Philadelphia Municipal Court. The
11 City has a hiring preference for
12 veterans.

13 I do think that we have not
14 recognized some of the bureaucracy of it
15 in that we have persons, military
16 personnel, currently serving in our
17 Reserve and National Guard who I think
18 are challenged to be eligible for some of
19 these, the hiring preferences and other
20 things. That's something that we have to
21 tweak, understanding now how things are
22 different.

23 But as far as you're concerned,
24 what is it that this newly established,
25 better-run Advisory Commission or

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2 Committee should focus on to be effective
3 in light of what we have to deal with?

4 MS. FOUR: I think keeping very
5 alert to the new trends that we're seeing
6 in the veteran population is very
7 important and how those trends need to be
8 addressed in the way of any enhancement.
9 There needs to be a very clear
10 understanding of what the OEF, OIF,
11 Operation New Dawn veteran needs. And
12 sometimes it's not for us to determine
13 that. They get to determine what it is
14 they need.

15 I think that in my regard to a
16 strategic planning subcommittee or
17 working group of City Council or the
18 committees, I believe that it would fall
19 within their domain to look at what have
20 we not organized in the City? Where are
21 the gaps? I think it's important to
22 identify the gaps and we know which
23 direction to take. I think it has to be
24 a very concise investigation of all
25 possibilities in a coordinated way that

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2 includes advocacy or the knowledge of
3 what's happening on the state legislative
4 issues and on the federal legislative
5 issues, because much of that can be very
6 advantageous to us as a city. We need to
7 know what's happening there. We need to
8 have input with our legislators, both
9 state and federally.

10 But I think the subcommittee
11 group is very, very important. I think
12 it has to be directed. I think it needs
13 to be chosen very thoughtfully, because
14 the expectation of what it will present
15 to you as City Council has high stakes
16 involved with it.

17 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
18 much.

19 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you.
20 Are there any other questions
21 for this panel?

22 (No response.)

23 COUNCILMAN JONES: I just want
24 to say that we're listening, and some of
25 the conversations up here about what to

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2 do next and how to, as you said it, keep
3 from being an empty suit. And what is
4 important is to first establish this
5 dialogue.

6 The first time I heard this
7 issue up close and personal was by
8 Pointman Ministries. They got me in a
9 room and they started telling me what was
10 going on, and we promised them that we
11 would talk to the experts within Council
12 to have this hearing.

13 So as we prepare for the
14 reentry into Philadelphia home life of
15 our returning veterans and also in
16 conjunction with people who have served
17 in the military in prior engagements, to
18 coordinate that at the federal, state,
19 local, and private level so that every
20 advantage, every resource that we can
21 muster will be given in an efficient
22 manner to those who need it most.

23 So we're going to take this on
24 as one of our priorities. And one of the
25 things about priorities in this body is

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2 that it's not just throwing money at it.

3 It's throwing time, resource, and careful

4 thought into it, and that's what we

5 intend to do. But the first step is

6 listening, and that's what we're doing

7 today.

8 So thank you for your

9 testimony.

10 COMMISSIONER SPELLER: You also

11 might want to look at best-case scenarios

12 in other areas who have successes --

13 MS. FOUR: Best practices.

14 COMMISSIONER SPELLER: Or best

15 practices, I'm sorry, in other areas that

16 we may want to incorporate here that

17 we're not, that we don't have in place.

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: I think the

19 President gave the charge that we need to

20 start to look at how down the pipeline we

21 can coordinate what -- the fact that

22 we're giving back money in times where we

23 have budget deficits is just beyond my

24 own comprehension, and the need is so

25 great out there.

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2 MS. FOUR: We also lost money
3 in 2009 when in the State of Pennsylvania
4 we took away the money through the
5 Department of Labor that came to this
6 state, through the Department of Labor
7 and Industry, they took away the money
8 for the Governor's Veterans Outreach and
9 Assistance Program. Those were centers
10 that existed, but there were two veteran
11 multi-service centers that were also
12 listed under those funding streams for
13 the GVOACs. One of it was the agency
14 that I work for. So there were a few
15 hundred thousand dollars every year that
16 were let go.

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: Well, we're
18 going to try to find out what exists and
19 make what is necessary to fill the gaps,
20 and that's a part of our collective
21 dialogue and we're going to follow
22 through with that.

23 So thank you for your
24 testimony.

25 MR. BUCKLEY: Just my last

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2 little bit of input. Again, I can't
3 commend the City enough, except that in
4 regards to the Commission, the Veterans
5 Commission of the City of Philadelphia,
6 and the Advisory Commission, that it
7 doesn't cost any money to infuse an
8 energy into them with the support that
9 they would get from the Council. And I'm
10 sure they are getting it. So thank you
11 again.

12 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you.

13 (Applause.)

14 COUNCILMAN JONES: Will the
15 Clerk please read the next panel of
16 witnesses to testify.

17 THE CLERK: Minister Ari,
18 Pointman Soldiers Heart Ministry; Brenda
19 Cooper, The Cafe; and Richard Gordon,
20 Veterans Support Group of America.

21 COUNCILMAN JONES: Now, it's my
22 understanding that we have 19 witnesses
23 coming up, and many of them have provided
24 written testimony. So feel free to
25 abbreviate some of it, if it is possible.

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2 If not, understandable, but if we can, to
3 get everyone in, all 19 witnesses, we'd
4 like to abbreviate.

5 (Witnesses approached witness
6 table.)

7 COUNCILMAN JONES: So thank you
8 and welcome to the witness testimony.

9 Feel free. We don't have a
10 particular order in this panel. State
11 your name, your organization, and begin
12 your testimony, please.

13 MR. ABRAM: Good afternoon,
14 Council. My name is James Abram. I am
15 the President and founder of Pointman
16 Soldiers Heart Ministry. We are a
17 faith-based organization. Twenty-two
18 years ago we started this ministry in the
19 basement of Triumph Baptist Church, whose
20 pastor is Reverend James S. Hall, Jr.

21 It took me 30 years to obtain
22 my benefits from the VA. I came home
23 from Vietnam with a profile, with 10
24 percent, and through the years, I have
25 hit walls trying to get my benefits. The

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2 VA was not helpful in helping me get my
3 benefits. So I met two other veterans
4 who helped me through the 30 years to
5 obtain my benefits.

6 And I want to thank Council
7 this afternoon, Councilman Jones,
8 Blackwell, and Oh, for allowing us to
9 come here this afternoon, but, you know,
10 I just want to thank God for allowing us
11 to be here alive. You know, we started
12 this hearing with the Pledge of
13 Allegiance, and I thought about it. I
14 said, Well, I want to thank God for being
15 here and for these veterans being here,
16 because we served our country. And this
17 is my pet peeve. It's not a pet. I'm in
18 this for life. This is a ministry. Like
19 I say, we're a faith-based organization,
20 and I just want to be there for those
21 veterans. I don't want to -- we don't
22 want to leave a veteran behind. That's
23 our motto. Behold how good and how
24 pleasant it is for brethren to dwell
25 together in unity. So this is our motto.

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2 So I just want to thank Judge
3 Waters, who is on our -- just a moment.
4 He's one of our lawyers. He's with the
5 Common Pleas Court, Judge Joe Waters, and
6 Sister Shirley Kitchen, Senator Shirley
7 Kitchen. She's on our Advisory Board.
8 Ted Walter Watkenhorst, he is our Social
9 Security disability lawyer, and
10 Blondell -- Donna Reed Miller. We want
11 to thank all these folks who make it
12 possible, and plus our veterans, the men
13 and women who are in our organization
14 that make Pointman run.

15 So I just want to thank my
16 officers, my first Vice President,
17 Minister Lester Outterbridge; Second Vice
18 President, Carl Booker, Jr.; and our
19 Treasurer, Carl F. Brabham; and, of
20 course, Brother Minister Ari Merretazon
21 for the work that he's doing. And also
22 we want to thank Brother Holman, Larry
23 Holman, for the work that he's doing with
24 the industry.

25 So at this time, I want to turn

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2 it over to our Minister Ari. He is our
3 spokesperson. He's my Executive
4 Director. So this is a summary,
5 executive summary. Not the summary, but
6 Minister Ari. He's a decorated Bronze
7 Star Army Accommodation Medal. He's an
8 honorable discharged Vietnam War veteran.
9 A lot of this stuff he earned, and
10 because of the time, I just want to just
11 go shortly.

12 In his war narrative, Chapter 7
13 in the books called "Bloods," it's an
14 oral history of the Vietnam War told by
15 black veterans, by Wallace Terry.
16 History was used to make the movie Dead
17 Presidents where Larentz Tate played his
18 character. He is quoted in the Vietnam
19 Trilogy: Veterans and Post-Traumatic
20 Stress, 1968, 1989, 2000.

21 In 1978, Ari was invited by
22 Senator Alan Cranston to testify on
23 matters related to incarcerated veterans.
24 He is a White House Honoree, President
25 Jimmy Carter, for establishing the first

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2 Office of Incarcerated Veterans Affairs
3 inside prison recognized by the VA. In
4 1980, he was hired by the Veterans
5 Administration as a member of the first
6 team to set up a vet center in Little
7 Rock, Arkansas under a Congressional
8 mandate of 1979, Public Law 96-22.

9 Ari is a certified legal
10 technician, Antioch School of Law,
11 Washington, DC, where he worked managing
12 and teaching law firms as a Special
13 Assistant to the Dean. He has provided
14 representation for veterans at the
15 veterans administrative hearings and
16 before Military Discharge Review Boards.

17 He is an ordained minister,
18 graduate of the Graduate School of
19 Communication Economics and Development
20 at Southern New Hampshire University and
21 served as Director of the school's
22 church-based narrative.

23 Brother Ari.

24 MINISTER MERRETAZON: Well,
25 thanks for working through that, Brother

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2 James. I really appreciate that.

3 MR. ABRAM: You're welcome.

4 (Applause.)

5 MINISTER MERRETAZON: What I
6 want to do is basically share with the
7 Committee Chairs here the order of my
8 presentation, and then we just going to
9 do -- it's going to be quicker than the
10 previous panel, I assure you.

11 I want to say -- first of all,
12 I'm going to cover the thanks and
13 appreciation and going to deal with the
14 framework of why we're here, then deal
15 with my findings and questions to the
16 Councilmembers and then recommendations.

17 So in terms of the framework,
18 we all must understand that women vets
19 have the same challenges as men, plus
20 some unique ones such as military sexual
21 trauma. That's MST.

22 Homeless veterans need help to
23 navigate the system. Most homeless vets
24 do have a service-connected disability,
25 and homeless vets have PTSD and drug or

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2 alcohol issues. Now, this is the
3 framework in which this hearing is called
4 in terms of the City readiness to deal
5 with all the issues that our veterans
6 have.

7 So let me go forward and say
8 thank you to Councilman Curtis Jones for
9 visiting the headquarters of Pointman
10 Soldier Heart Ministry almost a year ago,
11 on Friday, November the 19th, 2011, to
12 listen to our findings in regards to the
13 problems facing our veterans of the City
14 of Philadelphia and the Commonwealth of
15 Pennsylvania and subsequently
16 facilitating this hearing pursuant to
17 Resolution 120042 regarding the City's
18 and the Commonwealth's preparedness for
19 returning war veterans.

20 Thank you for the invitation to
21 participate in this hearing by providing
22 written and oral testimony explaining my
23 experience, expertise, expert analysis,
24 and recommendations.

25 Also, I want to thank you,

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2 Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell, for
3 meeting with Pointman Soldier Heart
4 Ministry in your office on March 30th,
5 2012 to discuss property acquisition for
6 its Veterans Outreach and Stand Down
7 Center, and inviting and supporting
8 Pointman Soldier Heart Ministries' use
9 proposal for the property located at 625
10 North 53rd Street.

11 Thank you, Councilman Oh, for
12 serving our country in the 82nd Airborne
13 and inviting me to provide written and
14 oral testimony in May of this year in
15 support of Resolution 120096 regarding
16 tax credits for the employment of
17 eligible United States Armed Forces
18 veterans.

19 Now, I'm submitting my
20 testimony for the record, and I request
21 the privilege to revise and extend my
22 remarks prior to any actions of the
23 Council as a result of this hearing as it
24 relates to Resolution 120042.

25 Essentially my testimony

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2 explains, as requested, my expert
3 experience on matters related to the
4 readjustment of war veterans to the
5 world, my expert analysis, and questions
6 in regards to Resolution 120042 and my
7 recommendations based on the research
8 conducted by the Pointman Soldier Heart
9 Ministry as to the City's preparedness
10 for the return of those who sacrifice
11 their lives and families to allow each of
12 you to be freely elected in a democratic
13 society.

14 Since Brother James gave my
15 relevant experience, I'll move on to my
16 findings and questions in regards to this
17 resolution.

18 Pursuant to the resolution, my
19 expert analysis covers two broad and
20 specific areas. One, veterans preference
21 and benefits in Pennsylvania and, two,
22 veterans -- two, Philadelphia Veteran
23 Service Office. The health, employment,
24 housing, legal, and other needs of
25 veterans are attached as a reference and

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2 a resource for the Council.

3 For my expert analysis and
4 findings, I make ten urgent, access-based
5 recommendations. I'm going to go to the
6 findings right now. I have four key
7 findings.

8 Our research has revealed that
9 the City's readiness and preparedness for
10 the influx of veterans from America's
11 wars needs restructuring and
12 operationalizing, and this comes from a
13 report entitled "Examination of Rural
14 County Veterans Affairs Offices" by the
15 Institute of State and Regional Affairs,
16 Penn State in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania,
17 published in July 2012.

18 Now, it wasn't until May 2012,
19 55 years after the Philadelphia City
20 Council first passed legislation that
21 created the Veterans Advisory Commission,
22 that the Philadelphia Veterans Advisory
23 Commission held its first resource fair.
24 So 55 years ago you created the
25 Commission, and just this year you held a

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2 resource fair. Something is wrong with
3 that, Councilman. Something is very
4 wrong with that.

5 And our research has revealed
6 that the City's readiness and
7 preparedness for the influx of veterans
8 from America's wars needs restructuring
9 and operationalizing.

10 Here are my findings: There is
11 no Veterans Affairs Officer in the
12 County/City of Philadelphia, no operating
13 Veterans Affairs Office. The state
14 requires county commissioners to appoint
15 a Director of Veterans Affairs whose duty
16 is to oversee those obligations assigned
17 to the county by law while failing to
18 provide any direct funding to support
19 this mandate. So it's up to the county
20 to budget for this function and to ensure
21 that the position is filled with a
22 competent person who has the respect of
23 the veteran community in that county.
24 County/City, same thing.

25 Finding number two: The City

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2 has no program to assist, facilitate or
3 advocate for veterans and their families
4 obtaining benefits for their patriotic
5 and honorable service. On December the
6 12th, 2007, Senate Bill 915, 1436 was
7 signed into law as Act 66 of 2007. This
8 is the current law. The goals of the Act
9 66 legislation are to enhance service
10 delivery to veterans, increase the number
11 of Pennsylvania veterans' claims for
12 service-related disabilities or pensions
13 filed with the VA.

14 There's no -- we couldn't find
15 nowhere a person in the City that can
16 facilitate and carry out those duties
17 within the timeframe from last year to
18 present day. And that Act 66 also
19 encourages counties to develop methods to
20 increase rates of recovery paid by the VA
21 to Pennsylvania veterans, expand training
22 opportunities for designated IVSOs and
23 veteran service officers, increase either
24 the number or percentage of Pennsylvania
25 veterans enrolled in the VA healthcare

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2 system, improve coordination among the
3 veteran service organizations and with
4 the Pennsylvania DMVA to ensure an
5 integrated approach to claims processing
6 and improved veteran outreach services.

7 The City of Philadelphia has
8 not used this grant program to provide
9 the eligible services. This is
10 embarrassing, Council. We have a law
11 providing grants at the state level and
12 it's nothing happening.

13 Finally, number three, the City
14 has no full-time certified Veterans
15 Service Officer as a point of contact for
16 veterans when there is a state law
17 providing funding for same.

18 County veterans affairs
19 directors are appointed by and report to
20 county commissioners while serving what
21 is essentially a state and federal
22 program, making accountability,
23 monitoring, and measuring of program
24 outcomes difficult. It is difficult but
25 not impossible, Council. There should be

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2 cooperation between the county
3 commissioner and the Pennsylvania
4 Department of Military and Veterans
5 Affair so that there is a uniform
6 statewide data collection and
7 productivity reporting. As of July 2011,
8 65 of 67 county directors had realized
9 accreditation, and Philadelphia is one of
10 the two that has not. This is
11 unacceptable.

12 Finding number four: The
13 Philadelphia Veterans Advisory Commission
14 has not had a regular public meeting with
15 notice to the general public since 2009.
16 And I might be very conservative with
17 that year. This is ridiculous, sad,
18 disrespectful, embarrassing, and in no
19 way does it show the City's appreciation
20 for those who served. Our veterans
21 deserve much better.

22 Since obtaining our taxes and
23 status in 2009, Pointman Soldier Heart
24 Ministry has not been able to get direct
25 answers from the City Council members

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2 mentioned in my introduction about its
3 programs and services to United States
4 Armed Forces veterans. My testimony
5 represents the critical path that we,
6 Pointman Soldier Heart Ministry, have
7 committed to walk, irrespective of
8 political party affiliations, to get the
9 City of Philadelphia in the state of
10 readiness to facilitate and advocate for
11 veterans and their families, to respect
12 our service, to appreciate our sacrifice
13 and honor our standing in society worthy
14 of the preference you would give to those
15 who sacrifice and laid down their lives
16 for their country.

17 There's a relationship,
18 Council, between post-traumatic stress
19 disorder and traumatic brain injury to
20 unemployment, to homelessness, family
21 violence, incarceration, and suicide
22 amongst veterans. Therefore, a full
23 evaluation of every vet diagnosed with
24 PTSD and TBI, every homeless veteran,
25 every case of veteran family violence,

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2 every incarcerated veteran, every
3 divorce, and every unemployed vet is
4 needed to match resources to needs. It
5 is because of the foregoing findings that
6 we declare a state of emergency in the
7 County/City of Philadelphia as it relates
8 to the readiness of returning war
9 veterans.

10 Questions to this Council,
11 question to the City of Philadelphia, and
12 questions to the City Council as a whole:
13 How can the City honor, assist, and serve
14 veterans in such a state of unreadiness?
15 Who is running the City's Veterans
16 Affairs Office? Who appoints members to
17 the Veterans Advisory Commission? Who is
18 the -- what is the delay in appointing an
19 accredited county Veterans Affairs
20 Director? When has the City of
21 Philadelphia conducted a formal needs
22 assessment of their veteran citizens?
23 Can the City of Philadelphia account for
24 any services to veterans during any
25 timeframe in reference to measurements of

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2 quality, outcome, and the impact of those
3 services? How does the City promote and
4 educate families about the list of
5 veterans benefits earned?

6 There's about 40 different
7 veterans benefits entitlements just at
8 the state level that veterans are
9 eligible for. We -- veterans walking
10 around the City, they cannot see that on
11 the buses. They can't see it on any
12 billboards. There's nothing -- there's
13 nothing on billboards to say, Thank you
14 for your service. So we've got to reach
15 out. You got to allow your say to be so.

16 Next two questions. How does
17 the City promote and advertise its policy
18 to hire veterans under the state's
19 veterans preference law? If there ain't
20 no communications, veterans won't know.
21 Unless there's -- of course, there are a
22 couple of individuals that come out who
23 use their own initiative and come find
24 out, but in the main, they won't know as
25 it relates to the City. And so the City

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2 has the obligation to veterans to let
3 them know what the policy is and
4 encourage them to apply when eligible.

5 Last question. Will the City
6 join with Pointman Soldier Heart Ministry
7 to address the identified state of
8 emergency?

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: I think
10 that's the only question that we have an
11 answer for you today.

12 MINISTER MERRETAZON: That's
13 all right. That's all right. The
14 questions are to be answered now or
15 today. Now, "now" encompasses today,
16 past, present, and future. So you can
17 put that into the future if you're not
18 ready as I showed --

19 COUNCILMAN JONES: Yes, we are
20 ready to stand with you, which is the
21 answer to the last question. The rest of
22 them we'll take, and they won't be
23 knee-jerk answers. We're going to take
24 our time. We're going to dig down into
25 the weeds to get you the answers you

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2 deserve, because you do deserve them.

3 And so the idea of this hearing
4 was to identify the questions so that we
5 can go back to the respective agencies at
6 the federal, state, and local level, to
7 our Mayor, and say, According to this
8 checklist, how prepared are we. And if
9 the answer is no, there's no shame to not
10 being prepared. The shame is not getting
11 prepared once alerted that the need is
12 there.

13 MINISTER MERRETAZON: Thank you
14 so much for that.

15 COUNCILMAN JONES: So we're
16 going to follow up on this. There are
17 people that have done this for a very
18 long time that I ran to. Once I talked
19 to you, I ran to Councilwoman Blackwell's
20 office and said, Come on in, we need to
21 be able to address this. I sought out my
22 colleague Councilman Oh, who has
23 experience from his service.

24 So we may not be ready today,
25 but as we pledge to you on this record,

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2 that we will be in a state of getting
3 ready from now on.

4 MINISTER MERRETAZON: And I
5 thank you for that. I would like for you
6 all who are still present here of Council
7 to carry this message to your other
8 colleagues, because there should be --
9 each Councilperson should have a veteran
10 service person in their office who
11 specializes in that.

12 So let me get to the
13 recommendations.

14 Number one, appoint/hire a
15 Director of Veterans Affairs whose duty
16 is to oversee those obligations assigned
17 to the county by law and budget for this
18 function and to ensure that the position
19 is filled with a competent person who has
20 the respect of the veteran community and
21 is a VA-accredited service officer.

22 Two, collaborate directly with
23 Pointman Soldier Heart Ministry to
24 establish and operate a 24-hour,
25 seven-days-a-week Veterans Outreach and

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2 Stand Down Center to advocate for, assist
3 with, and facilitate obtaining benefits
4 for veterans as a means to honor their
5 service to the City, to the County, to
6 the Commonwealth, and to the United
7 States of America.

8 Three, establish a "Hire a
9 Veteran Pledge Campaign" -- and,
10 Councilman Oh, I emphasize the word
11 "pledge"; we got to make sure that we get
12 a commitment -- providing tax credits to
13 employers hiring unemployed veterans and
14 their spouses. I want to underscore
15 spouses, because oftentimes we leave the
16 spouses out, and they are eligible for
17 benefits as well based on the service of
18 the other spouse. Also have some outcome
19 measurements under the Vow to Hire Heroes
20 Act of 2011, of course, put into play by
21 current President Barack Obama.

22 Number four, establish
23 principles of excellence for education
24 institutions that have a veteran enrolled
25 under the GI Bill to strengthen

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2 oversight, enforcement, and
3 accountability. There's a lot of bad
4 actors out there, particularly these
5 private education institutions, these
6 training institutions. They encourage
7 veterans to come in and use their GI Bill
8 benefits, then they flip alone on them.
9 So that's why they must know -- which
10 moves me to my fifth recommendation.
11 That's why we must encourage local
12 colleges, universities, and schools to
13 provide GI Bill applicants with completed
14 "Know Before You Owe" financial aid forms
15 developed by the Consumer Financial
16 Protection Board and the Department of
17 Education.

18 Recommendation number six, we
19 recommend the City look at its own hiring
20 policies and publicly advertise its
21 veterans preference accommodation on all
22 available media, all available media,
23 radio, TV, social media, everything.

24 Seven, publicly disclose the
25 procedure governing selecting members of

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2 the Philadelphia Veterans Advisory
3 Commission. We tried to find out what is
4 the procedure to get -- appoint someone,
5 to nominate someone. No luck, from
6 November 11th to date.

7 Recommendation number eight,
8 publish the schedules of all meetings of
9 the Philadelphia Veterans Advisory
10 Commission. We need to know in a public
11 sort of way when they meet so veterans
12 can come in and give good input.

13 Recommendation number nine,
14 resolve to hold hearings on matters
15 relating to veterans employment,
16 homelessness, veteran disabilities, and
17 incarcerated veterans, which will provide
18 a snapshot in time on the status of
19 veterans in Philadelphia County.

20 I just want to remind you that
21 this hearing is to ascertain the
22 readiness of the City, the preparedness
23 of the City to serve the influx. That's
24 the first stage. The second stage is the
25 hearings as it relates to unemployment,

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2 homelessness, veteran disability, and
3 incarcerated veterans.

4 The last recommendation I
5 definitely -- since I won't be able to
6 get any answers for those questions, but
7 I'd like to have some dialogue. Utilize
8 federal and state laws and dedicate
9 veteran resources to meet the emergency
10 needs of returning war veterans.

11 And I'd just like to introduce
12 Larry Holman. He is our official board
13 researcher at the executive level. He's
14 also involved with the Vietnam Veterans
15 of America.

16 Larry, by the way, I was a
17 member of the Vietnam Veterans back in
18 the day when they first started up.

19 So we'll entertain any
20 questions, the three of us, and we'll
21 stand by for follow-through on the
22 testimony.

23 COUNCILMAN JONES: I'd like to
24 acknowledge Councilman Henon who has
25 joined us here as well.

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2 Are there any questions?

3 Councilman Oh.

4 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
5 much for your very thorough and very
6 helpful and --

7 (Applause.)

8 COUNCILMAN OH: -- very, very
9 objective testimony. I think those are
10 the kind of things that we can use, and
11 you are right to expect an answer from
12 us, and I am sure that all of us here are
13 committed to getting you answers to your
14 questions.

15 By the way, I wanted to let you
16 know that this testimony is being
17 recorded. It is being transcribed. And
18 as we sit here, although you may see some
19 of us sitting here, Councilmembers are
20 actually -- and not just Councilmembers,
21 City Hall, including the Mayor's Office,
22 they are listening or watching you right
23 now on these cameras. And also for that
24 reason, I have to put this on the record,
25 and you'll understand, that although I am

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2 the current Chairman of the 82nd Airborne
3 Association here in Philadelphia, because
4 I was a paratrooper, I did not serve in
5 the 82nd, I served in the 20th Special
6 Forces Group, although I was not a
7 tabbed, you know, soldier.

8 Thank you very much.

9 MINISTER MERRETAZON: My
10 mention will stand corrected.

11 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
12 much. Thank you.

13 (Applause.)

14 COUNCILMAN JONES: We just want
15 you to know in order to get answers, the
16 questions have to be asked. And so it's
17 on the record. The clock starts, and
18 we'll get those answers to you.

19 What we hope to do is use this
20 as a working dialogue, working document
21 to move forward to improve the condition.
22 That's the reason why we introduced this
23 resolution in the first place, because
24 when I sat surrounded by your men up in,
25 I think it was, Frankford --

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2 MINISTER MERRETAZON: Yeah, we
3 had you surrounded.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: They had me
5 surrounded. I said, Well, maybe I need
6 to call on a hearing to kind of bring
7 this to the public's eye. So I'm glad I
8 did, and we now want to as a body start
9 to work as ambassadors for you to get
10 those answers.

11 MINISTER MERRETAZON: Thank you
12 very much. We think that you will.

13 (Applause.)

14 COUNCILMAN JONES: What we're
15 going -- can you be patient with us a
16 second. We have a time delay on the
17 medical panel. Some of the questions
18 that were raised might be answered by
19 that panel.

20 So can you announce them at the
21 podium, please.

22 THE CLERK: Jeff Vollum from
23 the Philadelphia VA Medical Center and
24 Dr. Jack Carroll, Magee Rehab Center.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: And Brenda

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2 Cooper. Come on up. It's all right.

3 (Witnesses approached witness
4 table.)

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you.

6 Please state your name for the record in
7 any order and begin your testimony.

8 DR. CARROLL: I'm Jack Carroll,
9 President and CEO, Magee Rehabilitation
10 Hospital, Center City Philadelphia. I'd
11 like to thank the Chairpersons, members
12 of the Council for allowing me to speak
13 today.

14 The question at hand is how
15 prepared is the City and are we prepared,
16 and you've heard testimony ad nauseum now
17 that we are not prepared. I would like
18 to offer that there is at least one area
19 where in fact we are prepared but
20 underutilized.

21 Magee Rehabilitation is one of
22 the nation's top-ranked rehabilitation
23 hospitals. It's celebrating its fifth
24 year now as an authorized provider of
25 specialized medical care for wounded

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2 veterans returning from military service.
3 With Magee, our returning heroes are able
4 to receive top-quality care and
5 compassion, while remaining close to
6 their family and loved ones.

7 Located in Center City
8 Philadelphia, Magee Rehabilitation is
9 recognized as one of the best
10 rehabilitation hospitals in the country
11 by U.S. News and World Report for
12 outstanding programs in physical and
13 cognitive rehabilitation, with
14 comprehensive services in spinal cord
15 injury, brain injury, stroke,
16 orthopedics, amputation, pain management,
17 and work injury. In fact, in 1985,
18 Magee's brain injury rehabilitation
19 program became the first in the nation to
20 be accredited by the Commission on
21 Accreditation of Rehab Facilities. And
22 together with Thomas Jefferson
23 University, we have formed one of the
24 nation's 14 federally designated model
25 centers for spinal cord rehabilitation.

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2 Many of the injuries suffered
3 by our troops such as traumatic brain
4 injury, which you heard of, amputation or
5 injuries caused by military-grade weapons
6 are similar to those injuries Magee's
7 clinical team treats every single day.

8 Once at Magee, each veteran has
9 access to a physiatrist, nurse,
10 occupational therapist, physical
11 therapist, speech/language pathologist,
12 psychologist, social worker, case
13 manager, and a recreational therapist.
14 This unique approach to rehabilitation
15 ensures a high quality of care and
16 involves veterans and their families in
17 goal-setting priorities. Traditional
18 therapies are enhanced by other services,
19 including day rehab, vocational
20 counseling, peer support, and many other
21 programs designed to help our veterans
22 return to their lives. Although we are
23 obviously a high touch facility, our
24 technology is second to none, including
25 Therastride, Lokomat, and Exoskeletal

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2 robotic aids for cutting-edge treatments
3 of post-injury walking challenges. All
4 veterans also have access to
5 community-based outpatient programs as
6 part of Magee's comprehensive lifetime
7 follow-up system.

8 Despite the availability of
9 these services in local veterans'
10 backyards, Magee has not had the
11 opportunity to treat many veterans
12 returning from war. We believe this is
13 because many service men and women are
14 not aware of this option or the path to
15 Magee is made difficult. We have
16 recognized that injured active-duty
17 soldiers in need of rehabilitation are
18 given few to no options outside the
19 Department of Defense's national
20 facilities. In fact, through our work
21 with Senator Mike Stack of the 5th
22 Senatorial District, we have found that
23 many active-duty military in our area are
24 being sent to in-network rehabilitation
25 facilities in Washington, DC. This

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2 creates both emotional and financial
3 hardship to our service men and women and
4 their families, as they are required to
5 travel much further for their care than
6 necessary.

7 But this issue is not limited
8 to our city's active-duty military.

9 Likewise, those returning veterans that
10 Magee has had the privilege to serve tell
11 us that it was very difficult to learn of
12 any of their options beyond the Veterans
13 Affairs health network. While we have an
14 excellent relationship with
15 Philadelphia's VA Hospital and the care
16 provided by the Polytrauma Center, we
17 have noted the process for veterans to be
18 treated at Magee or any other authorized
19 facility outside the VA health system is
20 more financially burdensome and is
21 preventing our service men and women from
22 pursuing their first choice in care.

23 At Magee, our injured
24 active-duty service men and women and
25 veterans would receive top-quality care,

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2 state-of-the-art facility, close to home.

3 But they have to be given the option. We

4 would like to recommend working with the

5 Department of Defense, the Department of

6 Veterans Affairs to determine the best

7 ways to make the process of seeking

8 rehabilitative care outside their

9 respective health networks simpler and

10 less financially burdensome for our

11 active-duty military and veterans.

12 Civilian rehabilitation

13 facilities have capacity, they have

14 competence, and they want to care for our

15 veterans.

16 Thank you.

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you

18 for your testimony. We'll hold questions

19 until all the panelists have an

20 opportunity to submit.

21 MR. VOLLUM: Good afternoon,

22 Council Chair, Councilmembers, and all in

23 attendance today. Good afternoon. My

24 name is Jeff Vollum. I'm the Chief,

25 Health Administration Service at the

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2 Philadelphia VA Medical Center. It is my
3 pleasure to be here today to provide a
4 brief overview of the Philadelphia VA
5 Medical Center and the care we provide
6 and to answer your questions.

7 Philadelphia VA Medical Center
8 is a Joint Commission accredited teaching
9 hospital serving veterans in the nation's
10 fifth largest metropolitan area,
11 including the City of Philadelphia and
12 the surrounding six counties in
13 Southeastern Pennsylvania and Southern
14 New Jersey. Philadelphia VA Medical
15 Center provides primary, secondary, and
16 tertiary care for acute medical,
17 surgical, neurological, rehabilitation
18 medicine, and psychiatric care.

19 Philadelphia VA Medical Center
20 is Pennsylvania's second largest VA
21 medical center. It is a member of the VA
22 Healthcare Network, VISN4, and serves as
23 an acute referral center for VA medical
24 centers in Eastern Pennsylvania and
25 Delaware. Affiliated with the University

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2 of Pennsylvania and numerous other allied
3 health schools and colleges, the
4 Philadelphia VA Medical Center offers
5 comprehensive surgical, medical, and
6 psychiatric care, including special
7 emphasis programs, alcohol and drug
8 dependence treatment, and rehabilitative
9 care.

10 The VA Medical Center is
11 located in West Philadelphia's University
12 City District and operates three VA
13 community-based outpatient clinics
14 located at Fort Dix, New Jersey;
15 Gloucester County, New Jersey; and
16 Horsham, PA, also known as the Victor J.
17 Saracini Community Based Outpatient
18 Clinic. An additional clinic annex is
19 located in Camden, New Jersey.

20 Philadelphia VA Medical Center
21 has a \$450 million operating budget for
22 Fiscal Year 2012. The Medical Center is
23 staffed by over 2,000 employees and
24 provides care for over 57,000 enrolled
25 veterans. This translated into 466,600

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2 outpatient visits and 5,861 inpatient
3 admissions in Fiscal Year '11. The total
4 number of enrolled veterans includes over
5 4,800 female veterans, which is an
6 increase of over 10 percent from last
7 year, and 9,500 Operation Enduring
8 Freedom/Iraqi Freedom/New Dawn veterans.
9 Philadelphia VA Medical Center is one of
10 21 VA polytrauma rehabilitation network
11 sites in the country.

12 The Medical Center has 142
13 inpatient beds, 135 nursing home beds
14 located across the street from our
15 Medical Center in the Community Living
16 Center, and will soon open a 40-bed
17 residential rehabilitation treatment
18 program in South Philadelphia.

19 Philadelphia VA Medical Center
20 is one of 152 medical centers operated by
21 the Veterans Health Administration, which
22 is the nation's largest integrated
23 healthcare system. Veterans Health
24 Administration is one of the three
25 administrations under the umbrella of the

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2 Department of Veterans Affairs. The
3 others being the Veterans Benefit
4 Administration and the Veterans Cemetery
5 Administration.

6 The City of Philadelphia is
7 also home to a Veterans Benefit
8 Administration Regional Office and
9 Insurance Center. The VBA Regional
10 Office processes claims for compensation,
11 pension, death benefits, vocational
12 rehabilitation, and employment and life
13 insurance. The Medical Center does not
14 adjudicate claims. However, we do
15 partner with the Regional Office to
16 provide medical examinations as part of
17 the claim process.

18 Veterans must meet certain
19 eligibility requirements in order to
20 enroll in VA healthcare. Men and women
21 who served in the active military service
22 and were separated under conditions other
23 than dishonorable may qualify for VA
24 healthcare benefits. Current and former
25 members of the Reserve or National Guard

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2 who were called to active duty by a
3 federal order and completed a full period
4 for which they were called or ordered to
5 active duty may be eligible for VA health
6 benefits as well.

7 Reserves or National Guard
8 members with active duty for training
9 purposes only do not meet the basic
10 eligibility requirement.

11 Most veterans who enlisted
12 after September 7, 1980 or entered active
13 duty after October 16, 1981 generally
14 must have served 24 consecutive months in
15 order to be eligible for VA healthcare.

16 These are just basic
17 eligibility requirements I'm explaining.

18 Operation Enduring
19 Freedom/Iraqi Freedom/New Dawn combat
20 veterans can receive cost free medical
21 care for any condition related to their
22 service in the Iraq/Afghanistan theatre
23 for five years after the date of their
24 discharge or release. The five-year
25 enrollment period begins on the discharge

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2 or separation date from active duty
3 military service, or in the case of
4 multiple call-ups, the most recent
5 discharge date.

6 The minimum duty requirement
7 may not apply to veterans who were
8 discharged for a disability incurred or
9 aggravated in the line of duty for a
10 hardship or a, quote/unquote, early out
11 or those who served prior to September 7,
12 1980. Since there are a number of other
13 exceptions to the minimum duty
14 requirements, VA encourages all veterans
15 to apply so that their eligibility can be
16 determined on an individual basis.

17 I have also attached a contact
18 information sheet for follow-up questions
19 and inquiries.

20 Thank you again for the
21 opportunity to provide Council with
22 information about VA healthcare and the
23 services we provide at the Philadelphia
24 VA Medical Center. I'm happy to answer
25 any questions you may have.

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2 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you
3 for your testimony. We're going to allow
4 the final panelist to submit her
5 testimony.

6 I'd like to acknowledge the
7 presence of Councilman Kenyatta Johnson
8 as well.

9 MS. COOPER: My name is Brenda
10 Cooper and I've been working with the
11 homeless for 23 years with the City.
12 Plus I wanted to thank you for allowing
13 me to speak and for all you're doing to
14 work with the vets.

15 I just wanted to say that the
16 City of Philadelphia has been working
17 with the vets for a long time. We had a
18 place at Broad and York that was
19 functioning very well until the funding
20 stopped. It was not my program, but I
21 used to take people there. And it worked
22 very well, because it was just for vets,
23 and they did all the medical and
24 psychological, everything that had to be
25 done. Right now we don't have a place

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2 like that. Okay? And that seems to be a
3 little problem.

4 When the hospital is working
5 with the vets, sometimes it takes a
6 minute for them to be able to get an
7 appointment to get into the hospital or
8 to do the things the hospital has to do.

9 About 20 blocks away,
10 Councilwoman Blackwell and the City
11 allowed me to open up a place -- it's at
12 3309 Melon Street -- so that I can hold
13 the vets when they need to be
14 hospitalized to go in for surgery. They
15 come from all the different places like
16 you were saying that they come, but they
17 have nowhere to stay. So we have been
18 housing them. And we have to let people
19 leave at 6 o'clock in the morning, but
20 this has been going on now for about
21 three years.

22 I helped start Stand Down.
23 That's why Ed and Marsha knew me, you
24 know, well.

25 There's a lot of things that

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2 you have in place before that the funding
3 stopped. The outreach workers are
4 trained now for the VA, and all these
5 things you had in place a couple years
6 ago, and for some reason they all fell
7 apart. But if we -- I can try to get
8 some of the paperwork and the things that
9 you were doing before that made the City
10 really look good and you really were
11 doing a great job.

12 I've gone to Washington to the
13 different things that were happening with
14 the VA and their conferences and
15 everything. So, I mean, Philadelphia has
16 been doing a good job until the funding
17 seemed to disappear.

18 So I'm just saying that if you
19 really want to help them, when they're
20 coming home, if they have a place that
21 they know they can go to sleep, eat, and
22 be able to handle themselves until they
23 can get into the hospital or go wherever
24 they have to go, that would be great.
25 The place that the City and Councilwoman

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2 Blackwell allows me to run now, I have
3 psychiatrists, medical staff and
4 everything. I have -- we have soup
5 kitchens on the University of Penn that
6 operate seven days a week. We have the
7 lawyers, the social workers, everything
8 on Wednesday, but seven days a week you
9 can feed people.

10 The most important thing that I
11 have understood through all this is when
12 I agreed to even open up this place, I
13 had to have medical staff. I had to have
14 Philadelphia Health Management allow --
15 they come in and do the medical, because
16 people need allergy medicine, the
17 different things that they need. I have
18 a case manager.

19 But what I'm saying is that I
20 only hold 50 people. You understand what
21 I'm saying? And what you're going to
22 have to do -- I'm not saying what you
23 have to do, but what's needed is to have
24 a place where people can come that are
25 coming home, and it can be in different

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2 sections of the City so that people know
3 that they don't have to be out, they
4 don't have to be hungry. They can have
5 medical care. But to me, making sure
6 that your vets come home and they're not
7 hungry, I have Desert -- I have vets
8 already from the wars. Okay? Because
9 they're waiting to get in the VA
10 Hospital. So, I mean, feeding them is
11 very important. Giving them a Band-Aid
12 until they can get into the hospital to
13 see someone is very important.

14 So I'm not going to keep
15 talking, but you are doing some things,
16 but it's just -- I can only hold 50
17 people.

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: Please don't
19 apologize for what we're not doing and
20 what we need to do. Listen, the reason
21 we are here is to assess where we are.
22 So the way you're telling us what we need
23 to do and how we can be better is vital.

24 MS. COOPER: I'm grassroots.
25 I'm right there when they coming up,

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2 homeless knocking on the door, Can I get
3 a night? Can I stay here until I can get
4 into the VA Hospital? These things are
5 so important because it keeps them from
6 being in the street and being violent.
7 Most people won't go too long without
8 eating, you know. So I'm just saying
9 there's some very minute things that can
10 be done.

11 COUNCILMAN JONES: These are
12 critical steps. And if I could, while I
13 have this panel, if I understand your
14 testimony juxtaposed on yours, you're the
15 private sector, you're the public sector,
16 correct?

17 MR. VOLLUM: Correct.

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: Are you
19 communicating?

20 DR. CARROLL: I'd say no.

21 COUNCILMAN JONES: Say it then.
22 Say it for the record. In what way
23 aren't we communicating and in -- I like
24 doing group and group sessions, but at
25 the end of it, what action steps can we

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2 take to help you facilitate that kind of
3 cooperation? Because what I'm hearing is
4 that there are people that need immediate
5 help at times and there is a time delay
6 to get to some of your valuable services,
7 and then there's the private sector
8 saying that we're right down the street,
9 why are you referring them.

10 I listen in this job. That's
11 one of the things I have to do.

12 So if you could explain to me
13 why you're not communicating and then how
14 we can do that better.

15 DR. CARROLL: Well, I don't
16 think the private sector has in any way
17 tried to figure out what are the
18 communication channels that we are
19 welcomed to join. We have sat on
20 numerous congressional testimonies before
21 with Brady and other folks where people
22 sat around the room and we tried to
23 communicate and tried to set up networks,
24 and everybody said they would talk,
25 everybody said they would get along, and

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2 at the end of the day, they go back to
3 the processes and procedures that
4 everybody knows well. And clearly for
5 our friends who are on the public or the
6 military side of it, you heard about the
7 bureaucracy, the oversight, and the
8 layers of organization that they go
9 through. Something is always going to
10 get lost when you got to go through that
11 many layers to carry on communication.
12 That's, I think, the problem. And I
13 don't want to say anything that adds to
14 inflammatory rhetoric. That's not really
15 my goal here. But we went through all
16 kinds of hoops, hurdles, hassles. When I
17 say "hoops," they lit them for us to be
18 certified to do tri-care and have
19 tri-care coverage, and it's questionable
20 why we would do that if there was, one,
21 no communication to the military
22 personnel that they have access to us.
23 So that's part of the communication issue
24 there. You heard about outreach before
25 and you got -- so there's no

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2 communication. That's the big thing.

3 And then, secondly, that the
4 way the referrals work, it doesn't matter
5 if you're certified or not. Unless a
6 family or an injured soldier really
7 understands the system and does their own
8 research to see what their options are,
9 those are the ones we get to see, because
10 they run it up the flagpole, so to speak,
11 and they say, That's where we want to go.
12 We don't want to be at Walter Reed where
13 the people are left standing in the
14 hallway. But they got to fight for that,
15 and that's the wrong message to send.
16 They did their fighting overseas.

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: Would you
18 like to address that at all? Because I
19 have a follow-up question to it, but I'd
20 like to hear your point of view.

21 MR. VOLLUM: Well, I think,
22 first of all, it's important to
23 distinguish that the two operating
24 agencies that we're talking about here,
25 what's being referred to through your

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2 tri-care referrals are the active-duty
3 soldiers. We are the Department of
4 Veterans Affairs. They are two separate
5 agencies. So when you speak of Walter
6 Reed, when you speak of the military
7 treatment facilities, you're speaking of
8 a different agency and a different
9 medical system.

10 As far as the Department of
11 Veterans Affairs works, we are a large
12 integrated healthcare system, as I
13 mentioned in my remarks, the largest
14 integrated healthcare system in the world
15 with cutting-edge technology and, as well
16 publicized throughout, most cutting-edge
17 electronic healthcare technology and some
18 of those healthcare cutting technology
19 systems available.

20 We also do have in-service
21 services based on veteran service
22 connection, their disabilities, which is
23 free healthcare, totally free, no
24 co-pays, no fees for services whatsoever.
25 There are some services for

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2 non-service-connected conditions, but
3 there are some co-pays. And by and
4 large, when VA facilities cannot perform
5 services within their walls, we also have
6 a, what we call, a non-VA care, a
7 purchase care program, where we do
8 collaborate and align ourselves with
9 private sector facilities. We're
10 affiliated with the Hospital of the
11 University of Pennsylvania. We're
12 affiliated with their medical school.
13 Their clinicians are basically our
14 clinicians.

15 So we do have a robust
16 relationship with private sector
17 facilities, and we do utilize them. More
18 complex VA healthcare facilities
19 generally have less of a need. And I'm
20 not a clinician, so I'm not going to
21 speak to the medical needs, but generally
22 there's less of a need because we provide
23 more of those services in-house than,
24 say, perhaps a smaller facility could.
25 However, are the opportunities there?

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2 Absolutely. I can't comment to the
3 difficulties that have been experienced.
4 I can't comment as to the active-duty
5 military and DOD and tri-care, but as far
6 as VA, I can comment that we do have a
7 robust internal and external healthcare
8 system.

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: So if I
10 understood you correctly, there's current
11 serving veterans that a system is there
12 for and then those who have retired or
13 left service, active service?

14 MR. VOLLUM: Well, there are
15 DOD, Department of Defense, is the
16 treating agency for active-duty soldiers,
17 sailors, Marines, airmen. Department of
18 Veterans Affairs, we provide healthcare
19 services to eligible veterans who have
20 left the service. That's where they gain
21 veteran status.

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: Now, address
23 the time delay that is -- a person is in
24 need. I know as a municipality sometimes
25 when you come to our public health

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2 facilities, you have to have an
3 appointment that there's a time delay.
4 How is that working for veterans today
5 with you guys? Is there a time -- if I
6 say I need services today, what is the
7 process? How long is that timeframe from
8 the emergency triage portion to long-term
9 care? I mean, do you see people
10 immediately?

11 MR. VOLLUM: We can see people
12 immediately. I'm not saying our system
13 is perfect. It certainly is not. We
14 have enrollment for healthcare benefits.
15 Once enrollment and eligibility is
16 established, our goals, the performance
17 we're measured on is to have a primary
18 care assignment and employment for that
19 individual within 30 days of enrollment.
20 Obviously if something is emergent, we
21 have emergency services. We can see the
22 person right away. We have people who
23 come to us every day and receive
24 emergency services from us.

25 We do have goals that we're

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2 measured on for initial appointments for
3 both primary care services as well as
4 specialty care services.

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: And what is
6 that standard?

7 MR. VOLLUM: What is the
8 standard?

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: Yes.

10 MR. VOLLUM: Well, again, there
11 are certain gates based on whether the
12 condition is service connected or not,
13 but assuming 14 days access for
14 appointments, for follow-up appointments.
15 For initial primary care appointments,
16 it's 30 days. And that's non-emergent
17 care. That's just a routine appointment
18 where just like you're going to your
19 doctor, you sign up, you want an initial
20 appointment, and you schedule an
21 appointment that's negotiated with you,
22 which is what we do with our veterans as
23 well. If there's emergent care, we have
24 emergency services available 24/7 that we
25 can provide care to anyone who may need

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2 it.

3 COUNCILMAN JONES: Okay. Are
4 there any questions from members of the
5 Committee?

6 Seeing none -- oh, Councilwoman
7 Blackwell.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
9 you, gentlemen. I wanted to thank Brenda
10 Cooper. We've been together all these
11 years, and I want to thank her. Even
12 when Lucien Blackwell, the late and great
13 Lucien Blackwell, and I had were feeding
14 in the subway, she was there. She's
15 dealt with this population as long as we
16 have.

17 So we want to thank you,
18 gentlemen, and say a special thanks to
19 Brenda Cooper for being there where the
20 rubber hits the road. Thank you all.

21 (Thank you.)

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: We
23 will now ask the Clerk to read the title
24 of the next panel, Panel 4A, Housing
25 Administration.

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2 THE CLERK: Eileen Kostic,
3 Veterans Service Manager, U.S. Department
4 of Veterans Affairs, Regional Office and
5 Insurance Center; Jim Hammond, HUD-VASH;
6 Marshall Pinckney, Outreach Coordinator,
7 Impact Services Corp.; Cara Colantuono,
8 Support Homeless Veterans; Niki Paul,
9 Philadelphia Alliance for Supportive
10 Service to Veterans Families.

11 (Witnesses approached witness
12 table.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
14 you. Good afternoon. Please identify
15 yourself and begin your testimony. Thank
16 you for being here. I will assume that
17 since two of you are here, that the
18 others named are not present. Thank you.

19 MR. HAMMOND: Thank you. Good
20 afternoon.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Good
22 afternoon.

23 MR. HAMMOND: My name is James
24 Hammond. I'm the Chief of Social Work at
25 the Philadelphia VA Medical Center, and

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2 today I want to give you an overview of
3 the continuum of care that we offer our
4 homeless veterans and veterans at risk
5 for homelessness.

6 As you know, in 2009, Veterans
7 Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki unveiled
8 the Department's comprehensive plan to
9 end homelessness among veterans. Through
10 a spectrum of services addressing case
11 management, medical, and behavioral
12 health services and assistance with
13 resources, Philadelphia VA Medical Center
14 is dedicated to the mission to prevent
15 and end homelessness.

16 At the most basic level,
17 Homeless Outreach is the main portal of
18 entry for homeless veterans. Working
19 with community partners, the Homeless
20 Outreach Team connects directly with
21 homeless and at risk for homelessness
22 veterans.

23 Faced with the challenges of
24 maintaining continuity of medical care
25 for homeless veterans, we created the

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2 Homeless Patient Aligned Care Team, or as
3 we call H-PACT. And that's a medical
4 team that operates an open access clinic
5 that's available to homeless veterans
6 Monday through Friday. The goal of this
7 team is to provide services to those
8 veterans who do not attend regular
9 medical appointments and to provide
10 same-day care to those in need. There
11 are also same-day behavioral health
12 services available to veterans.

13 Philadelphia VA Medical Center
14 provides several levels of supportive
15 housing in conjunction with our community
16 partners. At the beginning of this
17 continuum is Safe Haven, which is a
18 transitional residence, providing a
19 low-demand model of care that is
20 facilitated by our community partner,
21 MinSec. As a low-demand site, house
22 rules are kept to a minimum and the focus
23 is on the safety of the veterans. The
24 primary goal of the program is to assist
25 chronically homeless veterans in

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2 obtaining and maintaining housing
3 stability.

4 Currently, Philadelphia is one
5 of only four model demonstration sites
6 selected for this national project.
7 Located at Broad and York Streets, Safe
8 Haven can accommodate 45 veterans,
9 including male and female as well as
10 those with disabilities. While in
11 residence at Safe Haven, veterans receive
12 case management services, structured
13 group activities, and life skills
14 training.

15 The next program in our
16 continuum of care is the Grant and Per
17 Diem program, also a transitional housing
18 program, which aids veterans by building
19 a strong foundation in support of a
20 successful recovery, while establishing
21 reliable income and long-term stable
22 housing.

23 Working with three community
24 partners in Philadelphia, the program
25 includes a total of 147 beds, with an

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2 expected expansion of an additional 26
3 beds in the next fiscal year. From
4 October 1st, 2011 through July 31st,
5 2012, a total of 473 veterans were served
6 by this program, 53 of whom were
7 returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.
8 Ten female veterans participated in the
9 program, with five continuing to receive
10 services.

11 Our largest program is the
12 HUD-VASH voucher program. HUD-VASH is a
13 partnership between VA and the Department
14 of Housing and Urban Development to
15 provide affordable, stable, permanent
16 housing. The program also provides
17 ongoing case management, not only while
18 the veteran is searching for housing but
19 also after he or she is in their
20 permanent housing. Currently, we manage
21 420 vouchers. Three hundred and
22 thirty-five of those are designated for
23 Philadelphia. The remaining vouchers are
24 in Bucks County, PA and Camden County,
25 New Jersey.

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2 I also want to note that
3 Philadelphia will receive an additional
4 75 vouchers for Fiscal Year '13.

5 Also within the HUD-VASH
6 program we have Housing First, which
7 provides veterans diagnosed with a
8 serious mental illness with immediate
9 housing. Working with our community
10 partner, Pathways to Housing, this
11 program serves chronically homeless
12 veterans. In the Housing First model,
13 the goal is to first move the homeless
14 veteran and their family members into
15 permanent housing and then address the
16 other issues that may be affecting the
17 veteran's ability to remain in housing.
18 Once housed, the model provides the
19 veterans with wrap-around case management
20 services. And as of today, we have 16
21 veterans housed under that model.

22 Another supportive program to
23 assist homeless and at-risk veterans is
24 our Veterans Justice Outreach program,
25 and the purpose of the VJO initiative is

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2 to avoid the unnecessary criminalization
3 of mental illness and extended
4 incarceration among veterans by ensuring
5 that they have timely access to
6 behavioral health, substance abuse
7 treatment, and housing services. This
8 program also provides crisis intervention
9 training to the Philadelphia Police
10 Department on an ongoing basis. For the
11 fiscal year from October 1 through the
12 end of July, a total of 217 veterans were
13 served through this program, 39 of which
14 are recently returning combat veterans.
15 Fifteen females, two of whom were
16 returning combat veterans, have also
17 received assistance through this program.

18 Now, we have a new initiative
19 which we are very excited about, and this
20 is the Community Resource and Referral
21 Center, and this will act as really a
22 full-service drop-in center for homeless
23 or at risk for homeless veterans. All of
24 the VA's homeless programs will be
25 represented at this site, which will be

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2 located with Marsha down at the
3 Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service and
4 Education Center at 213-217 North 4th
5 Street. We expect this center to open
6 within the next 90 days.

7 Lastly, the National Homeless
8 Call Center ensures that homeless or
9 at-risk veterans have access to free 24/7
10 counselors. The Call Center also takes
11 calls from family members and non-VA
12 providers calling on behalf of a veteran.
13 Once the call is made, hotline staff
14 conduct a brief assessment and then
15 connect the veteran with our Homeless
16 Outreach Team. And the number to the
17 national Homeless Call Center is
18 1-877-424-3838.

19 Philadelphia VA Medical Center
20 is committed to serving our veterans and
21 ending homelessness. As has been said
22 many times up here today, one homeless
23 veteran is one too many.

24 And with that, I thank you for
25 the opportunity to speak on behalf of the

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2 VA Medical Center, and I'm happy to
3 answer any questions you may have.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you. Are you located within the Medical
6 Center?

7 MR. HAMMOND: Yes, I am.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
9 you very much. Very important testimony.

10 MS. PAUL: Good afternoon,
11 Joint Committee on Public Safety and
12 Housing, Homeless and Neighborhood
13 Development --

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Would
15 you pull the mic closer. We can't hear
16 you, and begin again.

17 MS. PAUL: Oh, absolutely.
18 Very soft spoken.

19 My name is Nicole Paul and I'm
20 the Program Coordinator for the
21 Philadelphia Alliance for Supportive
22 Services for Veteran Families. I would
23 like to thank you for the opportunity to
24 testify here today. Also for convening
25 this hearing on the City and State's

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2 preparedness for the influx of returning
3 veterans from war, including Iraq and
4 Afghanistan.

5 I'm here today to provide a
6 brief testimony on behalf of Project
7 H.O.M.E. and in solidarity with the many
8 veterans who are currently experiencing
9 homelessness, as well as those veteran
10 families who are on the brink of
11 homelessness.

12 Veterans are far more likely to
13 experience homelessness than other
14 Americans, in part because of high rates
15 of post-traumatic stress disorder,
16 physical injuries and disabilities, and
17 other factors that make reintegrating
18 into civilian life and employment
19 difficult. Project H.O.M.E. and its
20 partners have been targeting services
21 that specifically address housing,
22 employment, education, and medical needs
23 of veterans who are currently
24 experiencing homelessness in our
25 community.

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2 Nearly one year ago today,

3 Project H.O.M.E., in collaboration with

4 the Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service

5 and Education Center, Impact Services

6 Corporation, and the Homeless Advocacy

7 Project was awarded a \$1 million grant

8 from the United States Department of

9 Veteran Affairs Supportive Services for

10 Veteran Families program to provide

11 homeless prevention and rapid rehousing

12 supportive services to 165 veteran

13 families in the Philadelphia County.

14 With this funding, Project H.O.M.E. has

15 been able to expand our veteran

16 programming, which currently includes the

17 St. Elizabeth's Recovery Residence Grant

18 Per Diem program, also funded by the VA,

19 and a nine-month internship program

20 funded by the PECO Exelon Corporation.

21 Project H.O.M.E. and its

22 partners are pleased to report that we

23 were able to exceed our goal by serving

24 over 230 veteran families with our

25 initial grant and will receive renewed

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2 funding for the 2012-2013 grant year to
3 continue the path to ending veteran
4 homelessness in Philadelphia.

5 We understand that the most
6 vulnerable veterans in our community rely
7 on critical permanent supportive housing
8 programs such as HUD-VASH and Shelter
9 Plus Care to prevent homelessness and to
10 help foster connection to critical life
11 thriving services that many
12 community-based agencies provide in our
13 city.

14 Army veteran and Project
15 H.O.M.E.'s Kate's Place resident
16 Mr. Stanley Shelton, who is in our
17 presence today, understands this critical
18 service firsthand. After losing his son
19 to street violence in the early '90s and
20 his wife a couple years later,
21 Mr. Shelton turned to different
22 substances to ease the loss and anguish
23 he was experiencing. He lived on the
24 streets and in shelters for several
25 years. After suffering a stroke two

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2 years ago, the three-year former Army
3 soldier decided to start on the road to
4 recovery. He began going to the
5 Perimeter, the drop-in center for
6 homeless veterans run by the Philadelphia
7 Veterans Multi-Service and Education
8 Center. Mr. Shelton recalls fondly the
9 encouragement and kindness he experienced
10 there. The PVMSEC staff eventually
11 referred him to a new program for
12 veterans, the Philadelphia Alliance for
13 Supportive Services to Veteran Families.
14 In working in partnership with the PASSVF
15 case manager, Mr. Shelton applied for and
16 soon moved into permanent supportive
17 housing at Project H.O.M.E.'s Kate's
18 Place residence. Stanley's successful
19 transition from the streets to permanent
20 housing represents why the PASSVF program
21 was started.

22 In addition to sustaining
23 permanent housing, Mr. Shelton is a
24 frequent participant in various community
25 groups at the Philadelphia VA Medical

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2 Center and is currently enrolled to begin
3 computer training courses at the
4 Honickman Learning Center and Comcast
5 Technology Labs at Project H.O.M.E.,
6 which I believe actually started today.
7 He is looking forward to continuing his
8 educational studies now that he has
9 settled into his new home. Stanley
10 firmly believes that participating in
11 supportive help and therapy, taking
12 classes, and sharing with others are
13 great tools for overcoming life's
14 obstacles. As he put it so well, "We
15 can't do it alone."

16 We at Project H.O.M.E., along
17 with the Philadelphia Alliance for
18 Supportive Services for Veteran Families
19 and our partners, appreciate and look
20 forward to working with City Council
21 towards ending and preventing veteran
22 homelessness in our city and continuing
23 our work to ensure Philadelphia is a
24 thriving and supportive home for veterans
25 who have dutifully served our country.

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2 Thank you for this opportunity
3 to speak today.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you very much.

6 Any questions?

7 (No response.)

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: All
9 right. We'll now call Panel 4B. The
10 Clerk will read the title of Panel 4B, in
11 addition Richard Gordon, III, founder,
12 CEO, Veterans Support Group of America,
13 Inc.

14 THE CLERK: David Kamioner,
15 U.S. Army, 1980-84, Executive Director,
16 Philadelphia Veterans Comfort House;
17 Angela Wright, Director, MinSec Safe
18 Haven; and Matt Dunphy, The Veterans
19 Group.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Did
21 you also call Matt Dunphy?

22 THE CLERK: Yes. Matt Dunphy,
23 The Veterans Group.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: That's
25 out my way. So we will ask those four

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2 folks to come forward. Thank you very
3 much.

4 (Witnesses approached witness
5 table.)

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:
7 Please, in any order, identify yourself
8 and begin your testimony. Thank you for
9 your patience.

10 MS. SULLIVAN: Good afternoon,
11 Councilmembers Jannie Blackwell and other
12 Councilmembers. I would like to read to
13 you a statement of our founder and Chief
14 Executive Officer, Richard M. Gordon,
15 III, on behalf of the Veterans Support
16 Group of America. Once I've read our
17 organization's statement, I will turn it
18 over to Council for consideration.

19 There is a few titles that
20 we're going to cover, is homelessness,
21 economics, and our appeal for acquiring a
22 building, preparedness for incoming
23 veterans.

24 My name is Rhonda Sullivan.
25 I'm the Operations Director for the

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2 organization.

3 First of all, in regards to
4 homelessness, Philadelphia's most
5 fundamental obligation to its returning
6 veterans should not only be to have
7 housing available to them but to have
8 decent housing available in crime and
9 drug free environments where they can
10 settle and heal as needed. Many
11 communities throughout Philadelphia have
12 become complacent as the statistics
13 continue to rise in the numbers of
14 crimes, drugs, and widespread poverty.

15 Philadelphia is a great city,
16 also filled with wealth, opportunity, and
17 one that claims a posture of people who
18 show brotherly love and sisterly
19 affection. Philadelphia must live up to
20 this claim by showing love to our
21 veterans and making their health and
22 wellbeing a priority.

23 The Veterans Support Group of
24 America has implemented its plan to
25 include private landlords in its housing

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2 program. These landlords have committed
3 their homes to exclusively house
4 veterans. This step has proven to
5 provide great promise and allows
6 landlords to help support veterans in a
7 way they know how. The Veterans Support
8 Group of America is also working towards
9 preparing transitional housing options
10 that guide veterans towards independent
11 living up to establishing new
12 homeownership.

13 In addition to making
14 provisions for incoming veterans, we
15 cannot forget the homeless veterans that
16 are already here. These veterans need to
17 know that the Veterans Support Group is
18 here help them as well.

19 In regards to economics, there
20 are 1.5 million residents of the City of
21 Philadelphia who enjoy the cultural
22 wealth of the City, support the
23 conviction of its citizens to correct an
24 injustice, and maintain many strong
25 community ties and allegiances.

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2 Leadership is essential to secure the
3 progress of each of our communities, and
4 Philadelphia is open and ready to embrace
5 a plan or should be open and ready to
6 embrace a plan for positive results that
7 benefit us all.

8 Our returning troops should not
9 be categorized as residents that will
10 increase our unemployment numbers and
11 poverty statistics. In fact, most of the
12 veterans returning to Philadelphia are
13 friends and family members and people we
14 know and are those who have acquired
15 managerial and leadership skills while
16 serving in the military. Veterans for 1,
17 2 or maybe 20 years have operated in an
18 environment that requires a posture of
19 discipline, structure, and order.
20 Veterans have been trained to follow up
21 on a request, lead and protect a mission,
22 and sacrifice their personal interests at
23 times to get the project done. We are
24 missing a valuable resource that can help
25 our communities when we ignore our

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2 veterans. Veterans are coming to
3 Philadelphia with backgrounds necessary
4 to help us build our communities, protect
5 the most vulnerable, and have
6 sought-after work ethics essential to
7 move our community projects forward.

8 VSG participated in the annual
9 Stand Down event in Levittown,
10 Pennsylvania this year, and we were
11 reminded of how veterans are accustomed
12 to setting up camp communities within
13 hours that will accommodate every human
14 need for functioning, care, and survival
15 in remote areas. Veterans Support Group
16 of America is working on plans to add to
17 the training knowledge for veterans, help
18 them build usable skill sets applicable
19 to the civilian life that will sustain
20 them, and help to build a well-prepared
21 veteran population of new entrepreneurs
22 who just need a map and the right tools
23 for establishing successful business
24 enterprises. Our veterans are very
25 capable of helping us transform our

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2 problem neighborhoods.

3 We also want to make an appeal
4 towards the support of acquiring a Bell
5 Telephone building at Broad and Rockland
6 Streets. A primary requirement for the
7 continued success of the Veterans Support
8 Group of America is a permanent site to
9 operate from. With sincere appreciation
10 to the Yorkhouse owners and staff and for
11 more than two years, we have been able to
12 operate from the senior citizen high-rise
13 facility located at 5325 Old York Road in
14 Logan area of Philadelphia. VSG started
15 out in the facility's small library and
16 soon outgrew the room and was offered the
17 use of the ballroom to serve clients on
18 the main floor. The Veterans Support
19 Group volunteer staff continues to grow,
20 and our program reach is expanding as
21 well. With this type of continuous
22 growth, we need a facility to effectively
23 serve our veterans.

24 Our program plan addresses
25 full-service needs of the veteran, and

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2 VSG needs the facility space to carry out
3 those on-site services. Specifically, we
4 need a site large enough to support our
5 intake process. We need space for
6 business operating purposes, space for
7 commerce venues that will help support
8 the building operating costs, and enough
9 space to accommodate veterans in need of
10 emergency housing. Our service reach is
11 stagnated by the space limits of our
12 current temporary location. Without our
13 own site, we will not be able to
14 effectively serve the needs of our
15 current veterans, and we will be limited
16 in our ability to serve the anticipated
17 thousands of troops expected to return to
18 the Philadelphia area.

19 Veterans Support Group of
20 America is also preparing to further
21 expand its reach on a national level with
22 its service work for veterans. We have
23 incorporated our organization in the
24 State of Pennsylvania. Just as our
25 initial start and support came from

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2 Philadelphia, we would like to establish
3 other newly renovated corporate office
4 right here in our beloved City of
5 Philadelphia. With the City Council's
6 endorsement and acknowledgment of the
7 valuable work and dedication of the
8 Veterans Support Group of America,
9 acquiring the Bell Telephone building
10 located at 4090 North Broad Street at the
11 Rockland Street intersection may become a
12 reality very soon and just in time for
13 providing needed services for our
14 incoming troops.

15 Regarding preparedness for
16 incoming veterans, and these are
17 suggestions for the agencies,
18 organizations, and the government or
19 municipal offices.

20 Our community agencies need a
21 cleaner path and direct access to the
22 veteran agencies to further assist our
23 veterans with very special needs. We
24 realize the agencies in our city provide
25 pathways to assist veterans who are

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2 without funds, those needing medical
3 attention, and for making citywide events
4 and programming a reality for veterans
5 and veteran organizations. Regular group
6 forums may be needed that will include
7 representatives from veteran agencies,
8 organizations, and the offices of
9 selected public officials. The purpose
10 for this forum or regular committee
11 meeting is to address veteran service
12 issues, build a centralized location for
13 all resource information needed, and
14 assist in mediating the agencies and
15 organizations in collaboration with
16 Philadelphia Veterans Affairs office.

17 Regarding organizations, the
18 Veterans Support Group of America is
19 ready and willing to lead in the
20 implementation of full services for the
21 veterans. Our organization is prepared
22 and staffed to accommodate the
23 development of service programming that
24 will provide what is needed to properly
25 assist our veterans. No other

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2 organization provides the same span of
3 services that VSG does, even now.

4 However, we also realize that no one
5 organization can do it all. There is a
6 need for specialty organizations that
7 assist with special service purposes in
8 specific areas in the City, and
9 absolutely those are poised to
10 accommodate the massive housing needs in
11 our new incoming veterans from overseas.

12 Government: The Veterans
13 Advisory Commission has reorganized, and
14 we have met the Veterans Coordinator,
15 Wanda Pate Dennis, who is capable,
16 passionate, motivated, and the right
17 personality for the position. The
18 efforts of the City of Philadelphia to
19 reach out to the service organizations,
20 consider the veteran agencies in place,
21 and to make provisions for the groups to
22 work together will ultimately provide for
23 a very efficient service process in
24 preparation for our returning veterans.

25 We need the help of municipal

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2 office personnel and committed public
3 officials to help us help our veterans
4 continue their missions by allowing the
5 veteran to do some nation building right
6 here at home. It is imperative that the
7 City of Philadelphia remain engaged in
8 creating a collaborative effort for all
9 veteran agencies and organizations to
10 thrive. We will remain focused on our
11 obligation to care for all our veterans
12 who serve in the Army, Air Force, Navy,
13 Marine Corps, Coast Guard and the
14 National Guard, our U.S. military force
15 that we have always been so very proud
16 of.

17 Thank you, Mayor Michael
18 Nutter, City Councilmembers, ward
19 leaders, public officials, veteran
20 agencies, and veteran organizations for
21 the opportunity to work with you in
22 serving our veteran community.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
24 you.

25 Any questions?

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2 MS. SULLIVAN: This is from
3 Richard M. Gordon, III.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you.

6 Next.

7 MR. GORDON: Yes. My name is
8 Richard M. Gordon, III. I'm the founder
9 and CEO of the Veterans Support Group of
10 America.

11 We have been very diligent in
12 trying to service our veterans. I was
13 very surprised when I organized this
14 organization the lack of knowledge of the
15 veterans of finding out about their
16 benefits, finding out about housing and
17 of other issues that are very, very
18 important to them today as we stand.

19 I have a staff that I am very,
20 very proud of. These people have worked
21 diligent with me. We have done things
22 that other organizations have not done at
23 the time, but we're working diligently
24 with other organizations to make things
25 happen for the veterans.

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2 One of the main problems we are
3 finding out is, as I said, the lack of
4 knowledgeability of the benefits
5 available to them, the services available
6 to them and their families. You have
7 families out here who are really hurting
8 because they're not -- they do not know
9 what's going on.

10 The Veterans Support Group,
11 what we do, we save houses. What I mean
12 by saving houses, you have a large number
13 of veterans who are losing their housing
14 through the legal issues that are going
15 on within the City. We have saved 144
16 houses so far this year from foreclosure.
17 We have placed well over 300 people off
18 the streets.

19 We have a comprehensive program
20 for housing, for saving their housing,
21 and the main thing that we do, we do
22 claims. We specialize in claims, and I
23 specialize personally in denied claims,
24 because it's all in the presentation when
25 you're dealing with the veteran trying to

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2 get his benefits.

3 Us as a group will not give up.

4 We are trying very hard to do so. That's

5 why our plan for the building at Broad

6 and Rockland is a comprehensive plan to

7 house and intake transitional people that

8 needs benefits, 200 male veterans and 100

9 female veterans. That's just part of our

10 beginning plan. What we're trying to do

11 is make sure that the veterans are aware

12 of what they have coming. Most do not.

13 Most are very lost.

14 We have an outreach program

15 that we just started, and we're seeking

16 these people. We are looking for them.

17 We are trying very hard. We also need

18 the Philadelphia -- the City Council and

19 other members to help us with this

20 outreach, get these people in. If they

21 don't come to us, come to some

22 organization that will help them

23 establish the benefits, the housing,

24 whatever their initial need is. We need

25 these people to come in.

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2 You have a lot of people out
3 here that don't believe that anyone will
4 help them. They are lost in this. They
5 believe in this. You have people that's
6 trying to learn about the benefits. They
7 were denied 20 years ago, and they never
8 came back.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
10 you. Thank you very much, Mr. Gordon.
11 Thank you.

12 MS. WRIGHT: Good afternoon.
13 My name is Angela Wright and I'm the
14 Director of the Safe Haven for Veterans
15 Transitional Housing program.

16 In an effort to end this sad
17 distinction of homelessness in the
18 Philadelphia area, MinSec is working to
19 make that goal a reality. Many homeless
20 veterans are coping with mental illness
21 and/or substance abuse. The Veterans
22 Administration is a national leader in
23 the homeless programs and has keen focus
24 on engaging the chronically homeless
25 veterans in primary and behavioral

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2 healthcare. This is critical in
3 combatting the efforts of chronic
4 diseases such as diabetes, hypertension,
5 heart disease, which are widespread among
6 the chronically homeless veteran.

7 Many veterans are considered at
8 risk for homelessness because of the high
9 occurrence of poverty, unemployment,
10 underemployment, lack of social and
11 family supports, and dismal living
12 conditions. Safe Haven is a form of
13 supportive housing and a new approach to
14 transitional housing of the homeless
15 veteran who have had a difficult time
16 participating in traditional services
17 currently available. Safe Haven embraces
18 the challenges that they face through
19 treatment and mutual respect. The
20 low-demand atmosphere recognizes that
21 many homeless veterans are struggling
22 with addiction, mental illness, making a
23 traditional homeless shelter an
24 impossible choice.

25 MinSec staff works to connect

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2 with veterans through its educational
3 programs, job placement, mental health
4 treatment, drug and alcohol treatment,
5 and ultimately connecting them directly
6 with the community resources available to
7 help them make it on their own.

8 MinSec's companies is a leading
9 provider of community-based transition
10 dedicated to rehabilitating the
11 individual and reduce recidivism,
12 treating addiction and building safer and
13 healthier communities.

14 The MinSec vision and mission
15 of values are designed to promote
16 treatment in an environment that will
17 promote hope, support, personal growth,
18 and improve lives. Safe Haven program is
19 one of the four Safe Haven programs
20 through the VA in America. The one here
21 is the last one to open, and we're most
22 proud of it. We just opened June 4th of
23 this year, and we find that it is truly a
24 new approach in addressing homelessness
25 and the only one of its kind for veterans

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2 here in Philadelphia.

3 The program as designed helps
4 the chronically homeless veteran
5 suffering from mental illness and
6 substance abuse problems, giving them a
7 chance to succeed in a low-demand, highly
8 supportive model. Unlike traditional
9 homeless shelters, Safe Haven's
10 environment is non-intrusive as possible,
11 with minimal facility rules governing the
12 program. Safe Haven is a low-demand
13 program with positive expectations.

14 A veteran's stay at Safe Haven
15 could last up to six months. Our goal is
16 to help them find permanent housing or
17 supportive family reunification before
18 the end of the six-month stay. To date,
19 40 percent of the veterans who have left
20 Safe Haven have had successful completion
21 of the program. Six percent have been
22 asked to leave due to rule violation, and
23 4 percent left the program on their own
24 decision. The remaining 50 percent of
25 our veterans are continuing to

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2 participate in our program seeking
3 employment, educational, financial, and
4 treatment support.

5 MinSec provides residents with
6 case management services, linkage
7 services through the Philadelphia
8 Veterans Medical Center, the Philadelphia
9 Veterans Multi-Service and Educational
10 Center, and several other supportive
11 programs on veterans needs.

12 On this day, all of 45 of Safe
13 Haven beds are presently full, while
14 homeless veterans are on the waiting list
15 and awaiting the opportunity to
16 transitional housing. These veterans and
17 hundreds more like them are living on the
18 street in unsafe and unstable situations,
19 looking for shelters and often landing in
20 the hospital. These veterans deserve a
21 safe haven.

22 We at MinSec hope that our safe
23 haven is a veteran's last stop before
24 finally going home.

25 (Applause.)

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
3 you very much.

4 Do we have someone here from
5 Veterans Comfort House or the Veterans
6 Group? Yes. Thank you very much, all of
7 you.

8 MR. GORDON: Thank you again,
9 Ms. Blackwell.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: My
11 pleasure.

12 (Witnesses approached witness
13 table.)

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
15 you all for your patience. Feel free to
16 identify yourself for the record and
17 begin your testimony. Thank all of you
18 for coming. We thank you.

19 MR. KAMIONER: Good afternoon,
20 Councilwoman Blackwell. I'm David
21 Kamioner. I'm the Executive Director of
22 the Philadelphia Veterans Comfort House.
23 It is good to be here in front of you,
24 also good to acknowledge your help over
25 the many, many years since we're in your

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2 district of the Comfort House, to include
3 a recent City Activities Grant that will
4 help us help homeless veterans on the
5 street this holiday season. So thank you
6 very, very much, Councilwoman Blackwell.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: My
8 pleasure.

9 MR. KAMIONER: I will make my
10 remarks mercifully short and direct. I
11 will not engage in theatre of the obvious
12 because you have better stats than I do.
13 You probably know this issue from your
14 perspective much, much better than I do.
15 But we're at the Comfort House -- and
16 also this is Cara Colantuono, Support
17 Homeless Veterans.

18 We're not at the policy end of
19 it, Councilwoman. We are at the
20 execution end of it. If this was a
21 military operation, we are the point of
22 the spear, because all the talk of
23 concept, all the talk of policy is very
24 well and good, until you're answering the
25 door 2:00, 3:00 in the morning with a kid

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2 that's just come back from Iraq or
3 Afghanistan who hasn't eaten in three
4 days and slept in the lobby of the VA
5 Hospital the night before, and he wants
6 to know not policy, not concept, he wants
7 to know if he has a place to sleep and if
8 he's going to get something to eat, and
9 we and Cara and her organization can tell
10 them yes.

11 The one thing I'd like to leave
12 you with is just a bit of information
13 about our shelter. And I think what the
14 core issue here is past funding, past
15 awareness, past participation, and
16 private-public partnerships, but what I
17 think it's the core of veteran
18 homelessness and one of the ways we can
19 understand it better and thus fight it
20 better.

21 Our shelter, as you might be
22 aware, is very much unlike other
23 shelters, because we're run along strict
24 military lines, for that's language all
25 vets understand. We emphasize honor,

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2 discipline, and duty and give U.S.
3 military veterans the chance to manage
4 day-to-day house operation. This way,
5 nothing is given to them, but they earn
6 everything and, with it, a renewed
7 self-respect.

8 At the Comfort House, we don't
9 coddle. We don't nurture. We challenge,
10 because we believe as the old military
11 aphorism says, more training means less
12 bleeding. If they can't handle what we
13 do, how will they handle the real-life
14 challenges of the private sector of
15 finding a job and finding their own
16 place. So when they come to us, it's not
17 a vacation. It's not a time for
18 self-actualization. It is absolutely
19 completely a time to be challenged and to
20 succeed in that challenge, much like 20,
21 30, even 40 years ago they succeeded
22 through basic training in any of the
23 armed services.

24 In conclusion -- and I said I'd
25 be mercifully short -- one thing I want

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2 to really leave you with is the reason
3 we're in existence and the reasons this
4 problem will probably be with us for some
5 time. We at the Comfort House are
6 utopians. We don't believe in talk of
7 ending veterans homelessness, because as
8 long as there are wars, there will be
9 veterans. And as long as there veterans,
10 there will be homeless veterans. Anybody
11 that says anything more is, to be
12 diplomatic, mistaken. But one thing we
13 have to realize is that there is a
14 difference between the civilian ethos and
15 the military ethos. In the civilian
16 world, status is accomplished by the car
17 you drive, the house you live in, the job
18 you have, the suit you wear. Where I
19 come from and what I do on a day-to-day
20 basis, status is derived from devotion to
21 duty, honor, loyalty, discipline. And so
22 when veterans come back, some of them
23 joining the military as 17, 18-year-old
24 teenagers and come back battle-hardened
25 veterans of Iraq or Afghanistan, they

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2 don't understand many of the completely
3 material ethos of civilian life. They
4 don't understand the inherent venality,
5 on occasion, of the free market. But
6 they do still understand honor, duty,
7 discipline and, most of all, country.

8 At the Comfort House, that's
9 what we attempt to give them. Not always
10 successful, and a unit just like ours
11 will lose people. And, again, we are not
12 utopians. We realize that not everyone
13 can be saved, because, frankly,
14 Councilwoman, not everybody wants to be
15 saved. But those that can, those that
16 come to our house looking to be
17 challenged and looking to better their
18 lives and become productive citizens,
19 those are the kind of people that we're
20 interested in. We often say that if the
21 rest of the shelter community in a
22 military comparison are like the Army,
23 we're like the Rangers.

24 So let me leave you with that,
25 Councilwoman, and say we thank you again

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2 so much for the work you've done for us.

3 Thank you so much for all your support
4 over the years, and we look forward to
5 that continued support in the future.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
7 you very much. Will you give for the
8 record your address.

9 MR. KAMIONER: Certainly. 4108
10 Baltimore Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19104.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: And
12 let me thank you for the excellent work
13 you've done and the commitment and what a
14 beautiful and wonderful place you have
15 there, and we thank you.

16 MR. KAMIONER: Thank you.

17 MS. COLANTUONO: My name is
18 Cara Colantuono and I am the founder and
19 President of the recently new
20 organization called Support Homeless
21 Veterans.

22 David was one of the first
23 individuals to get behind what I'm trying
24 to do and the people that believe in what
25 I'm doing.

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2 A lot of people brought up
3 amazing points today. We were here
4 earlier. We heard a lot of things that
5 are much needed that we know. One of the
6 things that was brought up was Stand
7 Down, and unfortunately -- and everyone
8 in the room is very aware of what Stand
9 Down is already, and I'm not sure if
10 everybody knows that they actually cut
11 that short this year.

12 Stand Down is a much-needed
13 event that provides veterans in need with
14 food, clothing, shelter for the weekend,
15 service providers, access to VA care
16 right on site. The problem is Stand Down
17 needs to happen a lot more than once a
18 year, and I'm really blown away that a
19 27-year-old is the only one saying that
20 at this point in time.

21 We at Support Homeless Veterans
22 have started something called Code: Red,
23 White and Blue that has the same mission
24 and initiative as Stand Down, but it
25 happens every single month. When I first

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2 said that, people said, That's crazy, how
3 can you pull that off?

4 On September 22nd, 2012 will be
5 our fifth Code: Red, White and Blue
6 event, and at this point, we have already
7 served over 300 veterans through that
8 initiative. It's held at the Fishtown
9 Rec Center, which is 1202 East Montgomery
10 Avenue, from 9:00 to 12:00 p.m., and we
11 offer complementary tables to any
12 organizations, many who were here today,
13 to let them -- let veterans know about
14 their support and services.

15 We need more hygiene products.
16 We need more clothing. We need more
17 press and individuals to get to know
18 exactly what we're doing so we get that
19 support. We're very fortunate to be
20 getting the leftovers from Stand Down,
21 which because it was cancelled halfway
22 through is going to be a lot of stuff.

23 So we need your support,
24 everybody that remains here in this room,
25 to make this event our biggest event so

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2 that everybody knows where they can come
3 and actually see what David talked about,
4 boots on the ground social work.

5 I've been working exclusively
6 with homeless veterans, chronically
7 homeless, dual diagnosed, meaning
8 multiple issues. These veterans aren't
9 just presenting with, Oh, you know, I
10 can't get a job, this market sucks.
11 They're coming back with PTSD, traumatic
12 brain injuries on top of schizophrenia,
13 major depression, then everybody has Hep
14 C and everybody has got diabetes. The
15 issues stack up and up and up. You
16 should see the axis one ratings that come
17 on the psych socials that we request from
18 the VA Hospital. Axis one is where they
19 write down all your clinical diagnosis,
20 major depression. There's five, by the
21 way.

22 So what we found with that
23 population, this chronically homeless
24 population, is, we need a permanent
25 solution to this, because there's not

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2 going to be any room for our returning
3 veterans.

4 I go to the seventh floor at
5 the VA Hospital, which you will find the
6 detox ward and you'll find the mental
7 health ward. On those wards we find the
8 same gentlemen and females over and over
9 again. A lot of them even call it the
10 vacation, because they know that they
11 could just go into the VA and tell them
12 that they're going to kill themselves and
13 then go sit up there on the seventh floor
14 and dry out.

15 What's the permanent solution?
16 We've got HUD-VASH vouchers, which are
17 limited and looking for specific groups
18 to target, organizations like Impact
19 Services trying to bring in permanent
20 housing, but they only have 32 beds. But
21 when you're talking about this dual
22 diagnosed, chronically homeless, there's
23 no family. There's no support. Every
24 bridge they ever had is gone. They've
25 burnt them all. So what we at Support

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2 Homeless Veterans have done -- and we
3 only have one house at this moment --
4 we've taken just four men, chronically
5 homeless, mentally ill, and brought them
6 together as brothers and as a family
7 again. And what we say we provide
8 support, I'm not saying we just help them
9 pay all the bills and that's it. We
10 actually go there and cook dinner, take
11 them on vacation, give them a life,
12 quality of life. And if -- when you talk
13 about the young guys coming back, the
14 programs, as a paid employee of a
15 federally funded program that I'm not
16 going to mention right now, if we do not
17 change up the game, we change up these
18 programs that were designed in the '90s
19 for a different group, we cannot help the
20 returning veterans. I have 19-year-olds
21 presenting homeless.

22 The other day we had a
23 25-year-old marine who was in distress.
24 He was high. He was suicidal. He was a
25 mess. He's in our circuit, so he called

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2 SHV. Myself, Michael Nutt, who is
3 standing over here, responded to his
4 call. They're pulling the furniture out
5 while I'm busting literally into the
6 house to take this veteran out of the
7 crisis situation that he's in, brought
8 him to the VA Hospital ourselves. He
9 told them, I'm suicidal. He told them
10 his plan. He was high on benzos and
11 heroin at the time. He fell and had
12 smashed his face and had -- was literally
13 bleeding still. We brought him there at
14 7:00 p.m. By 7:30, they discharged him
15 with a list of shelters.

16 These are the kind of issues,
17 institutionalization, using the word
18 "program," these old-school methods for a
19 generation that's my generation, ADHD,
20 adrenaline, sports, X games. These are
21 the kids that we're not reaching in these
22 programs, and if we don't switch up our
23 game, it's just not going to work.

24 So thank you again for staying,
25 staying awake, and staying with us.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
3 you very much.

4 (Applause.)

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: We
6 will now have the Clerk read Panel 5.

7 THE CLERK: David Christian,
8 Andre McCoy, Imam Nuriddin, Karen
9 Riggins, Tykia Fitch and Bertram Martin.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: After
11 this, anyone who hasn't spoken is
12 certainly welcome to do it. This is our
13 final panel.

14 (Witnesses approached witness
15 table.)

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
17 you all for your patience. I apologize
18 for how long you've had to wait, and
19 thank you for hanging in there with us.
20 Please identify yourself and begin your
21 testimony.

22 MR. CHRISTIAN: Good afternoon,
23 Madam Chair Blackwell. Judge Deni said
24 to say hello. I saw many of the
25 Councilmen. I'll say hello to them back

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2 in their quarters there, Denny O'Brien.

3 Many of them are good friends. I've been

4 before City Council under the

5 jurisdiction of Frank Rizzo, Wilson

6 Goode, and I've gone through Bill Green,

7 John Street and Mayor Nutter. So I've

8 seen you through the hallways here,

9 walking this hallways. You've paid a lot

10 of dues to the City of Philadelphia, and

11 I thank you.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

13 you.

14 MR. CHRISTIAN: I want to thank

15 the people today of 9/11 for their

16 sacrifices, and I want to thank the

17 veterans that are prosecuting those in

18 reference to the war in Iraq and

19 Afghanistan and going after those that

20 have caused the situation such as 9/11.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

22 you.

23 MR. CHRISTIAN: My name is

24 David Christian and I happen to be raised

25 in and around the Philadelphia area. I

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2 was a senior advisor just recently to the
3 United States Senate under John Kerry. I
4 advised him on veterans benefits.

5 I enlisted in the U.S.
6 military -- I'll give you a brief
7 thumbnail sketch of my background which
8 qualifies me to say hello to you today.

9 I enlisted in the Army down at
10 401 North Broad Street here to be a
11 paratrooper. I enlisted and I went on to
12 be the youngest officer in U.S. history
13 since the Civil War, being commissioned
14 at the age of 18 and going on to be a
15 captain at the age of 20. It sounds
16 somewhat romantic, but unfortunately with
17 some of the romanticism of war comes some
18 of the price you pay.

19 I was machine-gunned across the
20 chest. I was stabbed in the left arm. I
21 was paralyzed in this hand that I have
22 sitting next to the mic, and I had an
23 anti-tank weapon explode into my crotch
24 and in my stomach. I had 40 percent of
25 my body second- and third-degree Napalm

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2 burns. I spent almost seven years in
3 hospitals, and then in the states here
4 close by, I was in Valley Forge General
5 Hospital before they closed that and
6 Philadelphia Navy Hospital and the
7 Philadelphia VA Hospital.

8 I feel I've paid my dues in
9 hospitals. I had to transition through
10 rehabilitation. I had to go from
11 electric wheelchair, which I drove with
12 my left hand because the other part of my
13 body was paralyzed. I'm Catholic. They
14 gave me the last rites twice, and they
15 told me that I wasn't going to live, then
16 they told me I wasn't going to walk. And
17 with all of this negative philosophy out
18 there, I believed in myself as a veteran.
19 If I was a former Airborne Ranger,
20 Special Forces, Green Beret, I was going
21 to get out of that wheelchair. And I
22 went out of that wheelchair from the
23 electric wheelchair to the regular
24 wheelchair, to crutches, to going and
25 running a marathon in New York City. And

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2 I carried a flag the whole way for the
3 disabled American veterans. Believe it
4 or not, the flag threw off my gait and I
5 wasn't as fast as the Vice President, who
6 did a three-hour marathon. My marathon
7 was over four hours, but I did complete
8 the marathon, and I was proud to have
9 completed that marathon.

10 The years --

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: God
12 bless you. Congratulations and God bless
13 you.

14 MR. CHRISTIAN: Thank you.
15 Thank you.

16 (Applause.)

17 MR. CHRISTIAN: Fortunately I
18 was educated under vocational
19 rehabilitation with the Veterans
20 Administration. I attended schools in
21 the area here. I was at Villanova
22 University for undergraduate, Rutgers Law
23 School, and I've been very successful.
24 I'm now presently a businessman. I have
25 a business in the City of Philadelphia

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2 with 70 employees, and we operate out of
3 Cottman and Tulip Street, and I'm proud
4 to say that I'm paying taxes into the
5 City of Philadelphia. The City of
6 Philadelphia has always been good to me,
7 and I'm glad to give something back.

8 But I spent years in veterans
9 activism before I went into business.
10 The thing -- we heard many, many, many
11 issues today here, and we've heard the
12 issues of homelessness, the issues of
13 housing, the issues of prosthetics, the
14 issues of psychological problems. We've
15 heard all of these issues. Today I bring
16 you also the solutions. And the solution
17 is money. The City of Philadelphia needs
18 to facilitate these programs. We have
19 the infrastructure, and I can tell you
20 that we have the money. We have to go to
21 Washington, DC to get the money. I have
22 brought money, millions of dollars, to
23 the State of Pennsylvania here. I have
24 gone to the Secretary of Labor in
25 Washington, DC. I developed the

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2 Governor's Veterans Outreach Program. I
3 had to bring it and educate the Secretary
4 of Labor in the State of Pennsylvania,
5 the Deputy Secretary of Labor for
6 Employment and Training, and then we
7 implemented a program called the
8 Governor's Veterans Outreach Program.

9 And if I had to stroke someone's ego to
10 get it by calling it the Governor's
11 Veterans Outreach Center, I would call it
12 a one-eyed horn toad if you have to if it
13 was going to help veterans. And then at
14 the same time, I wrote a program called
15 the Multi Center, Multi Task Center, the
16 Veterans Multi Center. We didn't know
17 what to call it. We moved that center
18 all the way around town here. And I can
19 tell you, I was there when we opened each
20 one of these centers across the State of
21 Pennsylvania - Erie, Pittsburgh,
22 Harrisburg, Scranton-Wilkes-Barre,
23 Philadelphia, Levittown.

24 Today there is one center
25 remaining, ladies and gentlemen,

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2 Philadelphia, 4th and Race. My heart is
3 heavy, but Philadelphia takes the lead.
4 Philadelphia is the leader in recognizing
5 the problems of veterans issues.

6 I want to conclude here and let
7 my colleagues have a say, but, again, I
8 just want to remind your recorder, I am
9 David Christian, and I ask for your
10 continued support for our brothers and
11 sister veterans. We had a philosophy in
12 combat that we don't leave our dead and
13 wounded on the battlefield. And I want
14 to share -- that philosophy has to be
15 enjoyed and shared in everyday society.
16 We cannot leave those who come back that
17 are called veterans from whatever service
18 they came from on the battlefield of
19 society.

20 I remember being written up in
21 People Magazine, and they said by virtue
22 of the fact, Mr. Christian made a
23 statement that war was more
24 understandable than society. And for me,
25 war was more understandable. My two

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2 brothers are disabled American veterans.

3 One is sheltered; the other has

4 matriculated back into society.

5 We can fix this problem. We

6 have the infrastructure. I can help you

7 bring the money here. I will volunteer

8 my services. I will talk with the Mayor.

9 I will talk with Madam Councilwoman

10 Blackwell and her colleagues on both

11 sides of the aisle, because we all know

12 that this issue is neither a democratic

13 or republic issue. The bullet that the

14 enemy wants to hurt and shoot and the

15 past 9/11 situation that happened here in

16 America, they didn't care if you were

17 black or white. They didn't care if you

18 were republican or democratic when they

19 tried to kill the people in the Twin

20 Towers. They took us all down. They

21 hurt our heart. And the people today

22 that are trying to kill the people in

23 uniform want to do the same thing.

24 So we will go to Washington,

25 DC, and I will help, and I will work. I

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2 still will be a businessman in the City,
3 but I will still also be an activist, and
4 we'll go there and we'll hold hands
5 together.

6 Thank you very much. I
7 relinquish my time.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
9 you very much.

10 (Applause.)

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
12 you. Thank you. God bless you. Thank
13 you.

14 MR. MCCOY: Wow, it's pretty
15 hard to beat a Purple Heart recipient
16 awarded many times over.

17 Ladies and gentlemen, my name
18 is Andre C. McCoy. I was born in
19 Philadelphia at Germantown Hospital. I
20 lived in and around Philadelphia. I have
21 a European American education, with a
22 capstone, an MBA from Temple University.
23 I worked for global 100 sized companies
24 and small businesses also in Philadelphia
25 and the surrounding area. I have done

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2 this while maintaining over 25 years of
3 military service. I started out for six
4 years as an enlisted marine in artillery.
5 I have served on active duty, reserved
6 duty, and National Guard duty. The rest
7 of my service was as a tank officer in
8 the United States Army. My current rank
9 is Army Major Reserve.

10 I have completed five
11 deployments, serving in both combat
12 theatres, returning from Afghanistan in
13 2010. I do not represent any one
14 organization.

15 I have submitted written
16 personal remarks regarding veterans
17 issues, because I am one of them. For
18 the next few minutes, I would just like
19 to enlighten you with some of my
20 thoughts.

21 Ladies and gentlemen of the
22 Philadelphia City Council, fellow
23 veterans, distinguished guests, visitors
24 to this great City Hall in Pennsylvania,
25 let us not forget the 3,000 citizens that

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2 were killed in a surprise attack on this
3 day over ten years ago, and since then,
4 over 6,400 veterans who have died in Iraq
5 and Afghanistan to defend them.

6 My fellow citizens, as a
7 veteran, I am thankful. I am honored to
8 be here and to offer a few personal
9 remarks to aid the betterment of our city
10 and the surrounding area.

11 When we assumed the soldier, we
12 did not lay aside the citizen. When we
13 assumed the soldier, we did not lay aside
14 the citizen.

15 These words were spoken to
16 another legislature. It was the New York
17 Legislature, June 26th, 1775, General
18 George Washington.

19 These words may help define a
20 relationship from which the soldier or
21 the service members are born out of and
22 return to its citizenry, and that there
23 is a duty, a right, a responsibility, and
24 an obligation that we citizens and
25 Councilmembers have with a special trust

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2 and fidelity to those and from those who
3 have served known as veterans.

4 Now with this understanding,
5 I'm thankful for the Council to hear
6 veterans issues. In particular, there is
7 a veteran on City Council who, like me,
8 has jumped out of perfectly good
9 airplanes. This is referred to as
10 airborne.

11 I offer the following backdrop:
12 There are approximately 78,000-plus
13 veterans in Philadelphia, and in nearby
14 Montgomery County, there's another
15 54,000. That's a conservative estimate
16 of over 132,000 veterans in the immediate
17 area. Now, if you include the
18 surrounding areas that drew into
19 Philadelphia for resources and services,
20 the number will significantly increase.

21 Of the 132,000, it can be
22 estimated that 80 percent of them are
23 married. Well, with an additional 105
24 spouses, most of which have two kids, if
25 only half of those were correct, we're

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2 talking about another 102,000.

3 Now, not all require or need
4 services. However, there are over
5 339,000 veterans and their family members
6 in the immediate area. Based on that
7 backdrop, I offer the following
8 observations:

9 Homeless veterans:

10 Homelessness amongst veterans exists.
11 General Eric Shinseki, retired, No one
12 who has served this nation as a veteran
13 should ever be living on the street.
14 He's the current VA director. This is a
15 living visual representation of a failed
16 life where survival is the only activity,
17 and this needs to be weighed against the
18 founding of America's principles, life,
19 liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

20 This has been a national issue.
21 I have heard conservative estimates of
22 over 250 or more veterans actively living
23 on the streets of Philadelphia.
24 Additional estimates have another 250
25 veterans in shelters. Shelters are one

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2 step removed from the streets or the last
3 step back on the street, depending on
4 your perspective. The estimate of
5 homelessness and immediate-risk
6 homelessness veterans is roughly 500 to a
7 thousand.

8 Veteran suicide: This is the
9 most dramatic issue, because it is a
10 permanent condition to a temporary
11 problem at a rate of, almost a minimum,
12 of one a day. This is even more
13 compelling considering historically
14 military suicide was actually below the
15 national average. The dilemma represents
16 a reversal from a previous resilient
17 trend. Time Magazine, July reports 20
18 percent of all U.S. suicides are by
19 veterans. Cover story.

20 Veteran unemployment: This one
21 solution can directly affect many of the
22 issues that plague our military men and
23 women. Jobs are difficult. It is a
24 difficult problem to overcome but the
25 easiest to manage and measure. Veteran

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2 unemployment far exceeds that of the
3 national average.

4 From an employer perspective,
5 veterans are trainable. They have a
6 strong work ethic. They are drug free.
7 They understand the mission does not stop
8 at 5 o'clock, and they have one of the
9 number one skills that are very difficult
10 to acquire, but these are needed in
11 business. It's leadership ability. This
12 is one of the best ways of any business
13 that they can contribute to the military
14 and also to the defense of the United
15 States of America.

16 Veterans education and
17 training: Two similar factors that can
18 point to jobs and careers is a return to
19 academics and vocational skill training.
20 In addition, it is generally accepted
21 that veterans are up to two-thirds more
22 likely to have independent business
23 thoughts in starting their own small
24 business or entrepreneurship.

25 Women veterans: Female

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2 veterans represent over 10 percent of the
3 forces operating in Iraq and Afghanistan.

4 Now, I have heard that the
5 divorce rate amongst -- the divorce rate
6 is three times higher than that of their
7 male counterparts. There is also an
8 increase in female homelessness. This
9 brings a unique set of issues of the
10 children who accompany them.

11 There is also both gender
12 specific and family accommodation issues
13 that will arise in these shelters. In
14 general, women suffer a far greater
15 proportion of mental health issues.

16 Now, fiscal responsibility is
17 always a concern. Approximately 10
18 percent of all non-farm businessowners,
19 small businesses, are veterans. It is
20 possible for veterans to go from tax
21 absorption programs to tax contributing
22 just by addressing some of these issues.

23 In closing, I am Andre McCoy
24 and I am sharing some personal
25 observations about veterans, because I am

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2 one of them.

3 (Applause.)

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you.

6 Imam.

7 IMAM NURIDDIN: Is this good
8 evening or good afternoon?

9 I am Imam Kenneth Nuriddin.
10 I'm with a group called the Muslim
11 American Veterans Association. I'm also
12 their national chaplain. I'm the
13 commander of the post here in
14 Philadelphia and the Delaware Valley,
15 which is located at the Philadelphia
16 mosque. And this group was formulated in
17 1998 for a very specific reason. With
18 all of the stereotyping and demonization
19 that we know is in the environment and
20 has been in the environment, there was a
21 need. And it may not be fair and it may
22 even be unfortunate, but there was a need
23 for Muslim American veterans to prove
24 that they are Americans more than
25 anything else as far as their

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2 nationalism, their patriotism, et cetera.

3 So this group was formulated in
4 Washington, DC in 1998 by a former Korean
5 War POW, who has now been deceased for a
6 few years. And it has spread throughout
7 the country, and it exists now in over 40
8 cities with posts throughout the area.

9 The main concern has been to
10 bring a new spirit of involvement, a new
11 spirit of participation among a group of
12 veterans who have been overlooked, who
13 have been marginalized and even
14 disenfranchised historically.

15 And let's step back for a
16 minute when we look at veterans in
17 American history. We see at the end of
18 World War II, which is called the
19 greatest generation, we see the returning
20 veterans became the foundation for the
21 middle class that exists in America
22 today. Through their participation in
23 the GI Bill when it came to education and
24 housing, to such an extent that entire
25 towns were built. I think Levittown, its

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2 whole foundation was based on the GI Bill

3 for housing. And there were others also.

4 There were a few Levittowns. But there

5 were some areas that were ignored, some

6 areas where the access wasn't as great.

7 And so those areas didn't develop and

8 grow even though there were veterans who

9 were living in those areas. And so there

10 could -- and there was a spirit of

11 non-participation or no desire to really

12 participate.

13 So the Muslim American veterans

14 grew out of that environment, with the

15 need and seeing the opportunity to bring

16 a new perspective to those who may have

17 been overlooked. Even though it may not

18 have been their fault, it was their

19 responsibility to do something about it.

20 So that group has been in existence for

21 14 years.

22 But here is where we are today

23 and the reason why we are in these

24 hearings. There is an historic

25 opportunity. And I agree with the

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2 gentleman here. Money or resources is a
3 major part of the issue. And as the
4 young lady in the back who is 27 -- I
5 don't remember her name, but I do
6 remember her age -- she said that there's
7 a different veteran today, but really
8 there's a different set of circumstances.
9 See, in World War II, there was an end
10 game, and all of the veterans stayed
11 until the game was over. And then when
12 they came back, they were able to heal
13 themselves, and they were given the
14 resources to do so. And so there was an
15 opportunity for that door to be closed
16 and another door to be opened, and that
17 is what laid the foundation.

18 Now, we have an opportunity,
19 but here is the challenge that we face.
20 The resources for defense or, as
21 President Eisenhower will say, for the
22 military industrial complex, are close to
23 a trillion dollars, 700 billion, 800
24 billion. The resources are not
25 unlimited. The challenge the veterans

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2 organizations face are competing for
3 those limited resources that they
4 allocate for the soldier once he comes
5 home. There has to be the effort made to
6 expand those programs that exist that can
7 meet the challenge of veterans who get no
8 closure because the war seems to be
9 continuous.

10 And let me speak about my own
11 situation just very briefly, and I'll
12 conclude with this remark.

13 I was under the operational
14 control of the 101st Airborne. So don't
15 hold that against me. We were in an area
16 of the HR Valley called Hamburger Hill,
17 and I can remember all the dynamics of
18 that operation. But I have sort of put
19 it aside when I came home, and for 21
20 years, life went on. I went to school
21 under the GI Bill. I bought a house,
22 blah, blah, blah. We know the
23 opportunity that exists.

24 But what happened was this: 21
25 years ago, which is 21 years after I left

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2 the military -- so that's 42 years in
3 total -- 21 years ago I can remember
4 driving in my car and hearing on the
5 radio -- I was driving in South Philly
6 and Kenyatta Johnson's district on
7 Wharton Street. It was around sunset,
8 around 5 o'clock. It was February, I
9 believe. And on the radio came an
10 announcement saying they are now bombing
11 Baghdad, and I can see the explosions
12 taking place. And for the next five
13 days, I really couldn't account for where
14 I was, and here's the reason why I'm
15 saying that: As long as war continues
16 and is highlighted the way it is, we're
17 going to produce veterans who won't be
18 able to get closure, most of them, their
19 exit strategy, the increase in suicide.
20 See, it's a different type of dynamics
21 that we face today, and we have to begin
22 to get to a point where decisions are
23 made and a better balance can be
24 produced, whereby we give more
25 consideration to bringing the veterans

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2 home and dealing with them instead of
3 redeploying them continuously and
4 continuously.

5 So here is what City Council
6 can do. We have an historic opportunity,
7 because you are presiding over a city
8 where there are 40,000 vacant houses or
9 40,000 parcels of land. And that's --
10 it's a dilemma, when we got so many
11 homeless veterans. We got vacant houses
12 on one side; we got homeless veterans on
13 the other side.

14 We have a situation, and with
15 the new zoning change, here's what
16 Council can do. You can expedite
17 development of properties for veterans.
18 And I don't mean someone says they want
19 to do a property for a veteran, but just
20 as you have community registered
21 organizations that have to be consulted
22 when it comes to anything that takes
23 place in their neighborhood, if there is
24 any development that's going to be for
25 veterans and there's a veterans group in

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2 that neighborhood that is certified, that
3 is organized and that's registered to
4 speak in behalf of the veterans, bring
5 them on board. And if they give the
6 sanction to it, let that be the rubber
7 stamp to expediate a project. Because
8 just as veterans got preference in coming
9 out of the military -- there's a Veterans
10 Court, which is good. There's taxes
11 which are available.

12 City Council can't increase the
13 defense budget, but just as City Council
14 came up with resolutions when the wars
15 began to heat up, they came up with a
16 resolution which shows their position,
17 and the position seems to be more
18 consideration has to be given to the
19 human resource that is part of the
20 military than just the hardware or the
21 expenditure of munitions.

22 We have an historic
23 opportunity, because just as the GI Bill
24 for education and housing produced a
25 middle class, we have to reveal mainly

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2 the urban areas, and we should be looking
3 for the same resources in the GI Bill to
4 help us to rebuild the urban areas,
5 because in rebuilding the urban areas, we
6 can also rebuild the lives of veterans.

7 There are enough organizations
8 that have spoken today. There are enough
9 operations that are ongoing. All of them
10 will let you know that the resources are
11 limited. Many times veterans groups,
12 they have to compete and fight for the
13 same resources.

14 But I'll conclude with this:
15 You have invited us here today, and we
16 are happy to answer your invitation, but
17 here's what we want to know as we leave.
18 In inviting us here, are we sitting at
19 the table as diners or are we on the
20 menu?

21 We want to sit down and work
22 with the government, work with the
23 politicians in the City, work with the
24 private and public veteran service
25 organizations. There has to be a merger

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2 or an agreement between both of them,
3 because the public veterans service
4 organizations represent a bureaucracy
5 that many veterans don't know how to
6 navigate, but the ones that are private
7 are the ones that are down there in the
8 streets and in the trenches, and they're
9 the ones who can actually help to locate
10 and identify veterans who are in need of
11 service.

12 So there has to be a
13 partnership between the two of them. But
14 with City Council, I will strongly
15 recommend that you look at some of the
16 changes that have taken place in the
17 Zoning Code and the Building Code and you
18 see how you can make them be more
19 expediently used by veterans
20 organizations, because they're going to
21 be coming back quicker than we can
22 service them. So we have to make it
23 streamlined.

24 They used to put veterans at
25 the front of the employment line. They

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2 give them ten points and you can almost
3 go right to the front. If a veterans
4 group goes down to L&I and they want to
5 do a property, put them at the front,
6 without charging them the extra money
7 that you charge them.

8 Thank you very much.

9 (Applause.)

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
11 you, Imam. We do thank you. Thank you
12 for your ideas, your statement. And
13 obviously you're from my district. I'm
14 happy to work with you, as is the entire
15 Committee on this issue.

16 If there are any questions for
17 the Imam. If not, Judge, would you like
18 to have something to say.

19 JUDGE CARR DENI: I will make a
20 couple of remarks.

21 Yesterday --

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I'm
23 sure the gentlemen are happy -- thank you
24 very much. No questions.

25 JUDGE CARR DENI: I'll be so

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2 brief that I don't need to sit, but thank
3 you so much. I'm Judge Teresa Carr Deni
4 from Municipal Court. I'm here in
5 support of these men. And I know Captain
6 Christian since my days in high school.

7 Yesterday I visited my
8 cousin's -- my deceased cousin's husband,
9 who was retired, United States Army, 35
10 years, and he's in -- since his wife died
11 four years ago, he's in rather pathetic
12 condition, with diabetes and numerous
13 health issues, and he thought he was
14 covered by the Veterans Administration
15 for medical. And to make a long story
16 short, I made contact with the Veterans
17 Administration and discovered that
18 although he had signed up ten years ago
19 at Willow Grove, at an area that is now
20 closed, he was supposed to send in a
21 renewal once a year, and he didn't
22 realize that, and he could never
23 understand why his request for benefits
24 was being turned down.

25 I think that the Multi-Service

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2 Center for the veterans that has been
3 described here is an invaluable resource
4 for people who are mobile. This man
5 can't get out of the house without major
6 resources to assist him. And one center
7 is barely enough. So I think we've got
8 to support that center with whatever
9 resources we can contribute, because
10 there are people all over the City, like
11 my cousin, who if I hadn't walked in his
12 house just to check on him, they've got
13 nobody. They've got nobody who can -- I
14 then went online and I filled out the
15 application, which was something like a
16 nine-page -- and this was just the
17 renewal application. It was a nine-page
18 application. The questions they asked
19 were unbelievable. They need help with
20 this. I could barely fill it out myself
21 with a law degree. So I can imagine what
22 kind of problems people are facing and
23 why they're not getting their benefits
24 that they've earned.

25 So I just want to support all

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2 these people, all these men, what they've
3 talked about, and I hope City Council
4 will give them the support they're here
5 asking for.

6 Thank you very much.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you, Your Honor.

9 (Applause.)

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: And we
11 thank you for your service on the bench.
12 Thank you for all that you do.

13 JUDGE CARR DENI: Thank you so
14 much.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
16 you, gentlemen.

17 Is there anyone else here who
18 would like to testify? Anyone else here
19 who would like to testify?

20 (Witnesses approached witness
21 table.)

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: These
23 are the final two people in the room who
24 would like to testify. Thank you. And
25 we'll recognize Councilman Oh.

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2 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
3 much, Co-Chairman.

4 I just wanted to recognize that
5 David Christian and Andre McCoy visited
6 my office advocating for veterans and
7 better services for veterans in
8 Philadelphia, and I truly appreciated
9 them coming in with their leadership and
10 expertise and showing up here today. I,
11 of course, reminded David Christian that
12 I got an autograph, photograph of him
13 once upon a time many years ago. So
14 thank you for coming in.

15 And, Imam, thank you so much as
16 well.

17 MR. CHRISTIAN: Thank you.
18 Thank all the members. Thank you.

19 MS. FITCH: Good afternoon. My
20 name is Tykia Fitch. I'm a returning
21 veteran. I spent a year in Iraq. I've
22 dealt with a lot of things since
23 returning home. I've dealt with
24 homelessness, job loss, unemployment. I
25 lost my kids at one point. A lot of

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2 different things, depression. And like
3 right now I'm starting to get myself back
4 together, but for all of those reasons
5 and other reasons also that I really
6 wouldn't mention right now, I'm actually
7 looking to go back into the military.

8 For myself I feel like that was the one
9 point in my life when I was stable.

10 Although I risked my life and did all the
11 things that I wouldn't want for my
12 children to do, I still feel as though it
13 was the most stable time in my life where
14 I was able to provide for my children.

15 That's all I really wanted to
16 say.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
18 you very much, and thank you for your
19 testimony. God bless you.

20 (Applause.)

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
22 you.

23 MR. MARTIN: Yes. My name is
24 Bertram Martin. I'm currently Vice
25 President of Harrison Plaza Housing

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2 Development, and how I got there was,
3 which I never thought that at 49, I
4 would -- my life would turn around. I
5 came down with stage 3B lung cancer, and
6 I went through the VA system and wind up
7 just about being homeless. But through
8 Councilman Darrell Clarke's office,
9 Ms. Blackwell's office reached out and
10 Asia Coney and a few other people, I got
11 into public housing. And I was in a
12 wheelchair, no muscle mass, couldn't
13 walk, the whole nine yards, but thank God
14 it changed and turned around. And in
15 going through all these appointments and
16 so forth at the VA, one night I was at
17 the emergency room and this young man
18 came in, said he was homeless and he
19 wanted to commit suicide and so forth.
20 No one wanted to pay any attention to
21 him. So he went outside, and he came
22 back about ten minutes. It took him ten
23 minutes to find a bottle that he broke on
24 the desk and started to slice his throat.
25 They still wouldn't admit him. So they

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2 called the cops.

3 I went up and said, Can I talk
4 to you? I said, Matter of fact, I'll
5 take you up to the University of
6 Pennsylvania and see if they'll admit
7 you. And I told him my story, you know,
8 about being given 30 days to live and so
9 far I was five years and so forth, and he
10 calmed down. And like I told him, you
11 learn all the things that are necessary
12 for you to sustain your life. You done
13 been through the rough parts.

14 And I was sent to Washington
15 for the Annual Housing Policy Conference
16 and Lobby Day in March. So I just want
17 to read you some excerpts from the
18 HUD-VASH that was sponsored by Home Depot
19 and what I got out of those seminars. I
20 was the only veteran there. Everyone
21 else was contractors, and what they
22 wanted to do was contract with people
23 that had apartment complexes to give them
24 vouchers and to sustain veterans for 20
25 years, to end homelessness in five. So

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2 let me just read this.

3 A Continuum of Care plan to end
4 homelessness in America in ten years and
5 HUD-VASH program to end homelessness in
6 five years for veterans.

7 Thank you for this opportunity
8 to express my concern in reference to
9 their explanation on the HUD-VASH
10 program, specifically to the needs for
11 the veterans in Philadelphia.

12 Their explanation of the
13 HUD-VASH program eligibility and
14 admittance in their flyer seems to focus
15 on overall homelessness versus
16 homelessness for veterans. The fact is
17 both of these issues are important, but
18 the funds allocated for veterans should
19 not be incorporated into the same budget.

20 The Continuum of Care plan
21 created by HUD in 1994 involved multiple
22 local stakeholders. There was an
23 assessment of the needs of homeless
24 people and the creation of a plan for
25 delivering housing services to meet the

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2 needs -- those needs, and it has been
3 used to distribute funding for federal
4 homeless programs. The Continuum of Care
5 plan was formally recognized in law by
6 the HEART Act of 2009.

7 The first part of this chapter
8 presented a sketch of the Continuum of
9 Care plan, but instead it focused on
10 potential ties to preserving the stock of
11 federally assisted affordable housing.
12 The Continuum of Care plan offers few
13 resources for advocates to use to
14 preserve federally assisted housing for
15 veterans.

16 I attended, like I said, the
17 2012 Annual Housing Policy Conference and
18 Lobby Day hosted by the National Low
19 Income Housing Coalition in Washington,
20 DC in March 2012. The workshop targeted
21 the veterans HUD-VASH. Thirty-one out of
22 every 10,000 veterans are currently
23 experiencing homelessness, and
24 approximately 67,500 veterans are
25 experiencing homelessness on any given

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2 night. The Continuum of Care to end
3 homelessness in America in ten years and
4 HUD-VASH to end homelessness in veterans
5 in five years.

6 My concerns for this committee
7 are, you know, y'all can help us. How
8 can this be accomplished when there are
9 homeless shelters recently closed and how
10 many of these displaced people were
11 veterans and how much assistance was
12 given to these people?

13 Have you identified the number
14 of female veterans with and without
15 children and their specific needs?

16 There are many roadblocks in
17 the HUD-VASH flyer, specifically
18 stereotype eligibility, limited
19 clinicians to meet the demand for the
20 applications, and the review process and
21 timeframe for approval.

22 How many HUD-VASH vouchers are
23 allocated for Philadelphia County and is
24 this information accessible to anyone?
25 Which I think was answered, but I

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2 couldn't get those answers and I told
3 them I was going to ask y'all to get
4 those answers. So maybe that's why they
5 came, because they're not giving out any
6 information.

7 And when I came back, I had two
8 appointments, Thursday and Friday, came
9 back Wednesday night. I have also now
10 skin cancer that I have to go in a photo
11 light machine three times a week. So I
12 usually go three, four, five times a
13 week. I never heard of HUD-VASH until I
14 went to this program, and when I tried to
15 ask questions, the veteran service
16 officer, he never heard of it. So they
17 referred me up to the counselor's
18 department on the eighth floor.

19 And my concern is for the
20 Vietnam era veterans that didn't sign up
21 by the cut-off date -- and this is what I
22 brought out at the workshop -- how can
23 you end homelessness in veterans when all
24 veterans are entitled to medical
25 attention? So if you already homeless,

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2 you might have mental issues now or
3 alcohol issues or drug issues. So you
4 can't address his needs through HUD-VASH.

5 And so what programs will there
6 be to assist the veterans to gain
7 employment? It seems like they have to
8 have income. Workshop in Washington said
9 there would be vouchers for veterans
10 chronic or otherwise.

11 On Monday when I was going down
12 to the HUD-VASH office, a guy stopped me
13 to thank me for helping him get a job,
14 and he said that he went down to apply
15 for some help. He was living with his
16 mother, but his mother was ready for him
17 to go, and he wasn't working. He was
18 getting the non-service-connected
19 disability, \$900 a month. They didn't
20 help him. He had to go to this gentleman
21 that just left, his vet center at 4th and
22 Race, and they gave him what -- he got
23 that job. So that's \$2,000 a month plus
24 the nine, but it's only for nine months.
25 So at the end of the nine months, he

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2 didn't know if he will be able to keep
3 this job.

4 So the way things is looking
5 now with somebody I hooked him up with,
6 he probably will be able to keep this
7 job, but they gave him 650, two month's
8 security rent and one month's rent. So
9 he's living in an apartment.

10 But, see, those are the things
11 that concern me, because everybody don't
12 have the help like I had. And a lot of
13 people don't have the strength. Because
14 I used to get up after about 1 o'clock in
15 the morning, hook that oxygen up to the
16 wheelchair and wheel around into the
17 service area. And I get out and push,
18 get tired, sit down, get out and push.
19 The only therapy I had was the therapy I
20 gave myself. And maybe it was a little
21 vanity. I didn't want nobody to see me
22 in a wheelchair. Now, I came here with,
23 you know, the walker, you know, for
24 certain things that PHA may have had, and
25 then I have been volunteering for six and

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2 a half years with the Women's
3 Revitalization Coalition down on 4th and
4 Fairmount.

5 So that's about all I have to
6 say.

7 COUNCILMAN JONES: Well, I
8 think you said a lot, and I want you to
9 know we heard you and some of the gaps in
10 the service provision.

11 I want to say this, that first
12 of all, foremost, thank you for
13 everything you did and continue to do now
14 by enlightening us so we can help others.
15 So we thank you.

16 The second thing is, this is
17 not just us doing this. That's not what
18 we do. We're going to use this
19 information. The question was on the
20 resolution, is the City of Philadelphia
21 and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania ready to
22 receive and service existing veterans and
23 new returning heroes. And the answer is
24 a resounding no. That's number one.

25 What was also said that I think

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2 is very important is that this hearing is
3 the precursor to a series of then digging
4 down into the weeds, well, what are we
5 doing about housing? What are we doing
6 about healthcare? And we may solicit the
7 support from the state and federal
8 government to do a joint hearing on that,
9 because rather than have three different
10 hearings and everybody point to each
11 other as to what they're not doing, let's
12 get them all in the room and figure this
13 thing out.

14 And then, finally, I think
15 Councilwoman Bass said it best, that we
16 had a plan. When you went into basic,
17 there was a plan. You had a
18 regimentality that you knew what the day
19 would bring. And then you returned to us
20 and kind of sort of there's no plan, or
21 none that we can recognize.

22 MR. MARTIN: Not cutting you
23 off. The one thing that I thank God for
24 is, I got out on a Thursday night, got to
25 Philadelphia about ten minutes to 9:00,

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2 and I started work on Monday morning.

3 So, I mean, Philadelphia had plenty of
4 jobs back then.

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: See, the
6 difference is also your
7 self-determination. Everybody isn't as
8 resilient as you. And whether you're
9 resilient, it shouldn't be up to your
10 resiliency; it should be up to our
11 capacity to help you. And that's what
12 we're going to work on, and we're going
13 to exercise that. And at the end of the
14 day, Cindy Bass said it best for me, that
15 that plan was there when you went in.
16 There should be a returning plan when you
17 come out. Your options shouldn't have to
18 be to go leave your family again, even
19 though we appreciate if that is your
20 choice, but you should have other options
21 too.

22 Any other comments?

23 Councilman Oh.

24 COUNCILMAN OH: Yeah. I
25 certainly -- well, first of all, thank

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2 you for your service and thank you for
3 being with us and thank you for being
4 here. Both of you have overcome some
5 very difficult circumstances to still be
6 with us.

7 You know, I am not familiar
8 with today's female veteran, our female
9 soldier, and so I am curious about a
10 number of things. And I don't want to
11 prolong this, so maybe on another
12 occasion, but I certainly am very
13 interested to know as a female military
14 person, you returning to civilian life,
15 if your expectations of what would be
16 available to you and how you would be
17 received and those type of things were
18 quite different in large part because of
19 your gender. I'm also interested to know
20 if there was available to you the kind of
21 support.

22 I chair the 82nd Airborne, as
23 we talked today. We're a veterans group.
24 I just don't know that there's many
25 support groups or people reaching out to

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2 the female soldiers, sailors, Marines,
3 you know, pilots or whomever. So that
4 I'm very curious, without getting into
5 your personal life, just your experience
6 as a female service person.

7 MS. FITCH: There was really no
8 groups. There was no groups. As far as
9 like female soldiers that have children,
10 there was basically nothing. I went to
11 JAG a couple of times, and JAG told me to
12 just sign my kids over. That's basically
13 the whole thing, just sign your kids
14 over. And when I came back, there was
15 really nothing. There was really
16 nothing, you know. Basically I was told
17 it's hard to find a job but even harder
18 to find a career. So at one point, I
19 felt like once I reached the gates, the
20 military closed the door basically.

21 COUNCILMAN JONES: The Chair
22 recognizes -- are you -- I'm sorry.

23 COUNCILMAN OH: Yes, I am.

24 Thank you very much for sharing
25 that.

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2 COUNCILMAN JONES: The Chair
3 recognizes Councilman Oh and then we'll
4 close out with Councilwoman Blackwell. I
5 mean Johnson. I'm sorry. It's been a
6 long hearing.

7 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Okay.
8 First and foremost, I thank everybody for
9 their presentation. I thank the
10 leadership of Councilwoman Blackwell as
11 well as Councilman Curtis Jones, as well
12 as all of the members of both of these
13 committees who have participated in these
14 hearings.

15 For me, this issue has always
16 been personal, primarily because my dad
17 was a veteran, and I remember after he
18 passed away, I was able to receive
19 veterans benefits to kind of help me and
20 my family along as I grew up as a young
21 man. But, more importantly, my patriotic
22 side just exudes the expectations that if
23 you serve this country, you should come
24 home with the red carpet. And we
25 shouldn't really be having this hearing,

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2 to be quite frank with you. That's just
3 my perspective. That's how I've always
4 been primarily as a young man.

5 I am proud of a project I
6 worked on, when you talk about housing,
7 called the Patriot House in South
8 Philadelphia, specifically housing for
9 veterans, similar to what the Imam talked
10 about. We were able to get the project
11 through on a community level. The
12 community supports it. We got the
13 vouchers from the federal government, but
14 we also are looking at streamlining the
15 process, because the bureaucratic process
16 will discourage you from applying to get
17 a house. And so that's what we're
18 working on right now before we go into
19 phase two.

20 And also when I was in North
21 Carolina with the Councilman and
22 participating in the convention, I was
23 able to attend -- it wasn't the veterans
24 caucus. It was more -- it was the
25 Conference on U.S. Mayors. They have an

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2 initiative called the Global Initiative
3 where they're focusing on recruiting a
4 hundred thousand veterans for employment
5 and career opportunities. And I don't
6 know why that's not here just yet, but I
7 would think that that would be a part of
8 this conversation as we move forward to
9 see what's out there, what's available.
10 And I'm quite sure once the Council
11 President starts having these roundtable
12 discussions, that some of those type of
13 resources will be available and actually
14 brought to the table as a part of the
15 discussions to support veterans just in
16 general.

17 So, again, I commend the
18 leadership hosting this. I think this
19 was great. And I don't understand how --
20 while this is the City of Brotherly Love,
21 this is also the birthplace of the
22 nation. And so when you're talking about
23 those who serve our country, those who
24 keep us safe, it's something that I don't
25 take lightly, because I traveled through

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2 different countries throughout my little
3 short lifetime and I definitely
4 understand what it is to represent this
5 country and know what it's like, and I
6 don't take our freedom for granted. So,
7 of course, you're here on the day of
8 September 11th. And so thank you for
9 taking the time symbolically out of your
10 schedule to talk about this very
11 important issue.

12 Thank you.

13 COUNCILMAN JONES:

14 Councilwoman.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
16 you, Mr. Chairman and members of both
17 committees, and certainly we thank you
18 for staying so long and your commitment
19 to try to say what you thought needed to
20 be said on this issue.

21 Many of us have tried to work
22 for many, many years in trying to create
23 veterans housing and trying to be
24 involved with feeding vets and many
25 aspects of this whole issue. Many of us

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2 have -- I believe that what is different
3 is that Council now collectively, this
4 hearing has had them have a collective
5 voice, so it will be easier so that we
6 don't individually have to deal in our
7 areas and deal with our city to try to
8 get it done, but I think there will be a
9 more collective focus on trying to do it
10 as a body that will help us all. It's
11 always harder when you feel you're
12 fighting individually, but it's always
13 better when the body fights and advocates
14 together on your behalf.

15 So, again, we say thank you,
16 and we're looking for improved conditions
17 and policies to come. God bless you.

18 MR. MARTIN: God bless y'all
19 too.

20 COUNCILMAN JONES: This
21 concludes our hearing, and we keep it
22 open at the call of the Chair. And thank
23 you all both for your patriotism and your
24 patience. Thank you.

25 (Joint Committees on Public

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2 Safety and Housing, Neighborhood

3 Development and the Homeless adjourned at

4 4:55 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the
proceedings, evidence and objections are
contained fully and accurately in the
stenographic notes taken by me upon the
foregoing matter on September 11, 2012, and
that this is a true and correct transcript of
same.

MICHELE L. MURPHY
RPR-Notary Public

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