

[IAVA: NYC Vets Blast Weak Budget Increase](#)

Vets also decry Mayor de Blasio's reversal on vet benefits

New York (June 23, 2015) – Late last night, after months of pressure from IAVA and other veterans groups, Mayor Bill de Blasio and City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito [announced](#) a budget deal for Fiscal Year 2016, beginning July 1 including \$1.5 million in new staff and resources to ending chronic veteran homelessness, and \$335,000 to fund a team of Veterans Service Officers.

“Doubling a pittance is still a pittance. Even with this increase, New York still allocates less than half what Boston does – a city with one-twelfth of New York City’s vet population,” said Paul Rieckhoff, CEO and Founder of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA). “New York City’s lack of commitment to veterans is an embarrassment that has become a national story and a stain for all patriotic New Yorkers. The city’s lack of commitment is insulting to veterans. IAVA’s more than 10,000 New York City members – many of whom were also 9/11 first-responders – and hundreds of thousands members nationwide demand a real response to the issues we face, ranging from suicide to the closing of beds at the Brooklyn VA.”

The proposed budget is widely seen as controversial as it ignores the recommendations of veterans advocates across the region to support Council Member Eric Ulrich’s – Chairman of the City Council’s Veteran’s Committee – bill ([City Council Bill 3.314](#)) to form a city Department of Veteran’s Services. The establishment of a department would provide substantial resources and options for veterans seeking help on a range of issues, including housing, healthcare and employment. The bill has broad bipartisan support with more than 40 supporters on the City Council, and last week veterans stood on the steps of City Hall with Public Advocate Letitia James to voice their support for the establishment of a dedicated department.

“We call on Speaker Mark-Viverito to publicly state her position on this important bill,” continued Rieckhoff, “and we call on her and all members of the city council to stand with IAVA in calling on the Mayor to pass the bill, increase the budget dramatically and show a real plan for New York City vets.”

This budget announcement comes just days after it was revealed that the VA plans to close a 25-bed facility at the Brooklyn VA Medical Center in Bay Ridge, and an investigation into the misuse of \$54 million in funds at a Bronx VA Hospital.

The action also comes on the heels of the Mayor’s Memorandum of Opposition to the Veterans Equality Act ([Bill 4313-A](#)), issued on June 19. The act would allow public employees who are veterans of U.S. military service to buy

back up to three years of state pension service credit. It would allow all public employees to be eligible if they had at least five years of actual service credit and were honorably discharged from military service, regardless of when or where they served.

Mayor de Blasio previously held a press event and photo op prior to Memorial Day to announce his support for the Veteran's Equality Act. In opposing the bill, the mayor now sites budgetary constraints, indicating that "every dollar spent to fund benefit enhancements means one less dollar for the City's discretionary budget which is used to fund essential services."

Over the last few months, IAVA and other local veteran leaders have been putting on the mayor and the city council to increase funding for the city's vet programs. For more information on IAVA's policy recommendations for New York City visit iava.org/nycvets.