

[NYC Public Advocate Letitia James Joins Fight for Veteran Community](#)

Vets calls on Mayor de Blasio to support creation of Department of Veterans Affairs

New York (June 17, 2015) – New York City Public Advocate Letitia James today joined the fight to provide more resources for New York City’s diverse veteran community. On the steps of [City Hall](#), James stood with Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and other city veterans leaders calling upon Mayor Bill de Blasio to increase funding for the city’s veterans programs and support the creation of a first ever Department of Veterans Affairs.

“Our veterans deserve the attention and services afforded by a dedicated department,” said **Paul Rieckhoff, CEO and Co-Founder of IAVA**. “Mayor de Blasio has done little more than pay lip service to the nearly quarter-million veterans in our city. In a town with a budget of more than \$75 billion, a meager \$600,000 is designated for veterans through the Mayor’s Office of Veterans Affairs (MOVA). Without resources, MOVA is nothing more than an empty symbol.”

Since being elected, Mayor de Blasio has consistently fought the expansion of MOVA, including expanding its budget and creating a Department of Veterans Affairs. This action would bring greater services to NYC veterans and has overwhelming support in the city council. Public Advocate James has been a staunch supporter of the creation of this measure, as well as the creation of an emergency housing assistance fund for disabled veterans.

“Veterans who have fought to defend our homeland are often left homeless when they return from the battlefield,” said **Public Advocate James**. “I am proud to be joined by Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America in urging Mayor de Blasio to expand the Mayor’s Office of Veteran Affairs and increase funding for programs to benefit New York City veterans. We sleep easily at night because of the sacrifices our veterans make; it is our responsibility to ensure they sleep easily at night knowing they are supported and cared for by the City of New York.”

Many disabled veterans in New York City receive either service connected disability benefits or disability pensions from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. These are often not enough for disabled veterans to afford market rate apartments in New York City. Skyrocketing rents in New York City put disabled veterans at constant risk of being evicted and joining the ranks of homeless veterans.

“The Mayor’s Office of Veterans Affairs currently doesn’t have enough staff

to field a softball team, let alone manage and coordinate veterans affairs for the largest municipal government in the nation,” said **Kristen Rouse, Interim Director of the New York City Veteran’s Alliance**. “New York City has more than 220,000 veterans, plus an additional 250,000 spouses and dependents who are affected by veterans policies. Together, this number represents approximately one-in-sixteen New York City residents whose lives are affected by MOVA’s ability to manage complex programs and resources across city government. The Mayor needs to recognize the importance of this critical function and get behind resourcing, staffing, and empowering an independent agency to manage the city’s veterans affairs.”

“New York City is in a unique position to become a municipal leader on veterans’ issues. With 6,844 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs disability claims pending and 3,380 stuck in the New York Regional Office backlog, our veterans need help. City veterans wait an average of 225 days for the completion of a claim, a significantly higher time than the national average of 184 days. It is crucial that the mayor take real action to implement benefits and services that directly impact the lives of veterans and their families,” added Rieckhoff.

Lee Covino, the Borough Hall veterans and military affairs adviser said, “It’s time for the City of New York to become a veteran-friendly city like Boston, where a fully-funded direct services agency is helping the veterans of their city every day.”

As the largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to the fastest growing segment of the veteran community, IAVA supports the recommendations made by Public Advocate James to create tangible support for New York City veterans.