



Statement of Vadim Panasyuk
Sr. Veteran Transition Manager, VA Benefits Lead
of
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Of America
before the
New York City Council Committee on Veterans

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Chairman Deutsch and distinguished members of the Committee, on behalf of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and our more than 425,000 members, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify here today on the pending legislation. My name is Vadim Panasyuk. I am a New Yorker, a Ukrainian expatriate and a naturalized citizen, an Iraq war veteran having served two tours with the 3rd Infantry Division, and Masters level social worker working as a Senior Veteran Transition Manager (VTM), VA Benefits Lead with IAVA's Rapid Response Referral Program, or "RRRP" for short. RRRP is IAVA's high-tech, high-touch referral service for veterans and their families with a complete and comprehensive case management component. We assist veterans of all eras, with any discharge status, worldwide in confronting significant challenges like unemployment, financial or legal struggles, homelessness and mental health related issues. To date, RRRP has served almost 9,000 veterans and family members nationwide, and over 1,000 in New York City alone, providing critical support and resources to ensure that this city's veteran's needs are effectively met.

After fourteen years, IAVA has become the preferred empowerment organization for post-9/11 veterans. While our members are spread throughout the nation, we are proud to say that our national headquarters is located in New York City. Since its beginning, IAVA has fought for and has been successful in advocating for policies that are able to meet the needs of our newest generation of veterans, which includes our advocacy towards the creation, proper funding and oversight of the Department of Veterans Services (DVS).

DVS has enormous potential and its establishment nearly two years ago was a historic moment for veterans of this city. DVS can significantly streamline access and improve service delivery to many of the most critical veteran-specific programs and resources already available here. Today we voice our concern to the Veterans Committee that Additional Reporting Requirements for the Department in their current form do not do enough to measure effectiveness and to ensure proper oversight of DVS and its programs, to include VetConnect NYC.



IAVA supports the intent behind this bill. However, it appears that it is somewhat redundant as some of the data is already widely available, and does not require the reporting of necessary metrics to accurately evaluate this Department's performance and many of its various initiatives. IAVA is a data-driven organization, and as such our view is that when appropriate metrics are applied for measuring program performance and veteran outcomes, services delivered can continue to improve and become more accessible and effective for the target population. This approach also empowers us to identify positive and negative trends, and to better document accomplishments to be studied and replicated elsewhere. This bill does not require the reporting of organizational and programmatic metrics necessary to accurately assess DVS' performance or its impact on this city's veterans.

IAVA has applied metrics as a service standard to various components of our RRRP Team. RRRP is staffed by a dedicated team of masters-level Veteran Transition Managers. For example: our clients receive a survey every time we make a referral. The client is able to provide feedback and rank the Quality, Timeliness, Effectiveness, and Customer service of every organization we refer to. We also provide the same opportunity to the client to grade RRRP, as well as the VTM they were working with once the case is closed providing us with a gauge of our own performance. Using qualitative data in tandem with quantitative metrics has helped us better understand the needs of the population we serve and to continue to make targeted improvements to the services we provide.

As a Senior VTM, I've also had the pleasure to work with many at VetConnect NYC and we have found them to be very responsive and easy to work with, but we have had challenges in seamlessly receiving referrals. One of the challenges is a burdensome increase in the amount of digital paperwork needed to sync the work of our case management team and VetConnect NYC. Another clear deficit we can see is a lack of a comprehensive case management component. We also view the requirement to use the VetConnect software to participate in the network as a barrier limiting the number and types of programs available through VetConnect NYC. As VetConnect NYC continues to find its footing as a platform, we encourage this committee to provide them with the oversight and tools they need to be successful.

Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to share IAVA's views on these issues today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.