



**Testimony on behalf of Volunteers of America-Greater New York  
The New York City Council Committee on Veterans  
Preliminary Budget Hearing  
March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

Introduction and Thanks:

My name is Eric Lee, and I am the Director of Public Policy for Volunteers of America- Greater New York (VOA-GNY). We are a local affiliate of the national organization, Volunteers of America, Inc (VOA). I would like to thank Chair Holden and members of the Committee on Veterans for the opportunity to testify today.

About Us:

VOA-GNY is an anti-poverty organization that aims to end homelessness in Greater New York through housing, health and wealth building services. We are one of the region's largest human service providers, impacting more than 12,000 adults and children annually through 70+ programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester. We are also an active nonprofit developer of supportive and affordable housing, with a robust portfolio permanent supportive housing, affordable and senior housing properties—with more in the pipeline.

Background:

Volunteers of America has provided direct services to veterans since World War I. VOA-GNY carries on this legacy by offering a continuum of care to support New York City's veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, serving 750 veterans every year. In addition to providing acute crisis intervention, counseling, financial assistance and housing placement services to veterans in the community, we are one of the largest providers of supportive housing for veterans in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester County, and we are extremely proud of our involvement in New York City's initiative which successfully eliminated chronic homelessness among veterans.

Our Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) community-based outreach program identifies low-income veteran households and connects them with a range of supportive services to promote housing stability and prevent homelessness.

Budget Priorities:

Thank you, Chair Holden, members of this Committee and the entire City Council, for your unwavering leadership and commitment to supporting veterans who served our country. **We are extremely grateful for the Council's steadfast support of VOA-GNY through the Veterans Community Development citywide initiative, and we are seeking the Veterans Committee's support for our funding renewal request (Ref 181375) in the FY26 Budget.** Given the growing uncertainty of Federal resources, the funding the Council provides through this initiative is even more critical to enriching the lives of the veterans we serve.

VOA-GNY utilizes initiative funding to enhance services for veterans within our citywide VA-funded SSVF program as well as veterans housed within our multiple permanent supportive



housing sites. This includes art therapy services, which Chair Holden has championed as extremely impactful for the mental and emotional well-being of veterans. Through the initiative, we also connect veterans to employment and training opportunities in high-demand fields like transportation, healthcare and construction. We are seeking an expansion of our funding request this year (\$100,000 request, an increase of \$26,000 from FY25) to help veterans to cover costs related to training and employment, housing placements, and daily basic needs, as well as enriching therapeutic programming, education and recreational services at our congregate housing sites which have set-aside units for veterans.

#### Legislative Priorities:

##### **Int. 29-2024 (Farias)**

VOA-GNY supports Int. 29 which would provide training to first responders and service providers to recognize the symptoms of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) in survivors of Domestic Violence (DV). Both veterans and DV survivors<sup>i</sup> disproportionately suffer from TBIs due to the injuries they sustain to the head and neck, but while the US Department of Veterans Affairs does mandatory screenings for veterans<sup>ii</sup> who served in combat operations, there is no comparable screening for survivors, and wider training on TBI will help both populations **Thank you Chair Holden and Council Member Nurse your co-sponsorship of Int. 29, and we urge the Committee to join in advocating for passage of this legislation, as well as your leadership in prioritizing funding for first responders in the FY26 Budget to receive TBI training, to ensure our best and bravest have the resources they need to save lives.**

##### **Res. 16-2024 (Paladino)**

VOA-GNY supports veterans and others in institutional settings, and we applaud Council Member Paladino for championing Res. 16-2024 which would increase the personal needs allowance, putting more money in the pockets of deserving Americans.

#### In Closing:

Thank you, Chair Holden and Members of the Committee, for your steadfast commitment to our city's veterans, and for ensuring that providers like VOA-GNY are equipped with the resources we need to support them in living fulfilling lives with the honor and respect they all deserve.

Testimony respectfully submitted by Eric Lee.

For more information, please contact me at [elee@voa-gny.org](mailto:elee@voa-gny.org).

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<sup>i</sup> Lifshitz J., Crabtree-Nelson S., Kozlowski D.A. Traumatic Brain Injury in Victims of Domestic Violence. J. Aggress. Maltreatment Trauma. 2019;28:655–659. doi: 10.1080/10926771.2019.1644693. [DOI]

<sup>ii</sup> Polytrauma/TBI System of Care, U.S. Dept of Veterans Affairs, [https://www.polytrauma.va.gov/system-of-care/TBI\\_Screening.asp](https://www.polytrauma.va.gov/system-of-care/TBI_Screening.asp)