



# Letitia James

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**TESTIMONY  
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON VETERANS  
OVERSIGHT - EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MOVA'S ROLE  
SERVING NEW YORK CITY'S VETERANS.**

**MAY 6, 2015  
CITY HALL**

Good afternoon members of the City Council Committee on Veterans. My name is Oswaldo Pereira. I am an outreach coordinator in the Office of Public Advocate Letitia James and also a veteran. I thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee on behalf of Public Advocate James. Before I begin, I'd like to note that I am reading this testimony on behalf of the Public Advocate, not myself.

Over the past few months both I and representatives from my office have met with leaders from a host of organizations representing the interests of veterans including Disabled Veterans of America; Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans; the Wounded Warrior Project; the United War Veterans Council; the American Legion; New York Metro Vets; New York City Serves; New York City Veterans Alliance; the National Association of Black Veterans; and the Bronx Veterans' Mentors. The overwhelming consensus among these veterans groups and others is that the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs (MOVA) must be strengthened to meet the growing needs of New York City's veteran community and their families.

Unfortunately, today many veterans throughout New York City feel forgotten and uncared for. Many have expressed the sentiment that, of all cities in the U.S., our City should rise to meet the challenge of caring for our veterans. Our City, which was so ruthlessly attacked fourteen years ago by a small group of terrorists and experienced the largest terrorist attack that our nation has ever suffered, should better understand the sacrifices that veterans have made and the needs that result from those sacrifices. New York City veterans return home after serving in the longest war this nation has ever seen and sacrificed parts of themselves – both physically and emotionally – that they can never regain. To think that veterans would have to return home to fight even further for the most basic services seems both unjust and unpatriotic.

Three weeks ago I stood on the steps of City Hall and witnessed a large group of veterans assembled in protest calling for better services and demanding to be treated with the respect that they have surely earned. While I know that much of that fault lies at the feet of the federal VA, I could not help but think about what we are doing locally. Disappointingly, our Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs is not funded in a way that reflects the actual needs of our veterans. With a staff of six and a budget of \$600,000, MOVA is not in a position to provide the services that our veterans truly need. Think for one moment about the numbers: we have over 200,000 veterans city-wide. With a budget of \$600,000, that means we are allocating just three dollars per veteran.



**PUBLIC ADVOCATE** FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

# **Letitia James**

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Veterans deserve to have a department that can truly serve their needs. I am concerned that MOVA, as it is currently funded, does not have the resources necessary to serve the needs of our veterans. As we head into executive budget negotiations, I urge this Committee, the rest of the Council and our Mayor to please give our veterans the support that they both need and have earned.

Good afternoon and thank you again for the opportunity to speak before this committee.