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# Review of the New York City Department of Veterans' Services' VetConnectNYC Portal

Department of Veterans' Services

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
**OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER**  
MARK D. LEVINE

August 18, 2026

To the Residents of the City of New York:

My office has conducted a review of the New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) to determine whether the agency is effectively connecting the City's veterans and their families with essential services and programs through VetConnectNYC.

The review found that since its launch in 2018, VetConnectNYC has been marred by inconsistent and poor system delivery. As of the close of this review in May 2026—nearly eight years later—the portal still did not streamline access to veterans' services as promised. The portal was originally developed and operated by Syracuse University (2018 to 2020) and later operated by Unite USA (2020 to 2024). DVS allowed the contract to expire in June 2024 without a replacement. The portal was disabled from July 2024 until July 2025. During this period, DVS provided links to online forms which were responded to manually, one by one.

In September 2024, DVS contracted with Combined Arms to implement a new portal by November 2024. However, Combined Arms did not relaunch VetConnectNYC until July 2025, eight months late, and the portal currently does not provide basic user access or case management functionality. The portal does not consistently allow veterans and DVS staff to log in and does not correctly route veterans' service requests to designated DVS staff. Additionally, the portal does not allow supervisory personnel to access each of the areas they oversee, and it does not send automated email reminders to DVS staff to follow up with veterans as planned. In January 2026, Combined Arms migrated system data from one web hosting platform to another, causing a number of issues that were not promptly remediated and, in some cases, remain unresolved.

The review makes six recommendations which DVS generally agreed to implement.

The results of the review have been discussed with DVS officials, and their comments have been considered in preparing this report. DVS' complete written response is attached to this report.

If you have any questions concerning this report, please email my Audit Bureau at [audit@comptroller.nyc.gov](mailto:audit@comptroller.nyc.gov).

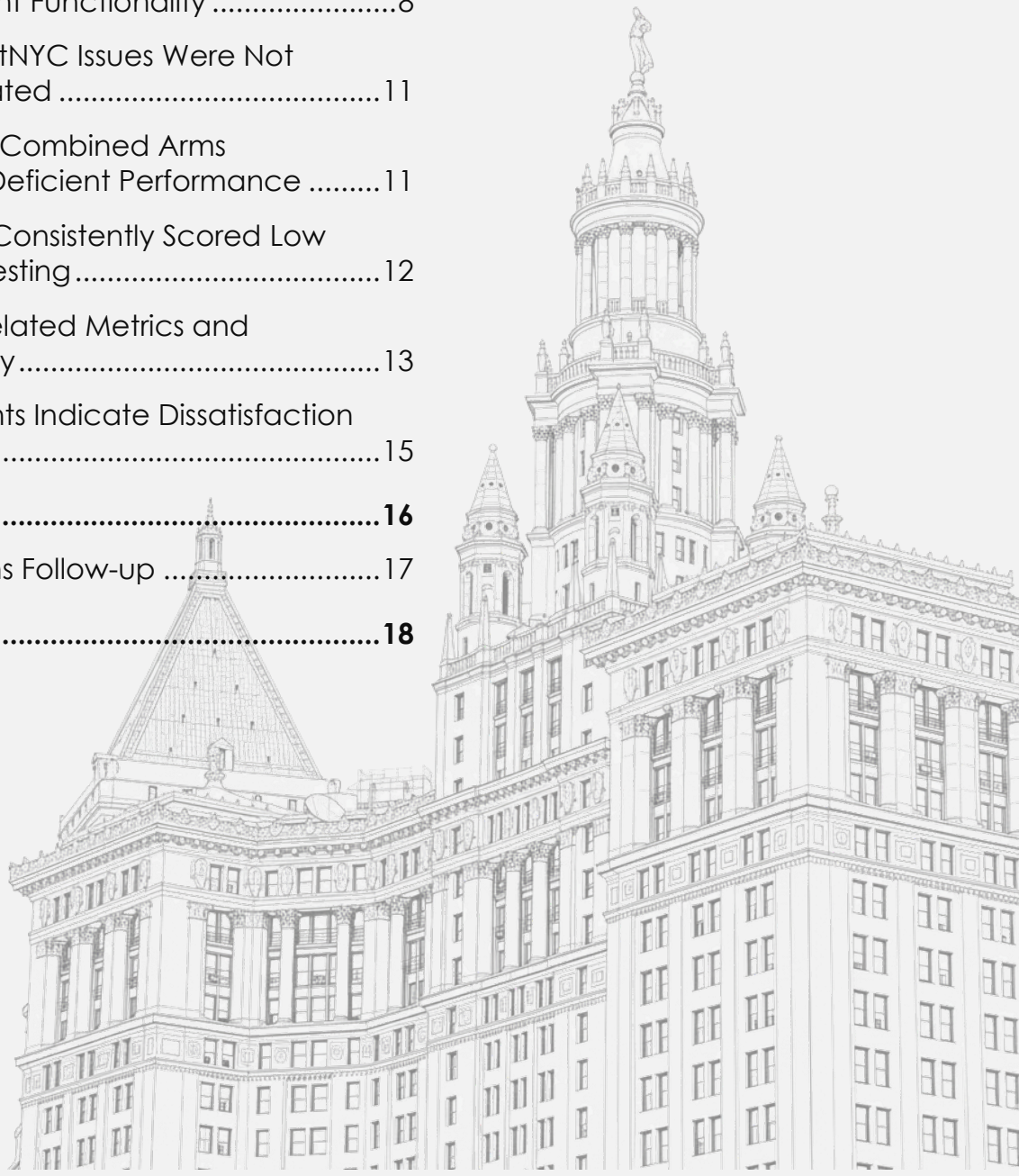
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mark Levine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark D. Levine  
New York City Comptroller

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# Introduction

## Background

The New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) was established in 2016 as the first standalone municipal-level department in the United States dedicated to veterans. DVS' mission is to "connect, mobilize, and empower New York City's Veteran community in order to foster purpose-driven lives for US Military Service Members... [and] their caregivers, survivors, and families." DVS works with various agencies and organizations to help veterans access housing, employment, and financial resources and benefits, among other things.

DVS is one of the smallest New York City agencies. For Fiscal Year 2025, DVS reported expenditures of approximately \$6.1 million and employed 36 staff as of fiscal year-end.

Based on the most recent American Community Survey, there were approximately 122,700 veterans living in New York City during 2024. At the time of the last survey, nearly 34% of veterans living in the City were 75 or older; almost 54% were 65 or older; and almost 71% were 55 or older. The table below presents the veteran population by age bracket.

**Table 1. NYC Veterans Population**

| Age          | NYC Veteran Population | Percentage  |
|--------------|------------------------|-------------|
| <b>75+</b>   | 41,479                 | 33.79%      |
| <b>65–74</b> | 24,445                 | 19.91%      |
| <b>55–64</b> | 21,145                 | 17.22%      |
| <b>35–54</b> | 25,057                 | 20.41%      |
| <b>18–34</b> | 10,635                 | 8.67%       |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>122,761</b>         | <b>100%</b> |

Source: DVS 2024 data

## VetConnectNYC

In 2018, the City announced the launch of a centralized "one-stop-shop" online portal, VetConnectNYC, to streamline the service request and referral process. The City contracted with Syracuse University to develop and maintain this portal

to allow veterans and their families to request services, coordinate a network of service providers, and provide licenses for access to a case management system to allow providers to accept, decline, or reroute service requests and to manage and report on cases. The portal was to allow veterans and their families to electronically request services and programs related to housing, healthcare, education, employment, financial, and legal services, and support for families. Between 2018 and 2020, DVS paid Syracuse University \$964,000.

When the contract with Syracuse University expired in 2020, the City contracted with Unite USA Inc. to ensure business continuity and prevent disruption of critical services. Unite USA previously worked as a subcontractor for Syracuse University. The City entered a subscription service agreement directly with Unite USA to provide licenses to access their proprietary case management software. Between 2020 and 2024, DVS paid Unite USA \$860,042. After Unite USA's contract expired in June 2024, the VetConnectNYC portal was disabled. DVS temporarily transitioned service request processing internally through Microsoft Forms made available on the agency's website.

In September 2024, a three-year contract was awarded to a new vendor, Combined Arms, for development of a new VetConnectNYC system with an expected launch in November 2024. The new contract specified that the new portal would allow veterans and their families to create user account profiles, submit service requests, and access historical information associated with their accounts. Additionally, the portal was supposed to provide DVS with the capacity to manage and coordinate service requests and referrals, and to generate performance metric reports, including client demographics, service type requests, case statuses and outcomes, and case response times.

In exchange for these services, DVS agreed to pay Combined Arms up to \$450,000 for the three-year contract period. As of May 2026, DVS has paid Combined Arms \$268,750.

## **Concerns Raised by Veterans, Advocates, and New York City Council**

The New York City Council held an oversight hearing on VetConnectNYC in September 2019. Council Members, veterans, and advocates raised several concerns related to ease of access to VetConnectNYC and its usability. They also raised concerns about the lack of follow-up with veterans and their families to collect feedback, and lack of data about the number of requests by service type, demographic information about requestors, and outcomes. City Council noted that this data was needed to inform decision-making, effectively provide appropriate services, and measure outcomes. Additionally, based on DVS testimony about the number of veterans served between November 2018 and

August 2019, the City Council raised concerns about the small number of veterans served relative to the overall population of New York City veterans.

In April 2025, the New York City Council released its first City Agency Report Card to measure how effectively agencies serve New Yorkers and identify ways to improve operations and services. DVS received an overall grade of “C” which indicated, in part, that internal processes needed improvement. The report also cited the need for significant digital infrastructure improvements, stating that the majority of stakeholders questioned the effectiveness of VetConnectNYC, that veterans, advocates, and non-profit partners expressed frustration with the portal, and that the City Council had concerns that many of the issues raised in 2019 remained unresolved more than five years later. Almost two-thirds of respondents to the City Council’s survey stated that the system was not very useful and not an effective or easy way to request services. Additionally, stakeholders raised concerns about the lack of proactive engagement and responsiveness.

The Report Card identified several significant issues faced by veterans and their families when trying to access critical services and benefits, including the following:

- Lack of awareness of available support;
- Difficulties reaching agency staff or case workers and lack of follow-up;
- Claims that VetConnectNYC was a difficult or ineffective platform for requesting services; and
- Dissatisfaction with VetConnectNYC’s delayed responses and inconsistent referrals to appropriate resources.

The Council described VetConnectNYC as a barrier to veterans in need of services, and, given the age of the veteran population, raised a concern that the system’s inaccessibility potentially discouraged older veterans and their family members from using the portal.

The report card made 15 recommendations, some of which specifically called for improvements to the VetConnectNYC portal and agency oversight, including the following:

- Improve the development and use of VetConnectNYC to encourage public engagement;
- Regularly monitor user experience with VetConnectNYC; and
- Conduct routine performance assessments of its digital services to track progress.

The Report Card also indicated that a disconnect existed between DVS' reported practices and veterans' experiences and stressed the need for DVS to rebuild trust with the community it serves.

At a New York City Council Committee on Veterans' oversight hearing on Report Card recommendations held on December 3, 2025, the former DVS Commissioner stated that the agency changed its technology provider in response to feedback from the community and planned to launch the new VetConnectNYC portal on July 1, 2025.

## Objective

This review was initiated in response to the public concerns cited above, to determine whether the Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) is effectively connecting New York City's veterans and their families with essential services and programs through VetConnectNYC.

## Discussion of Review Results with DVS

The matters covered in this report were discussed with DVS officials during and at the conclusion of this review. On June 15, 2026, we submitted a Draft Report to DVS with a request for written comments. We received a written response from DVS on July 7, 2026. In its response, DVS acknowledged the checkered history with VetConnectNYC and stated that the Department is committed to improving the system by following the report's recommendations. DVS also complained that the review scope was limited to determining whether DVS is effectively connecting veterans and their families with essential services through VetConnectNYC and did not determine the effectiveness of connecting through traditional pathways including in-person visits to Veteran Resource Centers (VRC), phone, and email, implying that its overall effectiveness is better than what is offered through VetConnectNYC.

However, all service requests, regardless of pathway, should be entered and tracked in VetConnectNYC. The system was designed with this functionality in mind, and all services, regardless of mode of engagement, should be visible in VetConnectNYC. VetConnectNYC has been officially described as the main way veterans request services, and it therefore plays an essential role in DVS' overall digital governance. As noted throughout, VetConnectNYC was envisioned as a one-stop shop, to simplify and support greater engagement with the Department.

In addition, an earlier assessment by the City Council assessed the effectiveness of DVS' traditional pathways by surveying veterans and visiting Veteran Resource Centers (VRC) and reported its findings in the Agency Report Card issued in April 2025. Veterans reported that they had difficulty reaching DVS staff by phone and that their telephone messages and emails went unanswered. They also reported

that VRCs had limited staffing and operating hours and were not accessible to working veterans. The City Council Oversight and Investigations Division (OID) visited five VRCs and found that one was closed during scheduled operating hours and the remaining four had limited staffing, one per site, and as a result, walk-in clients could not be served at one site. OID also found that VRCs were difficult to locate due to a lack of directional signage.

DVS also complained that “the report appears to presume that a perfect ‘one-stop-shop’ is technologically possible.” The review team’s assessment of VetConnectNYC performance is based on the scope of work and terms agreed to in the contract negotiated between DVS and Combined Arms, and on this basis, found that the system could not perform even the most basic case management functions such as allowing veterans and DVS employees to log-in using their correct credentials. VetConnectNYC cannot route veteran service requests to the correct staff or units within DVS, cannot provide accurate case status information, and has limited capacity to generate reports on key performance indicators.

DVS’ response has been fully considered, and where relevant, changes and comments have been added to the report.

The full text of DVS’ response is included as an addendum to this report.

# Key Takeaways

Since its launch in 2018, VetConnectNYC has been marred by inconsistent and poor system delivery. As of May 2026—nearly eight years later—the portal still does not streamline access to veterans' services as promised.

The portal was originally developed and operated by Syracuse University between 2018 and 2020, then operated by Unite USA between 2020 and 2024 and scrapped when Unite USA's contract expired. DVS allowed the contract to expire in June 2024 without a replacement contract or other alternative arrangements for maintaining the existing portal, and without implementing a new portal. The portal—despite an expenditure of more than \$1.8 million on its development and operation—was disabled from July 2024 until July 2025. During this period, DVS provided links to online forms which did little more than collect information and questions. Forms were responded to manually, one by one.

In September 2024, DVS secured a contract with Combined Arms with a not to exceed value of \$450,000 to implement a new portal. Combined Arms was supposed to ensure the new VetConnectNYC portal was fully operational by November 11, 2024 (Veterans Day), and was also, based on the terms of the contract, supposed to allow veterans and their families to create user account profiles, submit service requests, and check the status of their requests. Additionally, Combined Arms was supposed to customize workflows and business processes to enable the portal to transmit service requests to designated DVS Care Coordinators or external service providers, send automated reminders, and allow them to track case status, progress, and outcomes.

However, Combined Arms did not relaunch VetConnectNYC until mid-July 2025, eight months late, and the portal currently does not provide basic user access or case management functionality.

Veterans and DVS staff cannot consistently log into VetConnectNYC when they enter their correct user ID and password. Additionally, the Combined Arms portal does not correctly route veterans' service requests to designated DVS staff responsible for reviewing and referring them to service providers and other resources. Service requests are either routed to the wrong staff or not routed to any staff member. The portal also does not allow DVS supervisory personnel to access each of the program areas they oversee, which impedes their ability to oversee staff and monitor case progress. Finally, the portal does not send automated email reminders to DVS staff to follow up with veterans and in some cases, does not provide accurate case status information.

Collectively, these ongoing issues likely delayed access by veterans and their families to critical services and benefits. The review team requested that DVS provide a report detailing service request dates and dates that requests were closed, among other things, for January through May 2026. To date, DVS has not provided this data.

In January of 2026, Combined Arms migrated system data from one webhosting platform to another. Prior to the migration, Combined Arms informed DVS that they should not expect any service disruptions. However, this migration caused the above-detailed user access and case management issues, which remain unresolved after nearly five months, as well as other critical issues which were not promptly remediated.

Prior to launching VetConnectNYC in July 2025, Combined Arms failed to conduct performance, stability, or endurance testing, and conducted only partial stress tests. Performance tests conducted by Combined Arms in March 2026, which assessed user satisfaction with application response time, and independent tests conducted by the review team in March, April, and May 2026, resulted in scores that indicate poor performance and the need for improvement. These performance deficiencies hinder the system's usability.

Although Combined Arms did not launch VetConnectNYC on time and has still not been able to resolve the above-detailed critical user access and case management issues, DVS has not held the vendor accountable. DVS has not documented poor performance in annual performance evaluations or issued cautions in the City's procurement system, nor has the agency sought remedies available under the contract such as issuing Notices to Cure or withholding payment.

## **VetConnectNYC Portal Scrapped and Not Replaced for One Year**

DVS was without any service portal between July 2024 and July 2025 because the agency did not ensure that a replacement system was in place when Unite USA's contract expired in June 2024. Prior to contract expiration, DVS did not ensure that a new contract was executed or ensure continuity of services. It simply discontinued use of the existing case management system.

Although the Mayor's Office of Contract Services approved DVS' use of the negotiated acquisition procurement method on May 11, 2023, DVS did not release the negotiated acquisition until February 14, 2024. This allowed only four and a half months for DVS to solicit, receive, and evaluate proposals, select a

vendor, and negotiate and execute a contract, and for the vendor to customize a new portal.

On September 15, 2024, DVS contracted with Combined Arms to develop a new, customized portal. Combined Arms was initially scheduled to relaunch VetConnectNYC on November 11, 2024, Veterans Day, but was delayed multiple times and did not launch until mid-July 2025, eight months late.

According to DVS officials, these delays were due to procurement challenges and the need to comply with Local Law 37 of 2024 (LL37), which requires City agencies to include a voluntary question about whether applicants or their household members have served in the U.S. military. LL37 is intended to improve the identification of veterans and enable their referral to services and benefits.

Throughout the year the portal was disabled, veterans and their families were forced to submit service requests through DVS' website using Microsoft Forms. As a result, case workflow relied on a manual process instead of an automated one, likely leading to slower case handling and delayed delivery of critical benefits. Specifically, veterans and their families were unable to submit more than one service request at a time, requests had to be manually assigned to case coordinators, and progress had to be tracked across multiple files.

Veterans voiced their concerns at meetings held by the NYC Veterans Advisory Board, some of which are highlighted in the Board's annual report. The 2024 Annual Report referenced concerns about the agency's disabling of the VetConnectNYC system before a new system was ready to be implemented. The Board stated that, until a new system is in place, "it is imperative that appropriate tracking mechanisms are in place to ensure requests are being logged and follow-up is occurring" and that "adequate services are provided." However, DVS did not adequately track service requests or outcomes, either through manual processes or after the new portal was launched in July 2025.

## **VetConnectNYC Lacks Basic User Access and Case Management Functionality**

Combined Arms' contract specified that the new portal would allow veterans and their families to create user account profiles, submit service requests, and access historical information associated with their accounts. Additionally, the portal was supposed to provide DVS with the capacity to manage and coordinate service requests and referrals, and to generate reports on service requests, case statuses, and outcomes, among other things.

Currently, VetConnectNYC does not provide certain core functionality intended to streamline the service request and referral process. Specifically, the portal does not consistently allow users to login when they enter correct credentials. During testing, the review team received repeated login failure messages despite entering the correct user ID and password and was denied access. DVS officials informed the team that DVS staff experiences similar problems and cannot consistently access the portal.

Additionally, the portal does not route requests to the correct DVS staff and in some cases, does not route them to any staff. For example, user accounts for staff responsible for processing veterans' benefits requests were incorrectly set up to receive education-related service requests. Housing staff were unable to see their own cases and incorrectly received benefit service requests.

When DVS reported this issue to Combined Arms, it was discovered that system access for certain user profiles had been incorrectly created by the vendor. Some users were assigned to the wrong group, and some were missing required access to specific groups.

VetConnectNYC does not send DVS staff automated email reminders to follow up with veterans after three days, as required, and in some cases, does not provide them with accurate case status. In February 2026, DVS found that some cases related to Housing Services initially marked as "completed" had been reverted to "initiated" status in VetConnectNYC. Finally, the portal does not provide DVS supervisory personnel with access to each of the program areas for which they are responsible, which impedes their ability to oversee staff and ensure that cases are progressing timely.

Collectively, these issues may prevent or discourage veterans and their families from using VetConnectNYC to request services and may delay them receiving housing, healthcare, education, employment, financial, and legal services, and other resources and support. They also impede DVS' operational efficiency.

According to DVS officials, each of the above-detailed issues was caused by a change in the VetConnectNYC hosting platform in January 2026 and none have been resolved as of May 2026. Officials stated that the migration "created numerous unforeseen issues that [Combined Arms] wasn't prepared to handle quickly." Officials stated that Combined Arms notified DVS about the platform change only two to three weeks before the planned migration and, as noted above, assured DVS that there should not be any disruption of service. However, DVS officials informed the review team that they experienced several challenges during and after the transition which continue to affect user access and case processing.

From system development in September 2024 through April 2026, DVS submitted 112 service tickets to Combined Arms. Forty-eight tickets were submitted after the

platform migration, with 24 categorized as “highest priority” or “high priority.” As of May 2026, 11 of those 24 tickets remain unresolved, including priority tickets related to user access, case routing, and case status system issues.

Combined Arms’ contract specifies that they are responsible for handling all incidents and states that the primary goal is to “restore normal service operations as quickly as possible and minimize the adverse impact on business operations that is caused by incidents.” While Combined Arms was able to resolve some issues caused by the system migration, many critical issues remain unresolved nearly five months later.

Platform migration and system updates require proper preparation and readiness to ensure continuity of operations and uninterrupted services. The unexpected issues encountered by Combined Arms reveal likely failures in the vendor’s planning, testing, and readiness to deliver an effective system for DVS, veterans, and their families.

On May 19, 2026, the review team requested information and documentation related to planning, mapping, and testing conducted prior to migration, including whether testing was conducted in a non-production sandbox environment and, if so, whether partial or full data was tested. DVS officials informed the team on May 27, 2026, that Combined Arms did not provide requested information.

DVS officials expressed frustration over the vendor’s responsiveness, noting that the agency has been bringing the above-mentioned issues to Combined Arms’ attention since January 2026, during weekly meetings. DVS officials stated that Combined Arms has successfully resolved only some of the submitted service tickets—some were resolved but reoccur, and some were resolved only to cause new issues.

The Combined Arms contract required DVS to name a project manager to work with and serve as a point of contact for the Combined Arms Technology Team. The former DVS Chief Information Officer (CIO) was responsible for developing and managing external technology projects, including designing and implementing VetConnectNYC. Given the significant issues with the VetConnectNYC development and implementation, it appears that the CIO did not adequately oversee this project to ensure that the system provides required functionality. DVS officials informed the review team that the former CIO was terminated in April 2026.

## Other VetConnectNYC Issues Were Not Promptly Remediated

Combined Arms also failed to promptly remediate several other critical user access and case management issues caused by the migration. During January and February 2026, none of the DVS staff were able to view service requests submitted through the portal due to user accounts that were migrated improperly into VetConnectNYC. Further, for nearly three weeks in April 2026, no DVS staff were assigned to the Homeless Program, which may have delayed veterans from receiving temporary shelter, supportive and permanent housing, and other critical services.

Additionally, existing users had difficulty navigating to the veterans' log-in page. The DVS website prompts veterans looking to connect to services to click the "VetConnectNYC Request Form" link. Following the migration, this link redirected clients to the Combined Arms sign-up page, which contained fields for a new client to create an account. However, the redirect page did not include a login button for returning users, nor did it provide any instructions on how to reach the login page. This issue was not resolved until May 2026.

The review team also found that the system's one-time-password (OTP) feature, which should automatically email the user a code to reset their password, was not functioning. The review team informed DVS about the login and OTP issues in March 2026. DVS officials stated that they had reported these issues to Combined Arms on numerous occasions starting in January 2026, but Combined Arms did not remediate the OTP issue until April 2026.

Lastly, DVS employees were unable to view veterans' addresses in VetConnectNYC, a feature that was available prior to the migration. This information is important for identifying available location-based support services. In May 2026, DVS officials reported that this issue was resolved.

## DVS Has Not Held Combined Arms Accountable for Deficient Performance

Although Combined Arms launched VetConnectNYC eight months late and either did not resolve or did not promptly resolve critical user access and case management issues, DVS has not held this vendor accountable by documenting poor performance in annual performance evaluations or issuing cautions in the City's procurement system, or availing itself of other legal remedies provided for in the contract.

The New York City Charter and New York City Procurement Policy Board Rules require agencies to complete annual performance evaluations. These must be completed within 90 days of the contract anniversary date. Therefore, DVS should have completed a performance evaluation and documented Combined Arms' deficient performance by December 13, 2025.

Additionally, the Combined Arms contract states that DVS may declare Combined Arms in default by sending a Notice to Cure upon a breach of a material term, including unsatisfactory performance of the services. Given that Combined Arms has not remediated several critical user access and case management issues after five months and has not otherwise minimized the adverse impact on operations, issuing a Notice to Cure may have been warranted.

In May 2026, DVS officials reported that DVS is in the process of completing a performance evaluation for Combined Arms. In addition, DVS officials stated that DVS' General Counsel's Office was consulted about Combined Arms but did not take any action.

## VetConnectNYC Consistently Scored Low in Performance Testing

To ensure positive user experience, performance testing should be conducted prior to the launch of a system to validate its speed, stability, and scalability, and to identify and address issues that may negatively impact performance and agency operation. OTI's *Citywide Policy for Performance Testing of Public-Facing Applications* states that performance testing must be conducted and meet specified criteria prior to rollout. This includes meeting minimum performance standards for average page response times of under three seconds and 90th percentile page response times under five seconds.

### Lengthy Redirect Times

Based on multiple tests conducted by the review team, the average redirect time from DVS' website to Combined Arms' VetConnectNYC sign-in page was 16 seconds. The review team forwarded this issue to DVS officials, who responded that they also experienced slow response times, sometimes as long as 20 to 30 seconds. DVS officials informed the review team that they reported this issue to Combined Arms in February 2026 and that it had been resolved in April 2026. The review team confirmed the issue as remediated.

## Performance Tests Not Conducted Prior to Launch

The review team requested that DVS provide results from system performance tests conducted before VetConnectNYC launched in July 2025, as well as any ongoing performance tests performed by Combined Arms. DVS did not provide documentation to show that Combined Arms conducted performance tests prior to rollout. The absence of pre-launch performance tests and the migration issues discussed above demonstrate that Combined Arms was not sufficiently prepared for system deployment and implementation, which led to operational disruptions and delays in service request processing.

Additionally, Combined Arms reported that they conducted only partial stress tests and did not conduct stability or endurance testing to evaluate if the system can operate continuously over time under expected conditions without failing, degrading performance, or producing errors.

## Poor Performance Scores

DVS provided the results of an Application Performance Index (APDEX) test conducted by Combined Arms in March 2026. APDEX tests measure user satisfaction with an application's response time. These tests assessed performance of the VetConnectNYC sign-in and sign up to the portal under sustained load conditions and were designed to measure system performance and load intensity by simulating a high number of users within compressed time intervals. All four test results were below 0.5, indicating poor performance.<sup>1</sup> Several key issues identified included stability limitation, server unresponsiveness, and potential resource exhaustion which indicates that the portal could not support peak load users.

The review team conducted additional performance scans during March, April, and May 2026 using Google Lighthouse, and the results were similar, with a mobile score of 42 (poor performance) and a desktop score of 67 (needs improvement).<sup>2</sup>

## Lack of Service-Related Metrics and Tracking Capability

As previously mentioned, veterans and other stakeholders have raised concerns related to the lack of data about service requests and outcomes since 2019 and

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<sup>1</sup> APDEX: Score ranges from 0 to 1: Excellent user satisfaction = 0.94–1.0, Good performance = 0.85–0.93, Fair performance = 0.70 – 0.84, Poor performance 0.69–0.50 and Unacceptable performance <0.49.

<sup>2</sup> Based on the Google Lighthouse numeric values: 0 to 49 indicates poor performance, 50 to 89 needs improvement, and 90 to 100 represents good performance.

noted that this data is necessary to inform decision-making, effectively provide appropriate services, and measure outcomes. However, DVS failed to address stakeholder concerns by collecting and monitoring key performance metrics.

According to the Unite USA contract, the vendor was to provide DVS access to performance metrics, including the number of program requests by service type and county, number of clients served, average time to referral acceptance, number of referrals rejected, and number of service episodes closed by service type.

However, when asked to provide metrics for FYs 2022–2024, DVS was only able to provide the review team with three of the five metrics. DVS informed the team that the other two metrics—data for average time to referrals acceptance and the number of referrals rejected—were never made available by the vendor. This means that DVS could not track the timeliness of services referred or referral rejection rates. These were key metrics for evaluating the extent to which DVS was effectively providing veterans access to critical services.

DVS did not hold Unite USA accountable for not providing all of the metrics required during the contract. In the absence of system functionality, DVS failed to track them all manually either when the VetConnectNYC system was disabled at the end of Unite USA's contract and the agency was managing service requests internally via MS Forms. In its 2024 Annual Report, the NYC Veterans Advisory Board stated that it was imperative that DVS has appropriate tracking mechanisms in place during this time.

DVS tracked service requests submitted, number of clients served, and number of service episodes by service type, but did not track referral rejections, average time to referral acceptance, service provisions, and client outcomes. These metrics would have enabled DVS to evaluate its program oversight, timeliness, and effectiveness of service delivery to veterans and their families, potentially improving outcomes.

Combined Arms is contractually required to track performance metrics. According to the contract proposal, Combined Arms was required to develop a custom Electronic Service Provider Platform to support VetConnectNYC and offer its "Premier Case Management System" and Data Warehouse MySQL database. The platform was supposed to enable DVS to generate performance metric reports. These reports would include client demographics, service type requests, case statuses and outcomes, and case response times. Based on minutes of weekly meetings, DVS consistently asked Combined Arms about the dashboards and reporting capabilities to pull their own data. However, Combined Arms did not provide DVS with reporting capability until March 2026, eight months after the system launched.

DVS can now generate its own data and reports, and officials stated that the agency will begin collecting monthly mandated reporting starting March 2026, including the number of unique veterans, service requests, referrals, and services provided (resolved/closed cases).

## Survey Respondents Indicate Dissatisfaction with DVS Services

Collecting feedback through surveys is essential for improving and enhancing agency services and performance. The VetConnectNYC portal includes functionalities to collect client feedback using a one-to-five-star rating scale. Between August 2025 and December 2025, DVS received feedback on their experiences from 33 veterans.

Of these, 11 respondents rated the service five stars, while 19 gave it a one-star rating. Over 57% of the respondents provided negative feedback, reporting that they were dissatisfied with the lack of communication and service provided. Specifically, respondents did not receive assistance when help was needed and did not receive initial contact or follow-up responses.

Additionally, DVS has collected feedback since June 2022 through its Constituent Satisfaction Survey. The survey has continuously been available on DVS' website and was emailed to veterans in October 2024. This survey asks respondents to rate their experience regarding DVS' timeliness in responding to requests, services and resources shared, friendliness, and staff knowledge on benefits and resources. Between June 2022 and January 2026, DVS received 118 responses to its Constituent Satisfaction Survey. Of these, 89 responses pertained to the period when VetConnectNYC was disabled and DVS managed service requests internally via MS Forms, 28 responses pertained to Unite USA, and one response pertained to Combined Arms.

Based on survey results, approximately 38% of the respondents rated their overall experience as "low" and 28.8% of the respondents indicated that they would not recommend DVS' services to another veteran, veteran families, or caregivers. Additionally, a high percentage of respondents reported that they were dissatisfied with services and resources, and with DVS staff knowledge and friendliness as detailed below and in the Appendix.

- 40% of the respondents were dissatisfied with services and resources. Specifically, the respondents' comments indicated that they never received any actual services or assistance, only information, while others described the experience as a waste of time.

- 30.5% of the respondents were dissatisfied with the timeliness of DVS' responses to requests. Respondents commented on lack of follow-up, unresponsive claims processing, and lack of contact after requesting help.
- 30% of the respondents were dissatisfied with staff knowledge. Some respondents noted that they expected to receive more information from DVS and expected more services than they received.
- 20% of the respondents were dissatisfied with the friendliness of DVS staff. Some respondents reported that customer service was characterized as rude, impatient, condescending, or unhelpful.

## Recommendations

The review team has identified several areas for improvement to address the above-mentioned findings, including that DVS should:

1. Ensure that VetConnectNYC meets its intended purpose of streamlining the service request and referral process. If limited by staff size or expertise, consider consulting or working with the New York City Office of Technology and Innovation to ensure Combined Arms implements required functionality, meets minimum performance standards, and immediately resolves user login, case routing and status, and information access issues.

**DVS Response:** DVS agreed with this recommendation.

2. Enforce adherence to contract requirements and hold Combined Arms accountable for lack of required features and functionality. DVS should consult with the agency's General Counsel and the New York City Law Department on contract remedies and pursue them.

**DVS Response:** DVS agreed with this recommendation.

3. Complete annual performance evaluations for Combined Arms to document performance deficiencies and consider issuing a vendor caution in PASSPort.

**DVS Response:** DVS agreed with this recommendation.

4. Develop requirements with Combined Arms for the collection of ratings and feedback from VetConnectNYC users and service providers on a recurring basis.

**DVS Response:** DVS agreed with this recommendation.

5. Require Combined Arms to provide all required performance metrics including service requests and referral outcomes.

**DVS Response:** DVS agreed with this recommendation.

6. Meaningfully engage with veterans and other stakeholders about their user experiences and satisfaction with VetConnectNYC and develop a plan for improving ease of use, functionality, service provision, and outcomes. Engagement should include in-person focus groups and surveys sent electronically and by postal mail.

**DVS Response:** DVS agreed with this recommendation.

## Recommendations Follow-up

Follow-up will be conducted periodically to determine the implementation status of each recommendation contained in this report. Agency-reported status updates are included in the Audit Recommendations Tracker available here:

<https://comptroller.nyc.gov/services/for-the-public/audit/audit-recommendations-tracker/>

# Appendix

## Constituent Satisfaction Survey

| How satisfied are you with the timeliness of DVS staff's response to your request? |               |               |             |                  |                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Very Satisfied                                                                     | Satisfied     | Neutral       | Unsatisfied | Very Unsatisfied | Total unsatisfied or very unsatisfied |
| 56<br>(47.4%)                                                                      | 12<br>(10.2%) | 14<br>(11.9%) | 7<br>(5.9%) | 29<br>(24.6%)    | 36<br>(30.5%)                         |

| How satisfied are you with the services and resources which were shared with you? |               |              |               |                  |                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Very Satisfied                                                                    | Satisfied     | Neutral      | Unsatisfied   | Very Unsatisfied | Total unsatisfied or very unsatisfied |
| 33<br>(37.5%)                                                                     | 11<br>(12.5%) | 9<br>(10.2%) | 11<br>(12.5%) | 24<br>(27.3%)    | 35<br>(39.8%)                         |

| Friendliness: How satisfied are you with the friendliness of DVS staff? |               |               |             |                  |                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Very Satisfied                                                          | Satisfied     | Neutral       | Unsatisfied | Very Unsatisfied | Total unsatisfied or very unsatisfied |
| 60<br>(50.9%)                                                           | 19<br>(16.1%) | 15<br>(12.7%) | 5<br>(4.2%) | 19<br>(16.1%)    | 24<br>(20.3%)                         |

**Knowledge: How satisfied are you with DVS staff's knowledge and information on benefits and resources which were shared with you?**

| Very Satisfied | Satisfied     | Neutral       | Unsatisfied  | Very Unsatisfied | Total unsatisfied or very unsatisfied |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 57<br>(48.3%)  | 13<br>(11.0%) | 13<br>(11.0%) | 11<br>(9.3%) | 24<br>(20.4%)    | 35<br>(29.7%)                         |

**Would you recommend DVS services to another veteran, veteran family member, spouse, or caregiver?**

| Yes           | Maybe         | No            |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 70<br>(59.3%) | 14<br>(11.9%) | 34<br>(28.8%) |

**Please rate your overall DVS Experience.**

| Level 5       | Level 4     | Level 3     | Level 2     | Level 1       | Total Level 1 or Level 2 |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| 44<br>(45.8%) | 7<br>(7.3%) | 8<br>(8.3%) | 5<br>(5.2%) | 32<br>(33.4%) | 37<br>(38.6%)            |



Yesenia Mata  
COMMISSIONER

July 7, 2026

Maura Hayes-Chaffe

Deputy Comptroller for Audit

Office of the City Comptroller

1 Centre St, Room 1100 New York, NY 10007

**RE: DVS Response to Draft Report**

The New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) appreciates the Comptroller's review of our VetConnect system and welcomes the opportunity to respond to the draft report. Generally, DVS agrees with the recommendations and shall endeavor to implement them. However, DVS respectfully seeks to clarify several factual characterizations and provide helpful background information for the public.

First, VetConnect is not the only pathway to services or programs. The report's scope was limited "to determine whether [DVS] is effectively connecting New York City's veterans and their families with essential services and programs *through VetConnectNYC*." Report at 4 (emphasis added). Notably, the Comptroller was not tasked with determining the effectiveness of traditional pathways to service – of which, the report underplays. Tellingly, this oversight led to compounding speculation throughout the report that issues in VetConnect "*likely*" delayed services (Report at 6, 7, and 8) and that veterans "*were forced* to submit" requests through DVS' website in lieu of VetConnect (Report at 7) (emphasis added). To be sure, Veterans are not *forced* to use VetConnect or DVS' website because they may contact DVS through a variety of traditional pathways (in-person at one of the Veteran Resource Centers located in each borough, in-person at events, email, phone, etc.). Moreover, this may have led to a mischaracterization of the services DVS provides and how they are provided. Generally, DVS provides information, referral, or advice about eligibility for services through a variety of pathways that may change over the course of assisting a veteran. However, DVS does not provide any direct services, does not control eligibility, does not employ case managers, and does not render essential services. All such direct essential services, case management, and eligibility determinations are controlled by other City, State, Federal and nonprofit entities. Thus, DVS connects veterans to a variety of services through many various pathways which adapt and change throughout the course of assistance. Therefore, the Comptroller's report may give the questionable impression that traditional pathways cannot fill gaps as modern technological systems improve – assuredly, DVS is committed to improving the system by following the report's recommendations while maintaining important traditional pathways to meet veterans where they are.

Second, the report appears to presume that a perfect "one-stop-shop" online system is technologically possible today. DVS welcomes the identification of any such system. Universally, it is well known by Veteran Service Organizations and government offices that no perfect system exists. (*E.g. see* U.S. Government Accountability Office website, last accessed 7/2/2026 at <https://www.gao.gov/blog/veterans-affairs-ongoing-struggle-modernize-its-electronic-health-record-system>) (noting how "the Department of Veterans Affairs is currently on its *fourth* effort . . ."). Similarly, the Comptroller's report identified issues with all three vendors approved by the City in recent history. *See* Report at 2, 3, and 5-7. This highlights the complication of enforcing remedies, since vendors



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in this space have insurmountable expectations and the required technology may simply not exist yet. Furthermore, the report may be viewed as overstating the extent to which automation is possible and may incorrectly infer that one-by-one manual processing is somehow inherently bad. *See Report at 7.* Even if the technology worked perfectly, manual processing of each case would still be required. Therefore, most likely a perfect “one-stop-shop” online system is not technologically possible today – however, DVS remains committed to improving the system by following the report’s recommendations.

Third, and similarly, DVS seeks to clarify other complications related to possible enforcement:

- The vendor appears to have taken reasonable steps to cure and regularly meets with DVS IT weekly to address open support tickets,
- The vendor’s switch to AWS from Salesforce appears to have long-term advantages despite some issues in roll-out,
- A finding of breach may result in a system pause or stoppage, and may delay support for open tickets, thus leading to more manual processing that the report criticizes,
- The Comptroller’s investigation leading to this report may have chilled the earlier exploration of available remedies,
- Most (if not all) staff involved in procurement have either left the agency or were reassigned during the new administration’s reorganization.

Thus, as recommended, DVS shall endeavor to explore legal options to ensure adequate performance under the contract, in light of the aforementioned facts.

Fourth, as related to the matters of the NYC Council, Veteran Advisory Board (VAB), and engaging with the public – DVS remains steadfast in coordinating with the public about VetConnect. *E.g. see NYC Council Hearing on December 3, 2025 (Joint Committees of Veterans and Finance).* Furthermore, the Comptroller’s report acknowledged references to VetConnect in the VAB’s annual recommendations (Report at 7 and 13), however it may have overlooked the portions reflecting that VetConnect “needs an appropriate level of funding to ensure it has a sufficient amount of physical and digital infrastructure required for the amount of data that will be processed in the system,” (VAB Report at 11). Yet, despite acknowledging that funding has decreased throughout the life of the program – the report failed to square this decrease with VAB’s recommendations for appropriate funding. *Compare Report at 2 and 5 with VAB Report at 10-11.* Furthermore, in addition to these public hearings and the traditional pathways of connecting with DVS, the agency also gathers feedback on the DVS website, including the ability to leave a message directly with the Commissioner. Thus, DVS remains steadfast in leading public coordination on how best to move forward with VetConnect in light of the shifting landscape around the system; the lifetime funding changes, any available budget in future sessions, and feedback from the public or city stakeholders such as NYC Council, VAB, or other city agencies.

In conclusion, DVS acknowledges the sordid history with VetConnect and is committed to improving the system by following the report’s recommendations. Accordingly, DVS shall:



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COMMISSIONER

1. Ensure VetConnect meets its purpose of streamlining referrals and shall consult with Office of Technology and Innovation to ensure minimum performance standards are met including resolving login, routing, and information access issues.
2. Consult with the agency's General Counsel and the NYC Law Department on pursuing contract remedies.
3. Complete PASSPort evaluations and consider issuing a vendor caution.
4. Develop requirements for collecting ratings and feedback from VetConnect users on a recurring basis.
5. Require Combined Arms to provide all required performance metrics including service requests and referral outcomes.
6. Meaningfully engage with veterans and other stakeholders about their experiences using VetConnect and develop a plan, including in-person focus groups and electronic surveys, to improve ease of use, functionality, service provisions, and outcomes.

As a new commissioner these findings and recommendations are insightful and will be considered carefully moving forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Yesenia Mata", with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Yesenia Mata, Commissioner





**MARK LEVINE**  
NEW YORK CITY COMPTROLLER

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