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BUREAU OF AUDIT

March 31, 2020

By Electronic Mail

James Hendon
Commissioner
New York City Department of Veterans' Services
1 Centre Street, Room 2208
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Letter Report on the New York City Department of Veterans' Services'
Compliance with Local Law 44 of 2019 Regarding Annual Report on the
Department's Services and Performance (Audit #SZ20-091AL)**

Dear Commissioner Hendon:

This Letter Report concerns the New York City Comptroller's audit of the New York City (City) Department of Veterans' Services' (DVS) compliance with Local Law 44 of 2019, which requires that DVS (1) submit an annual report to City Council regarding specified aspects of its services and performance, and (2) post a copy of this annual report on its website. The objective of this audit was to determine whether DVS has complied with these requirements of Local Law 44.

Background

New York City, with a population of more than 8.5 million people, is home to approximately 210,808 veterans; 189,808 are active duty veterans and 21,000 are reserves or National Guard veterans. To help veterans, service members, and their families identify and connect to necessary services, DVS was established as a City agency in April 2016.¹ As an agency of the City, DVS works with other City, New York State (State), and federal agencies, as well as regional private and not-for-profit partners, to improve the lives of all New York City veterans and their families. Among other things, DVS seeks to ensure that homeless veterans have permanent housing and access to the support services they need to find and maintain homes. In addition, DVS seeks to expand education and career opportunities for veterans and to provide information to them and their families about the availability of benefits, resources, and care Citywide. DVS states that it is committed to supporting veterans' overall mental health and to specifically helping veterans cope with the full impact of war and their military service. DVS serves service members, veterans, or family members regardless of their era of service, branch of service, or discharge status.

¹ Prior to 2016, New York City's veterans were served by the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs (MOVA).

Veterans rely on resources provided by the City, State, and federal governments to obtain information and gain access to benefits. Accordingly, in 2019, New York City Council passed Local Law 44, amending the City's Administrative Code in relation to additional reporting requirements for DVS. Local Law 44 specifically requires that DVS, by December 15 of each year, create an annual report regarding its services and performance for the prior fiscal year, submit the report to the Speaker of the Council, and post the report on its website. The local law specifies that the DVS annual report include, among other metrics, a list and description of the services the agency provides, the number of its employees, a list of their functional titles, the number of employees in each functional title, and the general responsibilities for each title. In addition, the local law mandates that the annual report include the number of veterans who have inquired about DVS' services, the number who have received services from DVS, and how veterans and their families learned about the services provided by the agency.

The objective of this audit was to determine whether DVS is complying with Local Law 44 by submitting the required annual report to City Council, with all of the required information, and posting that report on its website.

Findings and Recommendation

Our audit found that DVS generally complied with Local Law 44. DVS submitted its first annual report regarding its services and performance for Fiscal Year 2019 to the New York City Council on December 15, 2019 and posted the report on its website.² The report lists and describes the types of services provided by DVS; the total number of employees, a list of all functional titles, the number of employees in each functional title, and a summary of the general responsibilities for each title. Additionally, it includes a monthly summary of the total number of interactions in which DVS provided services to veterans, caretakers, active service members, and their families, and specified the locations where those interactions occurred among DVS' main office at 1 Centre Street in Manhattan, its five resource centers throughout the five boroughs, or in the field at community events. In addition, as required by Local Law 44, the data is disaggregated by the types of services provided and the borough in which the interaction occurred.³

Furthermore, the report includes the types of disaggregated services that veterans have made inquiries about, including calls that were made through 311, by borough and per month. The report also includes the numerous methods that DVS utilizes to provide information to

² <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/about/memoranda-of-understanding-mous.page>

³ The resource centers for Queens, Manhattan, Staten Island, and the Bronx are within the Borough Hall of the respective borough. The resource center for Brooklyn is within the Workforce One Career Center at 9 Bond Street. Satellite offices/resource centers enable veterans and their families to meet one-on-one with VA-credentialed outreach specialists in each of the five boroughs. Walk-ins are welcome, but appointments are encouraged. The hours of operation for the satellite offices are from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and then 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. on select days.

veterans, their families, caretakers, and active service members, and the methods by which veterans and their families learned about DVS. Moreover, it lists the field services provided by DVS in each borough, per month, and the systems utilized by DVS to calculate the performance indicators in the report.

Our findings are outlined in the following two tables, the first entitled Compliance Summary and the second entitled Core Criteria.

COMPLIANCE SUMMARY		
Criteria	Compliance	Notes
DVS must create an annual report regarding its services and performance for Fiscal Year 2019.	Yes	DVS created its first annual report regarding its services and performance between July 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019. The report was issued December 15, 2019.
DVS' annual report regarding its services and performance for Fiscal Year 2019 must be submitted to the Speaker of the Council by December 15, 2019.	Yes	DVS submitted its first annual report regarding its services and performance to the Speaker of the City Council on December 15, 2019.
DVS' annual report regarding its services and performance for Fiscal Year 2019 must be available on its website.	Yes	DVS' annual report regarding its services and performance for Fiscal Year 2019 is available on its website. The annual report was issued on December 15, 2019.

Based on our understanding of the Local Law 44 requirements, we outlined all the criteria necessary for DVS to be in compliance, which is summarized in the table below along with our findings regarding DVS' compliance with that criteria.

CORE CRITERIA	
Detailed Criteria	Compliance
DVS' Annual Services and Performance Report must include a list and description of the services provided by the department.	Section I of the December 15, 2019 Local Law 44 DVS Services and Performance Annual Report for 2019 lists the services and programs provided by DVS including transition services; social determinants of health (causes and factors); housing and neighborhood stability for veterans; benefits navigation; and community recognition.
DVS' Annual Services and Performance Report must include the total number of employees, a list of functional titles, the number of employees in each functional title, and a summary of the general responsibilities for each title.	Section II of the December 15, 2019 Local Law 44 DVS Services and Performance Annual Report for 2019 lists the functional units and titles within DVS, the number of employees currently staffed in each title, and a summary of the responsibilities for each title.
DVS' Annual Services and Performance report must include the total number of engagements, per month, disaggregated by the types of services provided, whether the service was provided at DVS' office, a resource center or in the field, and borough.	Section III of the December 15, 2019 Local Law 44 DVS Services and Performance Annual Report for 2019 lists the total number of engagements, per month, disaggregated by the types of services provided, whether the service were provided at a DVS office, a resource center or in the field, by borough.
DVS' Annual Services and Performance report must include the types of services veterans have inquired about, including through 311 calls, per month, disaggregated by type of service, and borough where applicable.	Section IV of the December 15, 2019 Local Law 44 DVS Services and Performance Annual Report for 2019 lists the types of services veterans have inquired about, through 311 calls and VetConnectNYC, per month, disaggregated by type of service. ⁴ Additionally, it lists the types of services veterans have inquired about through DVS' headquarters, and veteran resource center per month, disaggregated by type of service and borough.
DVS' Annual Services and Performance report must include the methods that DVS uses to provide information to veterans and their families, caretakers, and active service members; and the methods by which veterans and their families learned about DVS.	Section V of the December 15, 2019 Local Law 44 DVS Services and Performance Annual Report for 2019 lists the methods that DVS used to provide information to veterans and their families, caretakers, and active service members, and the methods by which they learned about DVS. This included Community Events and Public Briefings that were attended by veterans and their families by borough between July 2018 and June 2019.

⁴ VetConnectNYC is a free community-based coordinated care network of 150+ service providers, including DVS, to serve as a one-stop shop for needs assessment and referrals.

DVS' Annual Services and Performance report must include a list of the field services provided by DVS in each borough and per month.	Section VI of the December 15, 2019 Local Law 44 DVS Services and Performance Annual Report for 2019 lists the field services provided by DVS in each borough per month including veterans housed through DVS' Housing and Support Services by borough and E-mail outreach via announcements, newsletters, or press releases per month.
DVS' Annual Services and Performance report must include the methods utilized by the DVS in calculating its report.	Section VII of the December 15, 2019 Local Law 44 DVS Services and Performance Annual Report for 2019 specifies that DVS' data was collected from the following sources: DVS' Constituent Tracker, Microsoft Dynamics Client Relation Manager, Veteran Peer Coordinator Move Tracker, Eviction Prevention Report, 311 Veteran Service Metrics, VetConnectNYC Monthly Report, MailChimp, and HR Personnel Records.

We recommend that DVS continue to maintain its compliance with Local Law 44 to ensure it effectively meets the needs of veterans who seek access to veteran services, resources, and benefits at resource centers, outreach events, or online.

Scope and Methodology

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. This audit was conducted in accordance with the audit responsibilities of the City Comptroller as set forth in Chapter 5, §93, of the New York City Charter.

The scope period for this audit was November 26, 2019 through January 07, 2020, the last day of our fieldwork. Our methodology for this audit consisted of the following steps:

- We reviewed applicable laws, rules, policies, and procedures to determine our criteria in accordance with Local Law 44 of 2019.
- We reviewed DVS' Local Law 44 DVS Services and Performance Annual Report for 2019 to determine whether it included the information required.
- We analyzed DVS' website to determine whether the Local Law 44 DVS Services and Performance Annual Report for 2019 was available.

- We interviewed key personnel at DVS to determine whether the Local Law 44 DVS Services and Performance Annual Report for 2019 was submitted to the Speaker of the Council by December 15, 2019.

The matters covered in this letter report were discussed with DVS officials during and at the conclusion of the audit, and they agreed that an exit conference was not necessary. On March 4, 2020, we submitted a draft letter report to DVS officials with a request for comments. We received a written response from DVS on March 17, 2020. In their response, DVS officials agreed with the audit's findings and recommendation, stating, "DVS will continue to maintain compliance with Local Law 44 so that we can effectively meet the needs of our veterans who seek access to services, resources, and benefits at resource centers, outreach events, or online." The full text of DVS' response is included as an addendum to this report.

Sincerely,



Marjorie Landa

c: Dina Simon, Acting Deputy Commissioner, DVS
Terrence Holiday, Assistant Commissioner, Engagement and Community Services, DVS
Jeff Thamkittikasem, Director, Mayor's Office of Operations
George Davis III, Deputy Director, Mayor's Office of Operations
Florim Ardolli, Assistant Director, Mayor's Office of Operations



James W. Hendon

COMMISSIONER

Dina Simon

ACTING DEPUTY
COMMISSIONER

March 12, 2020

Ms. Marjorie Landa
Deputy Comptroller for Audit
Office of the Comptroller, Bureau of Audit
1 Centre Street, Room 1100
New York, NY 10007

SUBJECT: Draft Letter Report on the New York City Department of Veterans' Services' Compliance with Local Law 44 of 2019 Regarding Annual Report on the Department's Services and Performance (Audit #SZ20-091AL)

Deputy Comptroller Landa:

This letter is to confirm receipt of the draft letter audit report that the Comptroller's office shared with the Department of Veterans' Services on March 4, 2020 pertaining to the audit done to ensure DVS' compliance with Local Law 44, regarding submitting our first annual report to City Council and posting it on our website so that citizens have access to that information (Audit #SZ20-091AL).

DVS thanks the Office of the Comptroller for its finding that DVS generally complies with Local Law 44 and is upholding its responsibilities to New York City veterans.

DVS will continue to maintain compliance with Local Law 44 so that we can effectively meet the needs of our veterans who seek access to services, resources, and benefits at resource centers, outreach events, or online.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JWH", written over a light blue horizontal line.

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Commissioner James Hendon

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