

MAX ROSE

11TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

1529 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515  
TELEPHONE: (202) 225-3371

STATEN ISLAND OFFICE:  
265 NEW DORP LANE, SECOND FLOOR  
STATEN ISLAND, NY 10306  
TELEPHONE: (718) 667-3313

BROOKLYN OFFICE:  
8203 3RD AVENUE  
BROOKLYN, NY 11209  
TELEPHONE: (718) 306-5500

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-3211

August 14, 2019

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND  
SECURITY  
SUBCOMMITTEES:  
INTELLIGENCE AND COUNTERTERRORISM,  
CHAIRMAN  
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE  
AND RECOVERY

COMMITTEE ON  
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

SUBCOMMITTEES:  
HEALTH  
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

Mayor Bill de Blasio  
Office of the Mayor  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Mayor de Blasio,

I am writing to you to discuss the urgent need for New York City to adequately address veterans' mental health, and the tragic trend of veteran suicides.

As you know, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) launched a comprehensive program called the Mayor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (the Mayor's Challenge), implemented in March 2018. This national challenge empowers American city governments to build interagency teams for veteran suicide prevention efforts.

According to the VA, cities are invited to participate based on suicide prevalence rates, veteran population, and the capacity of the cities to successfully execute the goals of this initiative. Given this criteria, New York City was invited to participate in the Mayor's Challenge in April 2018. I was shocked – then infuriated - to learn that New York City declined participation.

Approximately 14 out of the 20 veterans who die by suicide per day are not under the care of the VA—and this would have been an incredible chance to find a way to reach and save those veterans who aren't getting the resources available to them. You had a chance to do so by bringing policymakers, community leaders, and families together via the Mayor's Challenge – and someone inexcusably dropped the ball. While Commissioner Sutton and the New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) should be applauded for their local and national collaborations to prevent veteran suicides, I am troubled that we are not using every tool at our disposal. You have spoken often of New York City leading the way on issues of incredible importance, yet for some reason your administration declined an opportunity to do so when it comes to saving the men and women who risked everything to keep us safe.

My office learned this decision was made due to a change in leadership at the Office of ThriveNYC, and limited capacity at DVS. If New York City is truly ill-equipped to undertake the work the Mayor's Challenge requires, when this program has been executed in several cities and counties across the country, then steps must be taken to address this deficiency. On behalf of my fellow veteran constituents, we are requesting the following information:

- 1) Has the Office of the Mayor, along with DVS, prepared an action plan to commit the necessary resources to participate in the Mayor's Challenge?
- 2) Is DVS taking affirmative steps to collaborate with SAMHSA and VA in the Mayor's Challenge, and other veteran suicide prevention initiatives, in 2020?
- 3) Does current leadership at the Office of ThriveNYC commit to working with DVS to allocate resources necessary to comply with the Mayor's Challenge requirements?

Thank you for your consideration of this request, and I hope that your office continues efforts to support New York City's veterans and their families.

Sincerely,



Max Rose  
Member of Congress