Testimony of the New York University Tandon School of Engineering
before
The New York City Council Committee on Veterans

March 14, 2019

Chairman Deutsch and fellow Council Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the New York University Tandon School of Engineering’s Veterans Future Lab (VFL). We are pleased to share how VFL is enabling New York City veterans to thrive in their post-military service careers. NYU recognizes the challenges veterans face when reintegrating into the economy, and we are committed to providing effective, tangible solutions.

Operated by NYU Tandon, VFL helps early-stage companies created by veterans, or their spouses, transform into successful businesses by providing the guidance, expertise, and resources that startups need to succeed. The incubator is a public-private-academic partnership where entrepreneurs are nurtured by university partners with support from government and the private sector. By leveraging the wealth of talent and diverse skill sets found in the New York City Veterans Community, we are able to accelerate the growth of new ventures and bring economic activity to the area. Out of the twenty active members of our inaugural incubator class, 19 jobs have been created, approximately $450,000 in revenues have been earned, and $2.3 million has been raised.

This past February, VFL announced that we will begin providing veterans accepted into our Apex program—a selective, year-long incubator program—with free housing at the Fort Hamilton Army Base in Brooklyn. Moving to a new city presents many veteran entrepreneurs with a significant financial burden. Coupled with the support services VFL already provides, the new housing benefits will make NYU’s world-class resources more accessible to veterans across the country.

VFL is in the process of launching a host of other new initiatives, one of which is the Female Veteran Venture Creation (FVVC) Program. Once established, FVVC will assist aspiring female military veteran entrepreneurs with all aspects of the creation of their new business. This includes, but is not limited to, developing a business idea, legal incorporation, obtaining product market fit, advertising, networking, accounting, and instruction on becoming a City-certified Woman-owned Business Enterprise (WBE).

Of the City’s 8.6 million people, there are approximately 14,500 female veterans and 193,000 male veterans. After completing military service, roughly half of all veterans settle in a city apart from where they originated. With this in mind, through FVVC, VFL seeks to increase the proportion of female veterans who pursue entrepreneurship, and by extension, the number of female veterans who settle in New York City. In addition, the self-employment rate for female Veterans is 5%, compared to 12% among their male counterparts—FVVC will seek to bridge this gap. These goals are closely aligned with the City’s efforts to address the disparities related to raising capital experienced by women entrepreneurs, especially in the tech industry.

Similar to most startups, the early financing stages of FVVC ventures are considered high-risk. While FVVC programming will help minimize risk by providing cradle to maturity in-person support, donors
whose capital is risk-tolerant is necessary for VFL to take action and begin execution. For this reason, we are seeking the support of the City Council to help us embark on this initiative. Funds from the City Council will help subsidize the cost for each individual entrepreneur, including rent expenses, business incorporation, website, branding, software, textbooks and materials, certification fees, and more. Once execution begins, VFL will tap into its existing network of donors to acquire the remaining funds necessary.

NYU Tandon is greatly optimistic about the future of FVVC and other bold Veterans Future Lab initiatives. With the partnership of the City Council, we look forward to continue improving the lives of veterans across New York City and around the country.

Thank you for the opportunity to share information about our exciting programs at NYU Tandon School of Engineering’s Veterans Future Lab. We welcome any additional questions the Committee may have. (Please contact Konstantine Tettonis, NYU Government Affairs, kt1249@nyu.edu)