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TESTIMONY OF
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BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. SENATE

APRIL 10, 2012

Senator Akaka, aloha and thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee about Veterans' benefits and services available in Hawaii, and the important work we are doing at the Department of Labor (DOL or Department) to increase the employment among Veterans, National Guard members, and Reservists. With more than 116,000 Veterans living in the state, it is critical that we provide those who need assistance with the services and support they need to find and obtain good jobs.

My name is Ann Greenlee and I am the Hawaii State Director for the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS). As a Veteran and member of the Hawaii National Guard, I am dedicated to helping our Veterans and returning Service Members achieve that goal.

VETS proudly serves Veterans and transitioning Service Members by providing resources and expertise to assist and prepare them to obtain meaningful careers, maximize their employment opportunities and protect their employment rights.

I would like to begin by briefly discussing some of our nationwide programs along with other initiatives that assist America's Veterans in getting a job or returning to work, and tell you what is happening in Hawaii to meet the employment related needs of our transitioning Service Members and Veterans.

One-Stop Career Centers

The Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) funds several programs that provide employment and training services to job seekers. These programs are operated out of almost 3,000 One-Stop Career Centers (One-Stops) and serve as the cornerstone for the Nation's workforce investment system. By law, Veterans receive priority of service in all Labor funded programs administered through the One-Stops. As you know, much of the Department's work with Veterans and other eligible individuals is concentrated on maximizing the employment and training opportunities developed through VETS and ETA's strong relationship and their combined influence on State Workforce Agencies. DOL has decades of

experience working with the employer community, at both local and national levels, to recruit, train, and find employment for Veterans and transitioning Service Members. In Hawaii, these programs are administered by the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, which have provided necessary employment assistance to 6,327 Veterans, resulting in 1,550 securing employment during Program Year (PY) 2010.

Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program

VETS administers the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) program, which helps Veterans find good jobs through services provided at One-Stops across the nation. Through the JVSG, VETS provides grants to each state, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands to fund two types of staff positions, Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) staff members that provide specialized services to Veterans.

DVOP specialists provide outreach services and intensive employment assistance to meet the employment needs of Veterans with barriers to employment. They may be located within the One-Stops or co-located with other service providers. LVER staff provide individualized job development services, conduct outreach to employers, and engage in advocacy efforts with hiring executives to increase employment opportunities for Veterans and encourage the hiring of disabled Veterans. They are located in service delivery points – such as One-Stops – throughout the states. In PY 2010, the JVSG provided services to nearly 557,000 Veterans, and more than 207,000 Veterans found jobs nationwide.

Over the past Program Year in Hawaii, 1,487 Veterans and transitioning Service Members received a wide array of employment preparation and placement services from a DVOP or LVER. Of those, 52 percent, or about 800, received intensive, case management from a DVOP. The Hawaii Department of Labor and Industrial Relations has three DVOPs and one LVER on Oahu, one DVOP on Kauai, while Maui and Hawaii each have one LVER.

I am happy to see the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) represented here today as we work closely with them on the employment piece of their Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program. VETS supports a DVOP specialist assigned to work with VA's VR&E offices and serve as the Intensive Service Coordinator (ISC). The ISC provides employment information to VR&E participants during their rehabilitation program. Following completion of the program, the ISC coordinates and monitors services provided to the Veteran through the One-Stops.

Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program

To meet the needs of homeless Veterans and help reintegrate them into the workforce, VETS administers the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP). Through the HVRP, we provide competitive grants to state and local workforce investment boards, local public agencies, for profit/commercial entities, and private non-profit organizations, including faith-based and community-based organizations. HVRP grantees provide an array of services utilizing a holistic case management approach to directly assist homeless Veterans and provide training services to help them successfully reintegrate into meaningful employment within the labor force. HVRP is the only nationwide program focusing exclusively on employment of Veterans who are homeless.

In PY 2010, which ended June 30, 2011, VETS funded 140 HVRP grant programs, which provided the necessary assistance to over 16,000 homeless Veterans resulting in 9,447 (59 %) obtaining employment. Here in Hawaii, the HVRP has touched many lives and helped hundreds of homeless Veterans. There are three HVRP grantees operating on Oahu: a rural residential program; an urban program; and a program for female homeless veterans and homeless veterans with families. In PY 2010, these programs provided 391 homeless Veterans with training programs and counseling services, and placed 193 Veterans into jobs that have an average wage rate above \$11.00 per hour.

Veterans' Workforce Investment Program

Through the Veterans' Workforce Investment Program (VWIP), VETS awards competitive grants focused on training, re-training, and providing employment opportunities for Veterans who are recently separated; Veterans with service-connected disabilities; Veterans with significant barriers to employment; and Veterans who served on active duty during expeditions or campaigns for which specific badges are awarded. These grants help Veterans attain the qualifications they need in high-demand industries, particularly in occupations that require a license or certification. In PY 2009, VWIP began providing training and employment services in green energy occupations. Nationwide, there are currently 22 grants serving 4,600 Veterans. While Hawaii does not have any VWIP grantees, VETS will be awarding grants through a new competition to be announced later this spring.

Transition Assistance Program

Our primary program for assisting Service Members and their spouses transition from the military to the civilian workforce is the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). TAP is an interagency partnership between the Departments of Labor, Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Homeland Security. VETS provides a comprehensive two and a half to three day Employment Workshop, where participants receive an individualized skills assessment and evaluation of their employability relative to the current job market. The course curriculum also provides information on a variety of topics including career exploration, job search techniques, current labor market conditions, resume preparation and interview techniques, as well as information on eligibility for other Veterans' benefits.

As you know, VETS is in the process of redesigning and transforming the TAP Employment Workshop to make it more engaging and relevant in light of the unique challenges facing returning Service Members as they look to transition into meaningful civilian careers during the current economic recession. Aside from a new curriculum, delivery methods, and student hand-out materials based on established best practices in career transition, the redesign of the Employment Workshop also includes tools to help Service Members translate their military skills and training to meet applicable civilian licensing and credentialing requirements in their chosen career field. .

We are currently piloting the new TAP Employment Workshop at 11 military installations. Our goal is to finish any changes to the curriculum based on the feedback and evaluations we receive during this final pilot phase by this summer. Then, we will sunset the current curriculum and fully implement the newly redesigned program.

Last year, nearly 130,000 transitioning Service Members and spouses attended TAP Employment Workshops at 272 locations worldwide. Hawaii averages more than 140 TAP Employment Workshops annually with nearly 5,000 transitioning Service Members in attendance. National Guard and Reserve personnel in Hawaii are also informed that they can attend TAP for up to 180 days after completion of their active duty commitment and many take advantage of the opportunity. All TAP sites also offer the program to military spouses who are or will be in the job search market.

There are four TAP sites, all on the island of Oahu, encompassing all military service branches, including the U.S. Coast Guard. Contract facilitators conduct the workshops, but a representative from the One-Stops attends each Employment Workshop to discuss their respective roles and responsibilities in providing job search assistance. Since most transitioning Service Members return to the mainland, this introduction to the One-Stop network helps them contact the appropriate One-Stop representative in their state, who will directly assist them with their reintegration into the local job market.

As the VETS Director in Hawaii, I meet quarterly with all TAP site managers, a VA representative, and a representative from the State of Hawaii National Guard to discuss TAP program issues and opportunities.

Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) & Veterans Preference in Federal Hiring

VETS is honored to serve our nation's Veterans. In enforcing the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994, VETS works to ensure that our Nation's Service Members and Veterans are protected against adverse discrimination due to their past, present, or future military service obligations and that returning Service Members are properly reemployed. VETS is also committed to assuring that Veterans receive their due preference in securing Federal employment, as provided by Title 5 of the U.S. Code. VETS' investigative staff accepts and investigates complaints alleging violations of USERRA by public or private sector employers. In addition, VETS investigates complaints brought by eligible Veterans asserting violations of their Federal Veterans' preference rights.

VETS works closely with DOD's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Reserve Affairs' Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) to ensure that Service Members are informed of their USERRA rights both before and after they are mobilized. Last year, ESGR volunteers in Hawaii provided over 20 briefings to deploying Reserve and Guard units, both pre- and post deployment.

The use of the National Guard and Reserves has increased significantly in recent years, with more called to active duty than at any other time since the Korean War. Hawaii's Army Reserve and Guard units are on their 4th deployment cycles. In addition, today's Service Members are subject to lengthier and multiple deployments. This has increased the challenges faced by Service Members and their families and the complexity of issues arising from their service to the country. Employers also face hardships reintegrating Service Members into the labor force, particularly after lengthy and multiple absences. However, Hawaii's employers are very patriotic and value their employees who also serve in the Guard and Reserve. The relatively small number of USERRA complaints received evidences this. In 2011, VETS received only seven USERRA and eight Veterans' preference complaints originating in Hawaii.

Recent Initiatives

President Obama is committed to ensuring that America fulfills its obligations to our returning Service Members and their families. As a result, the Administration has launched a series of initiatives to lower Veterans' unemployment and provide a seamless transition from active duty to civilian life.

On November 7, 2011, the President and DOL, working with other Federal partners, introduced new resources created to help Veterans take the skills they developed while serving in the military and use them to secure civilian jobs. These resources are designed to aid Veterans in their search for jobs and make it easier for them to connect with companies that are hiring.

The first of these resources is the "Gold Card Initiative", which offers a set of intensive services to post-9/11 Veterans through DOL's nationwide network of One-Stop Career Centers. The goal of this initiative is to jump-start the job search process through enhanced in-person intensive job preparation and job search services that help Veterans reconnect to the civilian labor force. We are excited about the Gold Card because our experience shows that Veterans who receive one-on-one employment assistance have much greater success in launching civilian careers.

The Administration that same day launched a new Veterans Job Bank, an easy-to-use tool to help Veterans find job postings from companies that are looking to hire them. It already searches nearly one million job postings and is still growing. In a few easy steps, companies can make sure the job postings on their own Web sites are part of this Veterans Job Bank, which can be found at www.nrd.gov.

Finally, the Department of Labor launched My Next Move for Veterans, (<http://www.mynextmove.org/vets/>), a new online resource that allows Veterans to enter their military occupation code and discover civilian occupations for which they are well qualified. The site includes information about salaries, apprenticeships, education and training programs, and links to area job openings that are also available through a Veterans' reemployment portal within the Department's Career One-Stop online tool (<http://www.careeronestop.org/ReEmployment/Veterans/>).

VETS is proud to lead the Department's efforts on many of its Veterans' programs, and works in tandem with other DOL workforce training and employment protection agencies, such as ETA and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP), to provide essential services, assistance, and employee protections to our Service Members and Veterans. VETS is taking similar steps to ensure implementation of the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 – a comprehensive effort involving DOL, DoD, VA, and other Federal agencies to ensure that the men and women who served our Nation have access to the employment services they need.

Employer Partnerships

VETS has been taking a new approach to employer outreach that involves programs and partnerships with the private sector, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). These partnerships are giving us much broader access to employers, which allows VETS to communicate the value of hiring a Veteran and to educate employers about the unique skills Veterans bring with them based on their military experience. They also allow us to help employers better understand how to access this

extraordinary source of talent, and to develop a more efficient hiring process that benefits both the business community and our Veterans.

Last month, the Chamber hosted its 100th Hiring Our Heroes career fair. These job fairs are exclusively for Veterans, transitioning Service Members and their spouses. The U.S. Chamber and its affiliates focus primarily on securing the participation of employers, while the VETS team focuses on obtaining participation by Veterans, transitioning Service Members and their spouses.

Here in Hawaii, we have formed Hawaii Hires Heroes, or H3. This is a partnership between DOL, Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) Hawaii Committee, the Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii, the US Chamber of Commerce, the VA, the State of Hawaii Dept of Labor and Industrial Relations, the State of Hawaii Department of Defense, Veteran Service Organizations and employers who support hiring Veterans. Oahu hosted two Hiring our Heroes hiring fairs, one in September, 2011, and one in January, 2012. This year additional fairs are planned on Oahu in May, Maui in June and Hawaii in September. Employers who sign up to join H3 agree to post their job vacancies on the job bank sites specifically for active and reserve military members as well as HireNetHawaii and provide H3 with the numbers of Veterans and Service Members hired. In return, H3 promotes these companies to TAP and Yellow Ribbon Program attendees and sends their job openings to both TAP managers and Reserve component units. Our first goal is 100 jobs in 100 days. The challenge ends 30 April and we are well on our way to achieving success.

Conclusion

Thank you again for allowing me to testify today and for your tireless support and commitment to our Nations Veterans. DOL and VETS look forward to continuing to work with you and your staff on Veterans' employment opportunities. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding my testimony or VETS' efforts on behalf of our Veterans and transitioning Service Members. Mahalo!