

**STATEMENT OF
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VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
BEFORE A
JOINT HEARING OF THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS AND
THE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES SENATE**

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Introduction

Chairmen Tester and Reed, Ranking Members Moran and Wicker, and distinguished members of the Committees, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the current state of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the steps that should be made to continue modernizing and reforming the program.

It has been an honor to lead the Department of Labor (DOL) Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) for the last two years. My wife Vanessa and I both served on active duty in the Marine Corps, and we have two wonderful daughters who in many ways grew up having to serve with us. So, this isn't just a job for me, it's my life's mission. I have been truly impressed by the talent, dedication, and commitment of our DOL VETS team, as well as by the high level of cooperation and collaboration with our interagency partners.

DOL is the lead federal agency for employment and training programs. Successful employment is one key to economic success, and can strongly impact physical and mental health, life expectancy, and the quality of life.¹ Our American Job Centers are one-stop locations that offer a broad range of career and supportive services to the public. And veterans receive priority of service for all DOL funded training programs.

VETS' mission is to prepare America's veterans, service members, and military spouses for meaningful careers, provide them with employment resources and expertise, protect their employment rights, and promote their employment opportunities. VETS administers programs designed to address the employment, training, and job security needs of over 196,000 military service members who transition to civilian life each year,² 8.8 million military veterans in the U.S. civilian labor force,³ over 766,000 National Guard and Reserve members,⁴ and nearly 950,000 military spouses (594,110 active duty and 354,255 Guard and Reserve spouses).⁵ Along with our partners, we are committed to ensuring the best transition for our service members and their families.

¹ See for examples: <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/employment>

² Department of Defense (DoD), Improvements to the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Congressional Report, August 2022.

³ Civilian labor force aged 18 years and over. Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) – 2022: <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat48.htm>

⁴ Department of Defense (DoD), Defense Manpower Data Center, Military Personnel Report, Selected Reserve Personnel by Reserve Component and Rank/Grade (Updated Monthly), July 2023: <https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/workforce-reports>

⁵ Military OneSource – Demographics Profile, 2021: <https://demographics.militaryonesource.mil/>

TAP Overview

TAP provides training, resources, and assistance to separating and retiring service members on active duty, Guard, Reserve, and their spouses, as defined in 10 U.S.C. § 1144. TAP is a cooperative effort by VETS, the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of Education (ED), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Small Business Administration (SBA), and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

Congress originally established TAP in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 1991 (P.L. 101-510). This enactment authorized the development of a voluntary program consisting of transition assistance counseling and employment assistance for separating service members and their spouses. In 2011, the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 (P.L. 112-56) mandated TAP participation for all Transitioning Service Members (TSM) - including pre-separation counseling and completion of courses provided by the newly established interagency partnerships - to start no later than 90 days prior to an anticipated date of transition. DOL, DoD, VA, and SBA collaborated to prepare new curricula and expand training, education, and transition activities to include Career Readiness Standards, a set of common and specified activities for service members to achieve.

The most recent legislative change to TAP occurred with the John S. McCain NDAA for FY 2019 (P.L. 115-232), which requires TAP classes to occur no later than 365 days prior to an anticipated date of separation or release from active duty, or 24 months prior to retirement. These requirements allowed TAP to evolve from a one-size-fits-all program where service members had to transition to civilian life in a condensed timeframe to an individualized program tailored specifically to the needs of each service member under a more suitable timeline.

Service Members Attended TAP Employment Workshops in Record-Breaking Numbers

In FY 2022, service members and military spouses attended VETS' TAP employment workshops in record-breaking numbers. TAP employment workshops provided instruction to 266,127 total participants,⁶ which is an over 40% increase from the previous workshop record of 188,924 total participants in FY 2021.

There are three core VETS TAP employment workshops. First, VETS is responsible for the delivery of the Employment Fundamentals of Career Transition (EFCT) Workshop, which is a mandatory, one-day course for employment preparation.

- **One-Day EFCT Workshop**: The EFCT lays the foundation for transitioning from military to civilian life, introducing the essential tools and resources needed to evaluate career options, gain information for civilian employment, and understand the fundamentals of the employment process. In FY 2022, VETS provided EFCT workshops to 149,229 participants, which is a 35.8% increase compared to 109,888 participants in FY 2021.

⁶ Note that an individual service member may attend more than one workshop. References to the total number of TAP workshop participants do not track individual unique participants.

In addition, based on service members' individual needs, VETS offers two elective tracks to acquire additional skills via a two-day workshop: (1) the DOL Employment Workshop (DOLEW), and (2) the Career and Credential Exploration (C2E) Workshop. Service members must elect one two-day track during their individual counseling; however, they are encouraged to attend any additional track(s) and attendance to the courses more than once (as their unit missions allows) to prepare them for their transition.

- Two-Day DOLEW: The DOLEW is intended for those pursuing the employment track and covers emerging best practices in career employment, including in-depth training to learn interview skills, build effective resumes, and use emerging technology to network and search for employment. In FY 2022, VETS provided DOLEW workshops to 82,253 participants, which is a 21.3% increase compared to the 67,762 participants in FY 2021.
- Two-Day C2E Workshop: For those on the vocational track, the C2E workshop offers an opportunity for participants to complete a personalized career development assessment of their occupational interests and abilities. Participants are guided through a variety of career considerations, including labor market projections, educational opportunities, Registered Apprenticeships, certifications, and licensure requirements. In FY 2022, VETS provided C2E workshops to 15,341 participants, which is a 35.9% increase compared to the 11,284 participants in FY 2021.

In January 2023, VETS launched its revised EFCT and DOLEW curricula based on participants' feedback. Throughout FY 2022, the VETS TAP curriculum development team compiled and categorized input from stakeholders:

- TAP service members (through survey results and written comments);
- DOL TAP facilitators;
- VETS federal field staff;
- TAP interagency curriculum subject matter experts;
- National Association of State Workforce Agencies; and
- Veteran Service Organizations.

The VETS TAP curriculum development team used the stakeholder input to reorganize workshop content, remove redundancies, and improve sections on resume writing, federal hiring, interviewing, and salary negotiation. VETS piloted the revised curricula at several military installations, and made further refinements based on pilot participant feedback. VETS is currently following the same process with the C2E curriculum. VETS will launch the revised C2E workshop in January 2024.

VETS workshops are highly rated by attendees. FY 2023 Transition Assistance Participant Assessment results through the second quarter indicated that 97% would use what they learned in their own transition planning, and 95% reported that the EFCT enhanced their confidence in transition planning.

VETS Designed and Implemented Innovative Employment Workshops

In addition to the three core VETS employment workshops, VETS designed and implemented two other innovative suites of employment workshops to address the unique needs of military spouses, caregivers, and our wounded, ill, and/or injured service members:

Military Spouse Employment Curriculum: In February 2021, VETS announced the launch of a monthly series of career workshops to provide employment assistance to transitioning military spouses, also known as the Transition Employment Assistance for Military Spouses' (TEAMS) curriculum. The TEAMS workshops are designed to help military spouses plan and prepare for their job search in pursuit of their employment goals. Currently, VETS offers ten TEAMS courses. The courses use a combination of current curriculum components for service members, such as resume development and interviewing techniques, and components more specifically tailored to the needs of military spouses, who often face frequent moves and the complexities associated with state licensing and credentialing requirements. In collaboration with SBA, VETS offers its entrepreneurship course through TEAMS and our collaboration with Hiring Our Heroes resulted in VETS creating and providing a specialized one-hour Federal hiring seminar for military spouses attending monthly Amplify events. Through July 31, 2023, VETS has provided 323 workshops to more than 3,380 military spouses and caregivers in FY 2023. We continue to work with our partners at DoD to schedule and promote TEAMS events.

Wounded Warrior and Caregiver Employment Workshop (WWCEW): Each year, there are approximately 15,000 TSMs who are considered wounded, ill, and/or injured, transitioning either through their service branch's warrior care or military recovery units or through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES).⁷ In April 2022, VETS launched the WWCEW for those being evaluated for a disability rating through IDES as an alternative to the required one-day EFCT. Disabled service members face barriers to completing the traditional EFCT, such as coordinating class schedules with medical appointments, long class duration, working with medical and health restrictions, and requiring caregiver attendance. The curriculum includes six self-paced online modules that participants can complete at their own pace, and the course interface enables users to register for a virtual meeting with a VETS facilitator to ask questions and to discuss activities and course content to accommodate the individual's needs. As of July 31, over 13,400 participants have attended WWCEW in FY 2023.

Military Life Cycle Curriculum: In FY 2023, VETS developed and implemented its first Military Life Cycle (MLC) course on Apprenticeship. The MLC curriculum is a self-paced online training module that a TSM, their spouse, or a veteran can access at any time. The course provides essential information and resources to broaden service members' understanding of credentialing and apprenticeship opportunities. VETS will continue to develop additional MLC employment related curricula in coordination with our Interagency Partners.⁸

⁷ 2021 DoD Demographics Profile of the Military Community: <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2021-demographics-report.pdf>

⁸ Note that the Apprenticeship MLC course is accessible at <https://www.tapevents.mil/courses> by selecting MLC from the drop down menu.

Transforming Employment Opportunities during Transition

In FY 2022, almost 28,000 separating service members participated in two interagency employment programs that are rapidly transforming the TAP employment space, expanding TAP's information-sharing program to include hands-on training and assistance for service members and their spouses. According to DoD, over 22,000 service members participated in SkillBridge and 5,369 separating service members and 340 military spouses participated in the VETS Employment Navigator and Partnership Program (ENPP).

Employment Navigator and Partnership Program: The ENPP began at 13 military installations worldwide on April 1, 2021. The ENPP leverages the Secretary's authority (10 U.S.C. § 1144) to assist TSMs and their spouses with identifying and connecting to employment and training opportunities. The pilot was designed in response to feedback from veterans who stated that, while their TAP classroom experience was educational, they desired a more personalized approach. ENPP provides one-on-one, tailored services for TSMs and their spouses.

Through our full-time contract employment navigator staff and our employment partners, ENPP clients receive assistance with their resumes, career direction, as well as referrals to vetted partner organizations and American Job Centers (AJC) that provide additional personalized support. ENPP Partners are required to select a primary service provided across nine possible categories of services, which include: digital employment opportunity matching, training services, employment mentorship, hiring events, employment networking, Registered Apprenticeship opportunities, referrals to employment opportunities, placement services, and wrap-around services. A list of our current partners can be found on the VETS ENPP Partner Page,⁹ and organizations that are interested in partnership with us can submit an application form.¹⁰ As of July 31, 2023, ENPP served over 11,256 TSMs and 778 military spouses since its launch.

Also, at ENPP sites, the lead Employment Navigator can serve as the initial point of contact for a TSM receiving a warm handover at Capstone. No later than 90 days prior to separating, TSMs will go through Capstone, a process by which the military service branch evaluates whether service members have met the Career Readiness Standards (CRS). To meet the employment track CRS for employment, a service member must have either a completed resume or confirmation of employment. If a service member fails to meet the CRS for employment, they are provided a "warm handover," a person-to-person connection between the transitioning service member and an AJC, which connects them to designated services and follow-up resources as needed.

During a warm handover, at ENPP sites employment navigators connect TSMs to a designated AJC point-of-contact, who verifies with DOL that a client has connected with the AJC. In addition to being connected with the state AJCs where they reside, many service members receiving a warm handover also receive services from our employment navigators and partners. VETS believes that providing TSMs with additional support from employment

⁹ <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/tap/employment-navigator-partnership/enpp-partnerships>

¹⁰ <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/VETS/files/tap/DOLVETSENPPPotentialPartnerApplicationForm.pdf>

navigators will enable more service members to meet the CRS and lead to a reduction in the number of TSMs who are required to receive a warm handover for employment.

According to participant surveys, the ENPP has been a great success. As of July 31, 2023, 96% of ENPP survey respondents reported positive feelings after meeting with their Employment Navigator and would recommend ENPP to a friend or colleague. Additionally, 98% felt ENPP partners met or exceeded their employment related expectations. As one ENPP survey respondent stated, “The value of the employment navigator is having a one-on-one conversation to go back over the plethora of information you received in TAP classes and give guidance and recommendations specific to your situation.” We are very proud of the progress that has been made through ENPP and look forward to continuing and expanding this initiative as time and budget allow.

DOL is excited to continue collaboration with Congress, ENPP stakeholders, the military services, and employers across the United States to annually increase employment-related TAP outcomes created by these two emerging interagency TAP employment programs.

Expanding the Off-Base Transition Training Pilot

On January 11, 2022, VETS announced the launch of a five-year Off-Base Transition Training (OBTT) pilot program, in accordance with section 4303 of the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-315), enacted on January 5, 2021. Section 4303 directed DOL to provide TAP to veterans and the spouses of veterans at locations other than active military installations for a period of five years to improve employment-related outcomes in areas with high veteran unemployment. The OBTT pilot launched in eight metropolitan areas across five states (California, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas). VETS is currently working to expand to five additional states (Colorado, Illinois, Nevada, New York, and Oregon). VETS will continue to expand by selecting states with high rates of veteran unemployment, with preference given to states with a high rate of Unemployment Compensation for Ex-servicemembers (UCX) usage by recently separated veterans.

OBTT features ten two-hour, instructor-led employment skills and workforce development workshops. The workshops cover the following topics:

- Marketing Yourself
- My Next Move
- Resume Essentials
- Resume Writing
- Employment Rights
- Federal Hiring
- Interview Skills
- LinkedIn Job Search
- LinkedIn Profiles
- Salary Negotiations

The OBTT workshops are offered in-person at various times and locations in the pilot states, as well as virtually nationwide. As of July 31, 2023, 6,170 veterans or spouses of veterans were provided support through 3,304 virtual and in-person workshops through OBTT.

Overall, VETS believes that OBTT has been a beneficial resource for our veterans, especially for those who have been separated from the military for over 10 years, as TAP was

not mandatory for most separating service members until 2011. As one OBTT participant indicated in a survey: “Over the course of years, I have attended a myriad of workshops and acquired much valuable information during the presentations. Many of the workshops offered applicable information and materials. However, I must say that the workshop presented by OBTT, *Marketing Yourself and Other Job Search Tactics*, was the most organized, user friendly, and engaging that I have ever attended. The format of the workbooks is excellent. They are now my resource books for future questions. I feel prepared to go out and find employment that can utilize my skills and interests. Many, many kudos to you and your team! My wish and desire is that this workshop continues so others can have the opportunity I was afforded.”

Leveraging Data to Improve TAP Outcomes

Data analytics and research are the key tools we use to understand the effectiveness and customer experience of our TAP services and improve employment outcomes for transitioning service members. Through changes in TAP since the passage of the FY 2019 NDAA, VETS is transforming its data collection and analysis capabilities around the transition space. Traditionally, VETS has only had access to data about TAP workshops and those workshops’ participants. However, new initiatives, such as ENPP and related data acquisition efforts, have enabled VETS to collect more data on TSMs’ transition experience through developing a new data system and building a new one-of-a-kind dataset. Overall, the past year has been a transformative time for DOL’s TAP program.

Last year (FY 2022), VETS updated its data-sharing agreement with DoD (specifically, the Defense Manpower Data Center) to expand the amount of data transferred to DOL. Through the Veterans’ Data Exchange Initiative (VDEI), which started in FY 2016 with DoD, the Department receives a daily refresh of information on TSMs collected on the DD Form 2648 (Pre-Separation Counseling Checklist) and TAP course attendance information. This data allows VETS to monitor DOL Benefit briefing attendance, DOL-provided TAP services, and receipt of warm handovers, and ultimately helps VETS measure program effectiveness. Additionally, in December 2021, VETS launched its case management system, the TAP Employment Navigator System (TENS), which is used by Employment Navigators (who are contracted staff), ENPP partners, and TAP Team members to capture data, develop reports, and manage ENPP processes. TENS includes an integrated client request meeting scheduler, program reporting, policy/guidance storage, and client record management.

For DOL’s TAP Evaluation and Employment Navigator (TEEN) Study, VETS completed the required data-sharing agreements with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) which were needed to extend the use of existing VDEI and ENPP data to include wage and employment information from the HHS administered National Directory of New Hires (NDNH).

In nearly every point of this early analysis, TSMs who received ENPP services saw notably better outcomes compared to those service members who did not. This is observed in examination of both average quarterly wages and Unemployment Insurance utilization data. For

example, preliminary findings from the TEEN study indicate an increase of 5.8% (\$13,620.45) higher average quarterly wages earned for enlisted TSMs who participated in ENPP compared to their counterparts (\$12,871.72) who did not participate. Additionally, preliminary analysis indicates that TSMs who utilized ENPP services are obtaining employment 2.9 months after separation on average compared to their non-ENPP veterans who obtain employment in 4.4 months on average. Also, approximately 30% of ENPP veterans obtained employment in 30 days or less of their anticipated separation date, compared to 20% of non-ENPP veterans. VETS will continue analyzing the data being collected and will be able to provide more nuanced information as data sets increase and analysis matures.

Based upon the current outcomes to date, VETS is prepared to transition the ENPP from the pilot phase to a program phase. VETS is prepared to make the Employment Navigator and Partnership Program part of the regular DOL Transition Assistance Program established under 10 U.S.C. section 1144. As funding allows, and in coordination with the TAP Interagency governance and military services, VETS will extend ENPP beyond the current pilot sites to serve as many TSMs and their spouses as possible.

Earlier this year, the Department published the findings of two evaluations on TAP, the TAP Impact Study and the ENPP Formative Study. The TAP Impact study evaluated the impact of the “Transition Goals, Plans, and Success” (GPS) program, which was implemented between 2013 and 2019, for nearly 289,000 Army servicemembers for up to 36 months post-separation.¹¹ This study found that the version of TAP was effective in helping participants obtain employment within the first quarter post-separation and achieve job retention at six months post-separation. The program also had an impact on specific subgroups’ employment rates, including for Black servicemembers and lower-ranking military personnel. However, the TAP study showed that GPS participants had lower earnings than employed non-participants across time. This finding demonstrates the need to continuously improve the quality of jobs that TAP participants have access to, in order to maximize their earning potential.

The ENPP Formative Study examined the early implementation of the ENPP and variations in the implementation by ENPP site.¹² The study found that ENPP was implemented as planned, and recommendations for improvement have been addressed. For example, interview participants stressed the importance of screening Employment Navigators for soft skills, the human connection that is so important for helping TSMs make sense in a tumultuous time in their lives. We also established eligibility criteria and an approval process for new partner organizations, and a new data tracking and reporting system. DOL’s VETS ENPP Evaluation is underway, and the key components include a rigorous implementation and outcomes evaluation, an assessment of whether an impact study is feasible, and a synthesis of findings from other DOL studies on workforce navigators.

¹¹ Evaluation of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Impact Study Report, [Evaluation of the Transition Assistance Program \(TAP\) Impact Study Report \(dol.gov\)](#). Published July 2023.

¹² Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Employment Navigator and Partnership Pilot (ENPP) Formative Study Report, [Transition Assistance Program \(TAP\) Employment Navigator and Partnership Pilot \(ENPP\) Formative Study Report \(dol.gov\)](#). Published July 2023.

As we complete these studies, we will share the results with the public, Congress, our partners, and other stakeholders, so that we can continue to ensure the quality of our programs for our service members and their families.

Successful Interdepartmental Collaboration

VETS believes that, at its core, TAP is a collaborative program that requires close coordination between our interagency partners and with our public-private partnerships to be successful in its mission. Since DOL is the federal lead for employment, training programs, and the American workforce system, it is imperative that DOL continues to work closely with DoD, VA, and SBA to ensure all training and employment programs for veterans are providing quality jobs for veterans. To accomplish this mission, VETS will continue to build stronger ties with Congress, its interagency partners, ENPP partners, DoD SkillBridge stakeholders, and employers to annually increase employment-related TAP outcomes.

VETS works with its interagency partners to provide program oversight. In conjunction with DoD and VA, VETS co-chairs the TAP Executive Council, the TAP Senior Steering Group, Transition Assistance Interagency Working Group, and six functional working groups. Interagency members including DOL, DoD, VA, ED, DHS, SBA, OPM, and the armed services meet and coordinate on a regular basis to ensure the partners are supporting and advancing TAP, as well as to reduce redundancy, better serve unique populations, and improve coordination of services across program areas.

VETS, along with all the TAP interagency partners, is participating in the President's Management Agenda Life Experience Human Centered Design (HCD) project named Navigating the Transition from Military to Civilian Life. The project lead is the VA's Veterans Experience Office. Beginning in September 2022, representatives from VETS and all the TAP interagency partners worked as a co-design team for the project. Guided by the HCD model, the first co-design sprint produced a concept for a digital solution used to deliver information and resources based on service members' own transition plans. The project team continues to work on the digital solution prototype to support development, piloting, and eventual implementation. The cross-agency collaborative will continue work through the rest of this year in packaging recommendations for potential solutions that can be developed and implemented in the coming fiscal year and beyond.

Through the ENPP, VETS has served over 12,700 TSMs and their spouses. Originally launched at 13 locations, the pilot has since expanded to 29 locations at the request of the military services and has grown to over 47 partners. ENs and installation personnel meet regularly to assist with operational or policy related needs. Additionally, ENPP partners and VETS' staff meet monthly to share updates and to address best practices and challenges. ENPP would not have succeeded without the great work that our partners are doing for our service members and their spouses, and for that we are grateful.

Through OBTT, our full-time contracted Employment Resource Coordinators are actively engaging with local stakeholders, including veteran and military spouse organizations. Stakeholder engagement through OBTT is essential for reaching our target audience. Each of our sites meets regularly with representatives throughout their community to leverage information, resources, and to share best practices.

DOL is proud to work with our partners to promote the DoD administered SkillBridge program, which connects service members with industry partners in real-world job experiences, helping bridge the gap between the end of service and the beginning of their civilian careers. Employers participate in the SkillBridge program to provide opportunities for service members through specific industry training, Registered Apprenticeships, and internships during their last 180 days of service. Timely access to the SkillBridge program and other TAP programs and services is crucial to the transition process, especially for those who face more challenges in the civilian sector, such as junior enlisted, service members with exceptional family members, and those who have unplanned transitions.

Each of these emerging interagency employment programs provide positive employment outcomes that are rapidly transforming the employment TAP space. Over the next few years, VETS is excited to continue collaboration with Congress, stakeholders, the military services, and employers, to annually increase employment related TAP outcomes created by these two emerging interagency TAP employment programs and initiatives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our long-term strategic goal for TAP is for the nation as a whole to recognize military service as a path to high-quality civilian careers. The future of the country's All-Volunteer Force across the armed services depends upon this recognition. As the lead Federal agency on veteran employment, VETS looks forward to working with this Committee and our many partners and stakeholders to create opportunities that ensure all veterans can have a good job and opportunity for advancement.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Moran, distinguished Members of the Committee, this concludes my statement. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this hearing, and I welcome your questions.