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EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

TESTIMONY OF
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VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING
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BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. SENATE

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“ENDING HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS”

Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Burr, and members of the Committee:

I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss how the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) fulfills its mission of supporting the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) goal of ending Veteran homelessness in five years.

Every day, we are reminded of the tremendous sacrifices made by our Service Members and their families. As this latest generation of Veterans returns home, we want to make sure that they can have a home . . . when they come home. One way that we can honor their sacrifices is by providing them with the best services and programs our nation has to offer and making sure they have a home. Ending homelessness means both obtaining a home and obtaining a job - which is why we are committed to providing a path to employment with family-sustaining wages.

The Department of Labor has made helping Veterans a priority. VETS' programs support Secretary Solis's vision of “Good Jobs for Everyone” by helping homeless Veterans get into middle class and maintain stability. VETS works closely with the Department of Defense (DoD), the VA, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to help Veterans reach this goal through seamless employment assistance. Seamless employment assistance will, in turn, require close collaboration, enhanced communication, and sustained, purposeful action. It's going to take all of us working together, sharing best practices, and developing innovative solutions to challenging problems.

VETS Missions

We accomplish our mission through three distinct functions: employment and training programs; transition assistance services; and enforcement of relevant federal laws. I have testified before this committee on my five aspirations. One of those is helping Service Members transition seamlessly into meaningful employment and careers while emphasizing success in high-growth and emerging industries such as clean energy and health care. While we normally think of

assistance for Service Members as they leave the military and transition to civilian employment, we must also look at homeless Veterans as they transition back into employment.

Homeless Veterans Vision

Secretary Solis shares Secretary Shinseki's vision of ultimately eliminating homelessness among our nation's Veterans. We have strengthened our interagency collaboration at all levels to mobilize for this important and necessary goal.

We are drawing upon the expertise and resources of the highest levels of the Executive Branch. For example, the deputy secretaries of DOL, VA, Health and Human Services (HHS), and HUD are pulling together and meeting regularly to increase the collaborative efforts of their departments towards the goal of ending Veteran homelessness. Among other initiatives, the departments have agreed to:

- Share data on how their programs serve the Veteran homeless population.
- Consider how best to provide outreach to Tribal communities, through ideas generated by a DOL-led working group.
- Provide information to each department's grantees regarding how Veterans served by those grants can determine if they are eligible for VA services and how they can access those services.
- Share draft Solicitations for Grant Applications (SGA) and Notices of Funding Availability between the departments to ensure alignment of efforts.
 - o For example, DOL has shared its draft SGA with VA for the Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program (IVTP), which provides employment services to veterans who have recently been incarcerated, including those who are at risk of becoming homeless. DOL will also provide VA with an early view of its initial IVTP applicant rankings in order to incorporate VA input.
- Identify ways to link VA Supportive Services grants to the VA/HUD homeless prevention pilot program and ways to involve HHS in that effort.

Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (HVRP)

VETS' major program to tackle the problem of Veteran homelessness is the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP). This is the only Federal nationwide program focusing exclusively on employment of Veterans who are homeless. HVRP provides employment and training services to help homeless Veterans with the skills and opportunities they need to gain meaningful employment and turn around their lives.

HVRP grants are awarded competitively to state and local workforce investment boards, state agencies, local public agencies, and private non-profit organizations, including faith-based organizations and neighborhood partnerships. HVRP grantees provide an array of services utilizing a holistic case management approach that directly assists homeless Veterans and provides training services to help them to successfully transition into the labor force. Homeless Veterans receive occupational, classroom, and on-the-job training as well as job search and placement assistance, including follow-up services.

Grantees provide additional services by networking with Federal, State, and local resources for Veteran support programs. This includes working with Federal, State, and local agencies such as

the VA, HUD, the Social Security Administration, the local Continuum of Care agencies and organizations, State Workforce Agencies, and local One-Stop Career Centers.

VETS requested a total of \$41,330,000 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 for HVRP, an increase of \$5 million (14 percent) over the FY 2010 funding level. In Program Year (PY) 2010, which will begin in July 2010, HVRP expects to serve 21,000 homeless Veterans. VETS plans to serve 25,000 homeless Veterans in PY 2011.

For PY 2009, \$26,330,000 was appropriated for HVRP, a 13 percent increase over PY 2008. HVRP grantees will serve 2115,5000 homeless Veterans in PY 2009. During PY 2008, HVRP grantees served 13,700 homeless Veterans. The employment placement rate was 67.4 percent. The cost for serving this hard-to-serve population was \$1,500 per participant and \$2,600 per placement. In PY 2009, VETS awarded a total of 98 HVRP grants, including third-year funding for two cooperative agreements to assist in developing the HVRP National Technical Assistance Center. The Center provides technical assistance to current grantees, potential grant applicants, and the public; gathers grantee best practices; conducts employment-related research on homeless Veterans; carries out regional grantee training sessions and self-employment boot camps; and performs outreach to the employer community in order to increase job opportunities for Veterans.

Homeless Women Veterans

A major new undertaking in HVRP is a separate grant initiative to serve the needs of homeless women Veterans and homeless Veterans with families, a population that is on the rise and in need of specialized services. In PY 2010, we will use up to \$5 million of the \$10 million increase appropriated to HVRP in FY 2010 for this program to provide customized employment services. We expect to fund about 25 grantees in PY 2010. We requested an additional \$5 million in the FY 2011 budget to provide continued funding for the homeless women Veterans initiative. .

VETS is collaborating with DOL's Women's Bureau, which has already conducted 28 moderated listening sessions nationwide with formerly and currently homeless women Veterans to identify the causes and the solutions for homelessness among women Veterans. The findings from these sessions are available on the Women's Bureau website at: <http://www.dol.gov/wb/programs/listeningsessions.htm>.

We also conducted a national listening session with service providers, VA, HUD, and other government agencies to begin identifying the best practices for serving homeless women Veterans and homeless Veterans with families. We will continue to identify such practices and disseminate them to service providers throughout the Nation.

Incarcerated Veterans

The Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program (IVTP) provides employment services to assist in reintegrating incarcerated and/or transitioning incarcerated veterans, who are at risk of becoming homeless, into meaningful employment within the labor force.

Through the program, VETS will continue its efforts to help incarcerated Veterans and will coordinate these efforts with the VA. Of the \$36 million for HVRP in FY 2010, VETS plans to use \$4 million for IVTP, which will serve approximately 1,500 Veterans through 12 grants. We plan to continue this program at that level in FY 2011.

Additional Activities

Of note to this hearing, the DOL Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshop addresses homelessness prevention. This module includes a presentation on general risk factors for homelessness, a self-assessment to help determine individual risk, and contact information for preventative assistance associated with homelessness.

VETS also utilizes a portion of HVRP funds to support stand down activities. A stand down is an event held in a local community where a variety of social services are provided to homeless Veterans. Stand down organizers partner with local business and social service providers to provide critical services such as: showers and haircuts; meals; legal advice; medical and dental examinations and treatment; and information on Veterans' benefits and opportunities for employment and training.

Stand down events are a gateway for many homeless Veterans into a structured housing and reintegration program. VETS funds HVRP eligible entities (that do not have a competitive HVRP grant) to support a stand down event. During FY 2009, VETS awarded over \$540,000 in non-competitive grants for 66 stand down events that provided direct assistance to 9,600 homeless Veterans.

Finally, there is also tremendous potential and opportunity for increasing engagement with employers to increase the hiring of Veterans. This involves communicating the value proposition for hiring Veterans more effectively, making the hiring process more convenient and efficient, and developing hiring partnerships. VETS is also developing new relationships with major private sector organizations to enlist their advice and support to increase Veterans' hiring.

Closing

In closing, I'd like to recount my experience from earlier this month, when I had the privilege of meeting the Honor Flight at Reagan National Airport and welcoming many of our country's WWII Veterans to our Nation's Capitol. When I shook the hand of a Pearl Harbor survivor, I was reminded of the honor and privilege we have at VETS to serve America's Veterans.

Thank you again for your unwavering commitment to Veterans and for the support that you've been providing to us.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today and look forward to answering your questions.