

**STATEMENT  
OF  
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VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
BEFORE THE  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

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**Introduction**

Good afternoon Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing. As Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy at the Office of Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) at the Department of Labor (DOL or Department), I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the implementation of the revised Transition Assistance Program (TAP), including the Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS). Additionally, I am also appreciative of the priority you placed on confirming Mike Michaud as the Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training at DOL.

In November, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that the national unemployment rate for veterans was 3.6 percent, the lowest rate in the past eight years and below that of nonveterans at 4.8 percent. Specific to this generation, the Gulf War-Era II veterans' unemployment rate of 4.2 percent was also below the nonveterans' rate. Further, among those aged 25 to 54 years, Gulf War-Era II veterans had an 84.6 percent labor-force participation rate compared to the nonveterans' rate of 80.8 percent. To the Department, this is great news and points to the number of efforts to help veterans obtain meaningful civilian careers.

The Department of Defense estimates that approximately 200,000 service members (including members of the Guard and Reserve) will leave the military annually. The brave men and women who serve our nation deserve a good job and a chance to utilize their unique skills to help build our economy. Under the leadership of President Obama, the Administration is committed to ensuring that America fulfills its obligations to our returning service members, veterans, and their families by providing them with the services and support they need to successfully transition to the civilian workforce. The TAP redesign is an important part of the Administration's efforts to fulfill this commitment.

**Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshops**

The Transition Assistance Program (TAP), as codified under 10 U.S.C. 1144, is a collaborative effort of the Departments of Labor, Veterans Affairs (VA), and Department of Defense (DoD), aimed at providing separating service members and their spouses with the training and support they need to transition successfully to the civilian workforce. Through TAP, DOL brings its extensive expertise in employment services to bear to provide a comprehensive three-day

Employment Workshop at U.S. military installations around the world.

Since the Department began providing Employment Workshops over 20 years ago, the number of workshops, participants, and locations has continued to grow. In 2003, TAP was expanded to overseas military installations, and in Fiscal Year (FY) 2005, courses were offered to returning members of the Reserve and National Guard via the 30, 60, and 90-day Yellow Ribbon Reintegration programs. Most recently, Congress passed and President Obama signed into law the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 (VOW Act), which, among other things, made participation in the DOL Employment Workshop mandatory for most transitioning service members, including those demobilizing from the National Guard and Reserve Components.

Since the inception of the program, the Department has provided training and services through Employment Workshops to over 2.6 million separating or retiring service members and their spouses. Last year alone, DOL conducted more than 6,400 Employment Workshops for over 180,000 participants at 206 sites worldwide. Of the over 180,000 participants, more than 7,000 were National Guard and Reserve.

### **Veterans Employment Initiative Task Force for a Career-Ready Military**

In 2011, the President established the Veterans Employment Initiative (VEI) Task Force to ensure the career readiness of transitioning service members. The Task Force consisted of joint representation from DOL, DoD, VA, Department of Homeland Security (U.S. Coast Guard), the Department of Education, the Small Business Administration, and the Office of Personnel Management. The President approved the Task Force's plan to strengthen and build upon the existing TAP curriculum, which is now known as the Transition Goals, Plans, Success program, or "Transition GPS."

*Transition GPS Program:* Under the current interagency Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the supporting agencies have a greater sense of their roles and responsibilities in support of Transition GPS<sup>1</sup>, which now includes four basic components to help service members prepare for separation and meet career readiness standards. They include (1) Pre-Separation Assessment and Counseling; (2) Transition GPS Core Curriculum; (3) Career Specific Additional Curriculum; and (4) CAPSTONE.

*Pre-Separation Assessment and Counseling:* Through the new transition program, separating service members will receive individual counseling to discuss their career goals and start their transition process. Each service member will be introduced to the programs and services available to them during their transition. Each service member will begin to develop an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) that documents his or her personal transition, as well as the deliverables he or she must attain to meet the new transition program's Career Readiness Standards.

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<sup>1</sup> Memorandum of Understanding Among the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, Labor, Education, and Homeland Security (U.S. Coast Guard), the U.S. Small Business Administration, and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, regarding the *Transition Assistance Program for Separating Service Members* (TAP MOU), of January 31, 2014. [http://www.dol.gov/vets/tapops/documents/APPENDIX\\_1-TAP\\_MOU\\_Final\\_Signed\\_Jan\\_31\\_2014.pdf](http://www.dol.gov/vets/tapops/documents/APPENDIX_1-TAP_MOU_Final_Signed_Jan_31_2014.pdf).

Transition GPS Core Curriculum: The Transition GPS Core Curriculum includes a financial planning seminar, VA Benefits Workshops, the redesigned DOL Employment Workshop, and other modules. Transitioning service members will also use a Military Occupational Code Crosswalk to translate their military skills, training, and experience into civilian occupations, credentials, and employment. To enhance the existing electronic tools used for the crosswalk, DOL contracted to identify equivalencies between the skills developed in specific military jobs and the skills required in civilian occupations, as required by the VOW Act. The results of the military equivalencies study have enhanced the military-civilian crosswalk by enabling the mapping of a single military occupation into multiple civilian occupations based on an analysis of embedded skill sets in addition to the similarity of tasks performed.

Career-Specific Additional Curriculum: Service members also have the opportunity to participate in a series of two-day tailored tracks within the Transition GPS curriculum: (1) an Accessing Higher Education Track (provided by DoD), for those pursuing a higher education degree; (2) a Career Technical Training Track (provided by VA), for those seeking job-ready skills and industry-recognized credentials in shorter-term training programs; and (3) the “Boots to Business” Entrepreneurship Track (provided by SBA), for those wanting to start a business.

CAPSTONE: Before their separation from the military, service members participate in a CAPSTONE event, which will involve chain-of-command verification that transitioning service members completed the Transition GPS curriculum and achieved Career Readiness Standards. Service members who require additional assistance will be referred to supplemental training opportunities. In addition, through the CAPSTONE event, service members will be offered a “warm handover” to appropriate federal, state, and local government agencies, such as the American Job Centers, as needed.

Current Curriculum: In compliance with the VOW Act, the Department initiated a significant redesign of the DOL Employment Workshop (DOLEW) to make it more engaging and relevant in light of the unique challenges facing transitioning service members. This was an extensive process that involved numerous pilots, evaluations, and feedback from reviewers and agency partners. In addition, the VOW Act required that DOL use contract facilitators to deliver its Employment Workshops to ensure a standardized, high-quality professional cadre of facilitators.

DOL awarded a contract to GBX Consultants, Incorporated, a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business, in August 2012 for the facilitation of all DOL Employment Workshops at locations worldwide as part of TAP. The contract runs through September 2017. DOL monitors the performance through review of Transition GPS Participant Survey results, regular site assessments by DOL federal field staff, and input from DoD and military services stakeholders. DOL can report thus far that the vendor is executing the contract requirements in a satisfactory manner.

The redesigned DOLEW includes three days of classroom instruction that is specifically geared toward the mechanics of getting a good job. On the first day of the Employment Workshop, participants develop their “Change Management Plan” and identify their overall strategy for transitioning into the workforce. They explore careers that complement the skills and expertise gained through their military service. Participants also develop a master job application from which they build targeted resumes, and they learn how to research the job market using the latest search tools.

On the second day of the Employment Workshop, participants learn how to analyze the job market and use social media in job searches and networking. Instructors discuss the difference between applications and resumes, and participants practice completing applications and developing targeted resumes. On the third day of the Employment Workshop, participants learn about special veterans' hiring authorities and how the Federal job application process differs from the private sector. Finally, participants work extensively on their interviewing skills and end the workshop with a mock interview exercise.

During the third quarter of FY 2014, VETS conducted a pilot with the Army's Warrior Transition Command, Army Installation Management Command (IMCOM), and the Fort Bragg Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) to provide a modified DOLEW to the wounded warrior population residing at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. That population's medical conditions and appointment schedules made it very difficult for them to attend a regular three-day workshop. The DOLEW curriculum was segmented into 6 modules taught in 3-hour blocks of instruction spaced out over several weeks.

From this pilot, it was found that the concept of breaking the workshop into smaller modules was well suited to the Wounded Warrior population and the Army wants to continue with this approach. It was recommended that the classes be two days a week, four to five hours in length for six weeks. Conducting the classes with this format would make it easier for the participants to retain information and soldiers would be more likely to complete their training. Also, it was recommended that two facilitators be present for the DOLEW because some participants required more individualized attention. As a result of this study, DOL began delivering this modified workshop to Army installations, specifically Fort Bragg, NC; Fort Belvoir, VA; and Joint Base San Antonio, Texas.

DOL is pleased to report that the new Employment Workshop curriculum has been well received. From its introduction in FY 2013 through the fourth quarter of FY 2015, over 530,000 transitioning service members experienced the new curriculum. Of the over 14,500 participants who most recently responded to a survey in FY 2015 Q4, 92 percent reported that they would use what they learned in their own transition planning and 90 percent reported that the DOLEW enhanced their confidence in transition planning. The data strongly suggest that the Department's revised Employment Workshop is meeting the high expectations of its audiences.

*DOL Employment Workshop Online Training Resources:* While completely redesigning the classroom version of the Employment Workshop during FY 2013, DOL also completed the development and implementation of a virtual Employment Workshop. Working with the U.S. Army's Soldier For Life – Transition Assistance Program (SFL-TAP) office, DOL began conducting regular synchronous virtual Employment Workshops. This is the same three-day workshop delivered in real time in a virtual classroom setting using the Army's virtual classroom platform.

Along with the synchronous virtual workshop, DOL worked with DoD Joint Knowledge Online (JKO) to convert the Employment Workshop instructor-led classroom curriculum into an asynchronous online distance-learning format. This is a self-paced online version of the Employment Workshop that service members can use to reinforce and refresh what they have

learned in the classroom. DOL has made the virtual curriculum available to all veterans and transitioning service members through the DOL VETS web site at <http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/tap.htm>.

Additionally, the Department assisted in the development and ongoing improvement of the online Veterans Employment Center. This online resource brings together a wealth of public and private job opportunities, a profile-builder, military skills translator, and detailed career and training resources all in one place. In November 2013, the Department also launched a new veteran-focused resource page for workforce practitioners. The resource page, available at <http://veterans.workforce3one.org>, is hosted on Workforce3One, the Employment and Training Administration's on-line technical assistance and peer learning platform.

*DOLEW Curriculum Review:* In FY 2014, as a member of the TAP Senior Steering Group Curriculum Working Group, DOL began an annual evaluation of its DOLEW curriculum. This included analysis of results from the web-based Transition GPS participant survey instrument developed by DoD, and input from various stakeholders. Based on this evaluation, DOL revised the Employment Workshop curriculum to include Equal Employment Opportunity and Americans with Disabilities Act content, the Veteran Employment Center content, and enhanced information on Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act employment training and registered apprenticeship programs.

The FY 2015 curriculum review of the Employment Workshop featured a variety of stakeholders (i.e. private sector employers, Federal partners, field staff, service members, Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) and Advisory Committee members from DOL's Advisory Committee on Veterans Employment and Training, and Employer Outreach (ACVETEO)). The stakeholders identified two key shortcomings in the DOLEW curriculum: (1) too much material without adequate time to cover it all, and (2) confusing and less-helpful content within the participant guide and workshop. These identified shortcomings resulted in a redesign of the DOLEW to promote mastery of (and not merely familiarization with) four core competencies: (1) developing and executing a job search plan, (2) planning for success in a civilian work environment, (3) creating resumes, cover letters, and other self-marketing materials, and (4) engaging in successful interviews and networking conversations.

Stakeholder input also suggested that the DOLEW be modified to ensure the workshop is relevant for transitioning service members of all grades from junior enlisted to senior Non-commissioned Officers and Officers. To accomplish this, DOL will include a range of model resumes and cover letters, and scenarios for the mock networking conversation and interview exercises, with guidance in the Facilitator's Guide to ensure each transitioning service member is working with the appropriate sample materials and scenarios. DOL expects this new content will be live in TAP classrooms beginning in January 2016.

*American Job Center (AJC) Resources and CAPSTONE:* Throughout the DOLEW , instructors discuss relevant employment services, including those pertaining to dislocated workers, available to assist transitioning service members, veterans and their families before, during, and after their separation from the military. All veterans, including recently separated service members and eligible spouses, receive priority of service in DOL-funded employment and training programs. As a result, DOL offers continuous employment services support to veterans before and after they

leave active duty and leverages Department-wide programs to provide comprehensive job services.

Most of the Department-wide programs and services are available through the nationwide network of nearly 2,500 American Job Centers (AJCs). The AJCs serve as the cornerstone for the Nation's workforce investment system and provide a range of services locally including counseling, resume writing workshops, job skills assessments, occupational training, on-the-job training, and job placement services.

During the DOL Employment Workshop, service members will also download and receive a "Gold Card," which entitles them to enhanced intensive services for six months from AJC staff. Veterans with significant barriers to employment will receive intensive employment services at AJCs from Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists funded through the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) program. However, most veterans who receive services through the AJCs are served by programs funded by DOL agencies other than VETS.

As previously mentioned, if a service member is assessed as not meeting Career Readiness Standards during their CAPSTONE event, their commander can facilitate a "warm handover" of the service member to the public workforce system for a review of the employment services available through AJCs and to facilitate access to appropriate services. This warm handover is accomplished either through introduction of the service member to a local AJC staff member, or through a call from the service member to the DOL Toll-Free Help Line (1-877-US2-JOBS or 1-877-872-5627). Being identified as not meeting these standards also allows the service member to receive services from a DVOP regardless of disability status or other significant barriers to employment.

*TAP Impact Evaluation:* DOL has awarded a contract to independently evaluate the Employment Workshop. The evaluation will include a quasi-experimental design impact analysis to analyze the impacts of the TAP DOLEW program on employment-related outcomes for separating military service members. It will also involve a small pilot to evaluate differential impacts of new delivery approaches for the TAP DOLEW (e.g., variations to the delivery of the program, the use of social media or other modes to enhance delivery or to serve as refreshers of TAP program lessons, or variations in the visual design of TAP program or outreach documents).

The interagency performance working group is also reviewing long-term measures that may be used to assess the impact of TAP. These include a variety of unemployment and labor force statistics. Many of these measures will require data sharing efforts, or possibly legislative changes to allow access to information across agencies.

Beginning in Program Year 2012, the TAP participant characteristic was added as a new reporting element for AJCs, indicating whether a participant attended the DOLEW within the past three years. This reporting element will be combined with other outcome measures under the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to track participants' employment, earnings, credential attainment, and skill gains. State workforce systems are still implementing this new data field. Data are expected to be available in FY 2016 that will help assess the impact of attendance at the DOLEW on a veteran's successful transition to civilian employment.

### **Off-Base Transition Training Pilot**

Section 301 of the Dignified Burial and Other Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2012 (enacted January 10, 2013, as P.L. 112-260) authorized the Secretary of Labor to provide the DOL Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshop under 10 U.S.C. § 1144 to veterans and their spouses at locations other than military installations via a pilot program. DOL conducted this two-year pilot “Off-Base Transition Training” program so that the feasibility and advisability of providing such a program to eligible individuals at locations other than military installations can be assessed.

After considering the requirements of Section 301(c) of the Dignified Burial Act, including at least two participant states that have high unemployment among veterans, and accounting for geographic dispersion, DOL invited Georgia, Washington, and West Virginia to participate in the pilot. All three states accepted. DOL used its current TAP contract facilitator to provide the selected states with the standard three-day DOL Employment Workshop for the Off-Base Transition Training program. In January 2015, VETS completed the two-year pilot program. In total, VETS conducted a total of 21 pilot workshops in three states. VETS submitted its second annual report on the pilot to Congress in April 2015. Out of the 250 total participants, 63 percent were within the 25-44 age group. Overall, participants rated the OBTT at rate of 9.14 out of 10 (ten being the highest). 56 percent of respondents indicated the resume writing instruction was the most beneficial, while 32 percent indicated interview skills as the most helpful. Common data measures regarding employment outcomes of participants should be available in October 2016 due to the existing data systems and because of data reporting requirements after an individual exits from AJC services. As outcome data for participants becomes available, VETS expects to develop options for maximizing the value of the services delivered to this population if Congress intends to extend the OBTT program or if the program is not continued.

### **Licensing and Credentialing**

Section 237 of the VOW Act required DOL to carry out a demonstration project on credentialing “for the purpose of facilitating the seamless transition of members of the Armed Forces from service on active duty to civilian employment.” Recognizing that the authority to regulate entry into most professions lies with the states, DOL funded the demonstration project with the intent to both engage governors in an effort to accelerate credentialing and licensing pathways for veterans and to move veterans into civilian employment by reducing or eliminating barriers to credentials, certifications, or licenses requiring similar skills, training, or experience within a select number of military occupations. A cost study also examined savings to federal programs that may be achieved when a veteran completes an accelerated pathway toward licensure instead of a duplicative training under a full-length pathway.

Through a contract with the National Governors’ Association (NGA), the Department explored accelerated career pathways for service members and veterans in selected high-demand civilian occupations, (i.e. truck driving, law enforcement, and healthcare support). Working with a panel of experts, NGA designed and implemented a demonstration project in six participating states: Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Nevada, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

During this demonstration project, NGA identified the following challenges regarding states’

efforts to design, establish, and improve strategies for accelerated pathways:

- Veterans with equivalent training and experience as licensed civilians may have difficulty providing documentation recognized by civilian licensing boards.
- Veterans that experience gaps between their military training and experience and civilian requirements may have to participate in duplicative training to attain relevant civilian licensure and/or certification.
- Administrative rules and processes within civilian licensing and credentialing systems may create hurdles for veterans to obtain licensure and/or certification unrelated to their ability to competently provide professional services to the public.

In turn, the demonstration project identified several strategies that states may utilize to streamline the licensing and certification of veterans, including:

- To address documentation challenges, states can license veterans by endorsement, or permit veterans with relevant training to sit for civilian licensure examinations.
- To address training gaps, states can work with educational institutions to set up new accelerated programs for veterans that bridge gaps, or provide veterans advanced standing in existing programs.
- To address administrative or procedural challenges, states can assess any non-skill related requirements that may disadvantage veterans such as fees or length of experience, or take steps to make civilian employment pathways friendlier to veterans through concerted outreach to both veterans and prospective employers.

DOL, with the support of NGA, will share the best practices identified through the demonstration project in a final report that includes a blueprint for other states to follow as well as the results of the cost study.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment**

DOL works to provide employment services to veterans and transitioning service members through the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program. The VR&E program focuses on assisting veterans with service-connected disabilities and barriers to employment in preparing for, finding, and maintaining suitable employment. Working with the VA, DOL personnel around the country, as well as our state and local workforce agency partners, strive to ensure that DOL's programs are made available to provide needed assistance to veterans and transitioning service members with disabilities. As the Federal Government's leader for veterans' employment, DOL is able to provide expertise to VR&E counselors, and provide critical employment and career services to veterans and transitioning service members. These services are available to transitioning service members regardless of characterization of discharge. Such transitioning service members have available to them the AJC services open to all U.S. Citizens.

### **Conclusion**

The Department looks forward to working with the Committee to ensure that our separating service members have the resources and training they need to successfully transition to the civilian workforce. Secretary Perez and I routinely visit TAP locations as we travel around the country and



the world to make sure our service members are receiving the best possible instruction, and Assistant Secretary Michaud will be visiting TAP locations in the very near future. The improving employment situation for veterans is a resounding testament to the nationwide response from stakeholders, both public and private, at the national level and even within the local communities. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished Members of the Committee, this concludes my written statement. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this hearing. I welcome your questions.