

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

FULFILLING THE PROMISE TO WOMEN VETERANS

**THE UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

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Introduction

Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and distinguished Members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to provide a statement for today's hearing. I commend you all for your tireless efforts to ensure that America fulfills its obligations to our current service members, veterans, and their families. The Department of Labor (DOL, or The Department) also works hard every day to ensure all veterans are prepared to meet their employment objectives. The employment situation facing women veterans is of particular importance for us.

The population of women veterans grows steadily each year. Of the 10.7 million veterans participating in today's civilian labor force, 13% or 1.4 million are women. Overall, the unemployment rates for women veterans are trending downward and are statistically no different than for women non-veterans. Annual unemployment averages reveal that women veterans are younger, more educated, and more likely to be of ethnic minority status than their male veteran counterparts.¹

The Department has closely integrated the efforts of our Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) and the Women's Bureau (WB) to address the full spectrum of issues facing women veterans in the workforce. WB formulates standards and policies that promote the welfare of working women. VETS' mission is focused on four key areas: (1) preparing veterans for meaningful careers; (2) providing them with employment resources and expertise; (3) protecting their employment and reemployment rights; and, (4) promoting the employment of veterans and related training opportunities to employers across the country.

¹ The preceding information was compiled using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment status, 2013- 2014 annual averages. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.toc.htm>

The Women Veterans Program (WVP)

The WVP was established in VETS in 2014, in collaboration with the WB, to ensure that DOL's employment services are meeting the needs of women veterans. The WVP also serves in an advisory role on the status of women veterans and employment for the VA's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans and interagency workgroups including the White House Council on Women and Girls - Women Veteran Working Group and the Council on Veterans Employment - Women Veteran Initiative. Our collaborative relationships with VA's Center for Women Veterans, Center for Minority Veterans, Office of Rural Health, and others ensure that service providers and other influencers of women veterans are educated on the full suite of employment services that their women veteran clientele may need. Other collaborative relationships include non-profit organizations that also provide services to women veterans. This cooperative approach has allowed VETS to "meet her where she is" while continuing VETS' core focus on employment, remaining the authoritative voice on employment issues, and making referrals for employment supports as appropriate.

VETS' WVP will continue its outreach to organizations that work with and advocate on behalf of women veterans, and will review existing programs and policies to ensure that women veterans are given opportunities to be successful in their employment and training opportunities.

Employment Resources and Expertise (Competitive and Formula Grants)

The Department provides a vast array of services to transitioning service members, veterans, and eligible spouses to help them with job searching, accessing training programs to bridge skills gaps, and identifying employment opportunities. Through core programs, such as Wagner-Peyser Employment Services, more than 1.1 million veterans receive services annually, including more than 170,000 (14.5%) who are female veterans. At the center of the Department's efforts are two VETS-administered grant programs: Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG), a formula program that supports State staff positions at approximately 2,500 American Job Centers (AJCs) across the nation to promote veterans employment; and the competitive Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP). The President's 2016 Budget maintains FY 2015 funding levels for VETS' grant programs (\$175 million for JVSG, and \$38.1 million for HVRP and programs under 38 U.S.C. 2021A and 2023).

Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG)

Although all veterans, including women veterans, receive priority of service through American Job Centers, JVSG provides additional funding to 54 states and territories so they can exclusively serve eligible veterans, as defined in 38 U.S.C. 4101(4) and 4211(4), and other eligible spouses as defined in 38 U.S.C. 4101(5) and can perform outreach to employers. JVSG funds are provided to fund two staff positions at American Job Centers: Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) staff:

- DVOP specialists are authorized by 38 U.S.C. 4103A and must provide intensive services to eligible veterans and eligible spouses to meet their employment needs, prioritizing service to special disabled and other disabled veterans, as defined by 38 U.S.C. 4211, and

to other eligible veterans in accordance with priorities determined by the Secretary. The statute also requires that DVOP specialists place maximum emphasis on assisting veterans who are economically or educationally disadvantaged.

- LVERs perform a wide range of duties on behalf of our veterans specifically related to outreach to the employer community and facilitation within the state’s employment service delivery system. These duties are outlined in law in 38 U.S.C. 4104(b). LVERs must be assigned duties that promote the advantages of hiring veterans to employers, employer associations, and business groups.

JVSG Performance Metrics for Women Veterans

JVSG services are successful and effective because they are tailored to suit individual veterans, regardless of sex.

Table 1. JVSG Employment, Employment Retention, and Average Nine-Month Earnings by Veteran Status for Program Year (PY) 2013*

Performance Outcomes	All Veterans	Women Veterans
Entered Employment Rate	54.9%	54.3%
Employment Retention Rate	80.2%	79.62%
Nine-Month Earnings	\$15,748	\$13,721

* Table 1: VETS-200C: Participant Services and Outcomes of DVOP/LVER, and by the ETA form 9133 for the States of Texas and Pennsylvania.

In Program Year (PY) 2013 (July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014), 13% of the veterans served through JVSG were women, an increase from 12% in PY 2012. A recent independent data analysis commissioned by the Department’s Chief Evaluation Office found that JVSG services are associated with better outcomes, specifically for women veterans. Every woman veteran has different experiences and needs, and JVSG services are responsive to the diverse needs of each veteran. Women veterans who utilize these services experience higher entered employment rates and higher wages than their non-veteran female peers. The gender wage gap is also considerably smaller for women veterans served by JVSG than it is for non-veteran women, according to DOL research. It is critical that each woman veteran struggling with unemployment come to an American Job Center where she will meet one-on-one with a workforce development professional and receive personalized assistance, guidance, and support.

Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP)

The Department is committed to the Administration’s goal of ending homelessness among veterans by the end of 2015. In leading this effort, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), currently chaired by Secretary Perez, has generated powerful national partnerships at every level to work toward ending homelessness across the nation. While homelessness among veterans has declined, much work remains. Homelessness among female veterans accounted for 10% of both the sheltered and unsheltered homeless veteran population in

the 2014 Point in Time Count. The 2014 count was the first year in which the Department of Housing and Urban Development required all of its Continuums of Care to count the number of female veterans experiencing homelessness.

HVRP operates on the principle that when homeless veterans attain meaningful and sustainable employment, they are on a path to self-sufficiency and diminished susceptibility to homelessness. HVRP is employment-focused; each participant receives customized services to address his or her specific barriers to employment. Services may include occupational, classroom, and on-the-job training, as well as job search support, placement assistance, and post-placement follow-up services.

Homeless Female Veterans and Veterans with Families (HFVWWF) Grant Program

The Homeless Female Veterans and Veterans with Families (HFVWWF) grants are competitive grants that specifically assist the subpopulation of homeless female veterans and veterans with families. The HFVWWF grant was developed to address the particular employment issues of homeless women veterans recognizing that their needs may be different from their male counterparts. The grants support direct services through a case management approach that leverages federal, state, and local resources. Eligible veterans and their families are connected with appropriate employment and life skills support to ensure a successful integration into the workforce.

HVRP Performance and Analysis for Women Veterans

In PY 2013, 1,958 female veterans were enrolled in HVRP. Of those, 1,161, or 59.3% were placed into employment. HVRP's engaged, client-centric approach has successfully placed thousands of previously-homeless veterans, some of whom were chronically homeless, on a path to self-sufficiency. In FY 2014, the HVRP program received an appropriation of \$38,109,000 with which the Department awarded 37 new HVRP grants, 101 option year HVRP grants, 18 HFVWWF grants, and 66 Stand Down grants.

Employer and Stakeholder Outreach

VETS' Office of Strategic Outreach (OSO) was chartered to develop a national engagement and integration strategy that informs and coordinates action within and between the government, private sector and communities to enhance veterans' employment opportunities and leverage the national workforce system. OSO conducts engagements with federal, state, and local governments; private sector employers and trade associations; institutions of higher learning; non-profit organizations; and Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) to establish and develop a network that enables service members, veterans, and families to successfully integrate into their communities. This office provides a valuable bridge between national and regional employers who are eager to commit to hiring veterans and workforce development staff at American Job Centers who are tasked with building local employer relationships and assisting veterans in entering gainful employment. OSO is also responsible for conducting outreach on behalf of women veterans, as well as other focus populations, including disabled veterans and Native American veterans residing on tribal lands. Through VETS' outreach efforts, partnerships with

regional and local organizations who serve these populations are being created and strengthened to best address these demographics' specific employment and training needs.

Advisory Committee on Veterans' Employment and Training and Employer Outreach (ACVETEO)

One of the primary means by which the Department engages with key stakeholders from both the public and private sectors and VSOs is through its ACVETEO. The ACVETEO is a non-discretionary advisory committee established under 38 U.S.C. 4110 that is required to assess the employment and training needs of veterans and their integration into the workforce; determine the extent to which DOL programs and activities are meeting such needs; assist the Assistant Secretary for VETS in conducting outreach activities to employers with respect to the training and skills of veterans and the advantages afforded employers by hiring veterans; make recommendations to the Secretary, with respect to outreach activities and employment and training needs of veterans; and carry out such other activities necessary to make required reports and recommendations.

For FY 2014, the ACVETEO focused its efforts on considering how, and with what effect, VETS could best advance the employment situation of veterans. Specifically, the Committee focused on the following themes: (1) veterans and employer outreach activities, (2) transition assistance and support (employment), and (3) employment and training activities/needs impacting focused populations, including women veterans. For example, the Committee requested the Department conduct an audit of the current Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Employment Workshop curriculum to ascertain whether there is a need for specialized training to address the particular needs of veterans with disabilities, women veterans, and Native American veterans in the workforce. Curriculum review will begin in April 2015, in conjunction with planned review of the entire Transition GPS curriculum to ensure we are meeting the needs of all current and future service members and veterans. This curriculum review will ensure that the employment workshop includes the latest information and best practices to assist transitioning service members entering the civilian workforce. In support of this ACVETEO recommendation, VETS will provide the Committee with the results of the review/audit. The ACVETEO's Annual Report to Congress was submitted to both Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees on January 9, 2015. On April 3, 2015, the Secretary submitted his concurrence with the ACVETEO Annual Report's recommendations to Congress. Currently, VETS' staff is working with the ACVETEO to address each of their Report recommendations.

Conclusion

Creating opportunity for our veterans to thrive in the civilian economy through meaningful employment is a priority for DOL leaders and for every agency within the Department. DOL also works closely with our other federal partners at the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense to promote employment opportunities for all veterans. Moreover, DOL knows that when women succeed, America succeeds, and we must ensure that women veterans have equal and full access to VETS resources. DOL's connection with the State Workforce Agencies via nearly 2,500 American Job Centers across the nation facilitates veterans' employment with large national employers as well as the small- and medium-sized businesses that do a large share of

our nation's hiring. DOL's long-established relationship with State Workforce Agencies is a partnership that delivers proven and positive results. The Administration wants to ensure that we build on these established relationships and the improvements called for in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 to build a workforce system and American Job Centers that better help transitioning service members and veterans move into middle class, family-sustaining jobs.

The Department looks forward to working with the Committee to ensure that all of our transitioning service members and veterans, regardless of gender, have the resources and training they need to successfully transition to the civilian workforce and support themselves or their families.

Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Blumenthal, distinguished Members of the Committee, this concludes my written statement. Thank you for providing us the opportunity to contribute to this hearing.