

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION
UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
SENATE VETERANS
AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**STATEMENT
OF
DR. SUSAN KELLY
DIRECTOR
TRANSITION TO VETERANS PROGRAM OFFICE
OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND
READINESS
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
BEFORE THE
SENATE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
HEARING
“IS TRANSITION ASSISTANCE ON TRACK?”**

DECEMBER 15, 2015

Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Blumenthal, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the Transition Assistance Program (TAP).

In 2012, in collaboration with the Departments of Veterans Affairs (VA), Labor (DOL), Education (ED), Small Business Administration (SBA) and the Office of Personnel Management, we began redesigning TAP in accordance with the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011. This redesign focused on four core objectives: adopting Career Readiness Standards for transitioning Service members; developing a new TAP curriculum; implementing a Capstone event; and introducing a “Military Life Cycle” (MLC) transition preparation model.

While we have accomplished the four initial objectives, we continue to work closely with the military Services and our Federal interagency partners to gather lessons learned, improve the curriculum, and instill a culture of planning for post-military life throughout the Service member’s career, and build relationships with partners eager to support our transitioning Service members. These efforts require continuous collaboration at every level within the Department of Defense (DoD), across Federal and State governments, with employers, and with community-based organizations.

INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

Our Federal interagency partners are committed to supporting our nation’s Service members. They continue to provide their expertise to ensure Service members are prepared to successfully pursue their career aspirations after separating from military service. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) details the interdependent roles and responsibilities for the Department and our five interagency partners. In addition to the MOU, all partners signed a

Statement of Intent outlining initial shared objectives and establishing a TAP interagency governance structure.

The TAP Executive Council (EC), comprised of Assistant Secretary-level executives, monitors the execution, assessment, and modification of TAP. The lead for this governance structure has, as planned, smoothly migrated annually from DoD to DOL and now to VA. The EC membership also includes representatives from SBA, OPM, ED, each Military Department, and the Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Within DoD, the Transition to Veterans Program Office, under the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness, oversees TAP and coordinates year-round governance activities. A TAP Senior Steering Group (SSG) includes Senior Executive representation from the interagency partners, each Military Service, the Coast Guard, Family and Employer Programs and Policy under the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, the Joint Staff, and the National Guard Bureau. The wide representation emphasizes providing the best transition assistance to our Service members requires a multifaceted approach.

In addition to the senior-level SSG and EC, the governance structure includes a number of working groups tasked with the continuous assessment and improvement of specific functional areas. These groups are dedicated to performance management, data sharing, Information Technology, strategic communications, curriculum, and interagency policy coordination.

TAP educates Service members on the abundance of available resources to support their transition before and after they separate. These include a nationwide network of approximately 2,500 American Job Centers under DOL; the Veterans Employment Center, an online job search

tool utilized by employers and Veterans; and the Veterans Economic Communities Initiatives. My colleagues from DOL and VA can share their work on these efforts.

CURRICULUM

The heart of the redesigned TAP is the Service members' Career Readiness Standards (CRS) requirement. To assist transitioning Service members in building the skills they need to meet CRS, the Department, in collaboration with our interagency partners, developed a standardized curriculum with standardized learning objectives.

This curriculum, Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success), includes the DOL Employment Workshop and VA Benefit briefings required by the VOW Act, as well as modules in personal financial planning and translating Military Occupational Codes to their civilian equivalents.

Recognizing the challenges our Service members face as they separate, we developed three additional career-building training tracks: Accessing Higher Education, Career Technical Training, and Entrepreneurship. Transitioning Service members are encouraged to take advantage of one or more of these tracks if they align with their individual transition goals. The Accessing Higher Education track, provided by DoD, instructs Service members interested in pursuing higher education and a degree. After completing this track, Service members are informed educational consumers, prepared to apply to an accredited educational institution. In the Career Technical Training Track, provided by VA, Service members pursuing a skilled trade receive guidance in selecting technical training schools or programs that will lead to a license, industry-recognized credential, or certification in their chosen technical career field. Service members interested in pursuing self-employment attend SBA's Entrepreneurship Track, commonly referred to as the Boots2Business program, where they receive information about the benefits and challenges of starting one's own business. Upon completion, Service members will have developed

the initial components of a business feasibility plan. Graduates can enroll in an eight-week online, SBA-sponsored entrepreneurship course to develop a viable business plan under the instruction of renowned business educators. SBA also provides the option to match Service members to successful business mentors for short- and long-term guidance.

Our Service members have access to the Transition GPS curriculum regardless of their duty station or geographical location. We have converted all components of the “brick-and-mortar” classroom curriculum into a virtual curriculum hosted on DoD’s Joint Knowledge Online (JKO). This instruction for transition preparation is located on the same platform that Service members use for all joint computer-based training – a strong message that transition preparation is a *normal* and *expected* part of military training. Since the virtual curriculum was launched in October 2013, more than 100,000 unique users have completed over 300,000 online modules. The virtual curriculum is also posted in the public domain on the DOL and VA websites, as well as DoD’s Military OneSource. Our intention is to make the rich curriculum available to all Veterans, military spouses, and family members.

INTERAGENCY TAP EVALUATION

In 2014, the TAP EC developed a comprehensive Interagency TAP Evaluation Strategy to address three overarching goals: (1) provide accountability to ensure the program is delivered on military installations in accordance with law, policy, and leadership intent; (2) measure and improve customer satisfaction; and (3) measure and improve program effectiveness. This strategy was approved by the Office of Management and Budget in May 2014.

To provide accountability, we implemented Staff Assistance Visits (SAVs) to verify the implementation and quality of TAP delivery at military installations. Thirty one SAV’s were conducted in 2014 and 2015 to gather feedback from Service members, staff, Senior Enlisted

Advisors, and Commanders. These visits have shown that the military Services and Commanders are supporting TAP, including meeting new standards such as a limit of 50 students per TAP class, and providing access to government laptops or internet access for Service members to use their own devices in the classroom.

To monitor customer satisfaction, we built and implemented a voluntary, anonymous online Transition GPS Participant Assessment. Service members are asked for their feedback on TAP upon completion of each Transition GPS module and again at the end of the entire program for both online or classroom curricula. The most recent participant assessment data (fourth quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 2015) shows 81 percent of respondents reported they gained valuable information and skills to plan their transition; 80 percent stated the training enhanced their confidence in transition planning; 81 percent said they intended to use what they learned in transition planning; and 82 percent responded they knew how to access appropriate resources. This assessment also informs our annual curriculum review and modification process.

We rely on VOW Act and CRS compliance to measure initial TAP effectiveness. DoD has developed an IT infrastructure that collects data on every separating Service member. In FY 2015, 226,111 Service members separated from active duty. Based on data verified by the Defense Manpower Data Center, 94 percent of these eligible Service members met the VOW Act mandate. Eighty-nine percent of eligible Service members either met CRS or received a warm handover to appropriate partner agencies. These results speak to the incredible commitment of the Services and our partner agencies to prepare Service members for civilian life.

DoD has gone one step further. The TAP redesign is a culture change for DoD and deliberate transition planning across the MLC is a shift. To monitor this culture change, we are using the DoD Status of Forces Survey to capture, for the first time, Service members' attitudes

toward post-military career planning and leadership support. This survey will enable us to gauge Service members' awareness of TAP and their individual transition responsibilities, as well as the support they receive from leadership and peers in preparing for transition. It will take time to integrate MLC transition preparation, but of those Service members responding to the 2014 survey, 62 percent indicated they had done some planning for their post-military career, 49 percent said Commanders or senior leadership were supportive of this career planning, and 65 percent indicated peer support. We have seen recognition among Service members that transition preparation is important throughout the military career. In the 2013 survey, just 10 percent of Service members said that transition assistance information should be provided at multiple points during the career. In 2014, this grew to 28 percent. We will be monitoring these yearly results carefully.

Our partners have proposed long-term outcome measures in the TAP Interagency Evaluation Strategy which will enable us to evaluate success after separation. These include Post-9/11 G.I. Bill Usage Rate, education Completion Rate, Percentage of Unemployed Post-9/11 Veterans, and Amount of Unemployment Insurance Payment by Branch. Additional long-term, outcome-oriented evaluations are also in development by the VA and DOL to further strengthen the interagency evaluation approach and ensure that TAP is continuously improved.

CURRICULUM REVIEW

DoD and our partners are committed to a relevant curriculum. The TAP Interagency EC has completed two review cycles of the Transition GPS curriculum, allowing for updates of resources, materials, and content. The updates are based on feedback provided by Service members through the Participant Assessment, facilitators, subject matter experts, interagency

partners, stakeholders, and Service representatives. This annual review process allows DoD and our partners to provide the most current and effective instruction to support the career success of our Service members.

The Curriculum Working Group leads the annual review and modification process to identify necessary changes to strengthen learning outcomes. Recommendations for changes vary annually based on shifts in law, policy, and Service member needs. The working group leverages the talent of both interagency and Service subject matter experts and curriculum specialists to revise the curriculum. The revisions are presented to the SSG for review, approval, and forwarded to the EC for final approval. The revised curriculum is then implemented by the Military Services and our interagency partners.

During the FY 2015 review, several changes were made in response to Participant Assessment feedback. These include discussions and examples of Verification of Military Experience and Training (VMET) documentation and the Joint Services Transcript, which can help Service members show qualifications or obtain academic credit for military experience. Information on healthcare and changes in taxes after transition were also added. Website resources were provided to accompany the curriculum. Feedback received from our interaction with employers has resulted in enhancing TAP to improve Service member skills in utilizing social media for employment, networking, and developing resumes. The revised DoD curriculum has been made available to the field. DOL and VA content is actively being piloted and complete implementation is forthcoming.

One addition to the available courses is an online course called “Higher Education Preparation,” which launched in October 2015. This module, developed in response to high Service interest and feedback, is aligned with MLC transition preparation and assists Service

members in making informed decisions when using tuition assistance. It intends to help first-term Service members understand the importance of aligning their education with future career goals, compare institutions of higher learning to find the best educational and personal fit, and effectively use tuition assistance to support their long-term educational goals.

COMMANDER ROLE IN TAP

Commanders play an integral role in TAP. Commanders must give Service members sufficient time to attend TAP and verify that Service members meet CRS during Capstone. If a transitioning Service member does not meet CRS, the Commander initiates a warm handover to one or more partner agencies to ensure the Service member receives the necessary support after separation. VA and DOL have increased resources to handle warm handovers from DoD. They can discuss their procedures after receiving transitioning Service members through the handover process.

Many Commanders have seized their role in TAP and are beginning to foster a culture of transition readiness, including encouraging honest discussions about post-military life in order to develop an environment in which post-military planning is the norm. In March 2015, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a memorandum to Commanders at all levels about their role in TAP. The Chairman cited actions Commanders should take to support transitioning Service members, including permitting them appropriate time and access to resources needed to meet CRS. The Chairman's memorandum underscored the unique role Commanders play in positioning Service members to succeed in their post-military civilian lives. We continue to work with the Military Services to systemically educate leaders on their responsibilities to separating Service members.

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Over the past two years, private sector companies of all sizes, as well as Federal agencies, have recognized that transitioning Service members comprise an incredible pool of talent and they seek increased opportunities to harness that talent.

DoD and our partners have received input from the private and non-profit sectors through advisory bodies such as the Defense Business Board, DOL's Advisory Committee on Veterans' Employment, Training, and Employer Outreach, and the MyVA Advisory Committee, to help provide the best possible assistance to Service members and Veterans. The Defense Business Board, an advisory body of corporate executives to the Secretary of Defense, was given the opportunity to review the redesigned TAP. A primary comment was to provide employers with early access to transitioning Service members. In collaboration with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Hiring Our Heroes Foundation, we have helped shape the environment in which employers gain this access. In 2015, thousands of Service members, Veterans, and spouses attended over 100 Hiring Our Heroes events. These include 18 large-scale transition summits, including summits at overseas installations in Okinawa, mainland Japan, Germany, and Italy. In the latest assessment (August 2015), 94 percent of attendees who responded to a survey indicated they felt better prepared for transition after attending these events.

Through organizations such as Veterans Job Mission, led by JPMorgan Chase, employers have committed to hiring transitioning Service members and Veterans. Companies such as those you will hear from today are not focused solely on hiring Veterans, but also on retaining them. Many have established Veteran affinity groups where Veteran employees can mentor each other through the corporate "culture change." These groups have become a helpful tool for employers

to understand the interests and concerns of their Veteran employees, better positioning them to retain this workforce.

DoD also collaborates with Federal agencies to support transitioning Service members and to fill workforce gaps. DOL (with its employer and labor partners) helps to ensure that transitioning Service members are able to connect with Registered Apprenticeships. Currently, approximately 95,000 active Service members are participating in apprenticeships through the United Services Military Apprenticeship Program – gaining valuable skills that translate to civilian occupations. The Department of Energy is launching initiatives to help Service members train for and obtain critical-need jobs in the utility industry. The Department of Agriculture has recently launched a targeted campaign to make Service members aware of opportunities in the agriculture industry. The Department of Homeland Security has been actively engaged at hiring events to recruit transitioning Service members for law enforcement, border patrol, and national security positions. At the Honolulu Transition Summit in July 2015, Customs and Border Protection accepted over 300 applications from Navy and Air Force personnel. The Department and Military Services are engaged with the Department of Homeland Security to improve the processes through which Service members are recruited, apply for, and obtain positions within Customs and Border Protection.

Private-sector employers have found innovative ways to employ transitioning Service members through the development of on-the-job training programs authorized through SkillBridge, which is overseen by DoD's Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness. Service members meeting certain qualifications are allowed to participate in civilian job and employment training up to six months prior to their separation from active duty. This

training must lead to a high probability of employment. Over 30 of these programs have been implemented at military installations.

It is evident that both industry and Federal agencies are starting to develop career pipelines for transitioning Service members. The revised Career and Technical Training track in Transition GPS will include an expanded discussion of apprenticeship and training opportunities offered by VA and DOL. However, we must acknowledge the military Services and Commanders are challenged with balancing unrelenting mission requirements and the workload on non-transitioning Service members while giving these training opportunities to transitioning Service members. We are committed to providing our Service members access to training that results in industry-recognized credentials. We are eager to balance mission requirements with opportunities for transitioning Service members to fill the most pressing workforce skills gaps in their communities. This is a new undertaking and we will learn and adapt along the way.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Many local and community organizations are eager to support our Service members as they plan, prepare, and ultimately complete their transition from the military. In 2014, the Secretary of Defense signed memoranda granting Non-Federal Entities, Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs), and Military Service Organizations (MSOs), access to installations to enable delivery of their support and services to Service members and families. This included detailed guidance with recommended processes and procedures. We are in the process of issuing a DoD Instruction asking the Military Secretaries to encourage their installation Commanders to grant VSOs and MSOs access to transition assistance-related events and activities. We intend this policy to further serve to support installation Commanders as they balance mission and

security requirements with leveraging the services that these organizations are able to provide to local installations.

A basic tenet of the TAP redesign is to build bridges from active duty to post-separation support from VA, DOL, and other community agencies. These bridges are apparent in the Transition GPS curriculum and in the final TAP component of Capstone. We applaud the requirement for DOL's American Job Centers to be embedded in the social support network of the communities where they are located. Likewise, VA's Vet Centers and the Department of Education's work to encourage universities and colleges to support Veterans on campus are getting stronger. SBA's SCORE volunteers reinforce our Veterans as they enter the world of entrepreneurship. VA's Veterans Economic Communities Initiative and policy academies aim to assist communities with coordinating Veteran support mechanisms. We are also heartened by another example of unexpected community support from the Sesame Workshop. Sesame Workshop is providing a suite of products to community agencies to educate agency staff on how to support transitioning military families with young children. The January 2016 launch of these materials will be just one more way that Sesame Workshop provides quality support to the military and Veteran communities.

CONCLUSION

The Department's intensified focus on transition preparation is being acknowledged across the Administration. In fact, many now recognize that preparing Service members for transition is imperative to sustaining the All-Volunteer Force. The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review noted that the strength of the All-Volunteer Force would be maintained by providing the best possible assistance to Service members transitioning to civilian life.

Our Service members are a vital component of our Nation's economic prosperity; their contributions last years beyond military service. We are working hard to increase the awareness of the valuable skill sets that Service members bring to every industry. We are encouraging employers to develop training, credentialing, and career paths that create viable and enduring post-service options for Service members.

Going forward, I believe we will see our Service members succeed more quickly in their post-separation goals, whether pursuing a degree in higher education, immediately entering the civilian workforce, or launching an entrepreneurial endeavor. I credit our interagency partners and the TAP staffs of the Military Services for making this happen. This has been an unprecedented effort. Our collective dedication has never wavered.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I thank you, the Ranking Member, and the members of this Committee for your outstanding and continuing support of the men and women who proudly wear the uniform in defense of our great Nation.