

**STATEMENT
OF
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OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND
READINESS
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
BEFORE THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE
ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
HEARING
ON THE
TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

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Chairman Heck, Ranking Member Davis, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on the Department's Transition Assistance Program (TAP).

It has been more than two years since I last testified before this Subcommittee, and we have seen much change to TAP and progress in transition preparation. In 2012, with collaboration from Departments of Veterans Affairs (VA), Labor (DOL), Education, Small Business Administration (SBA), and Office of Personnel Management, we began redesigning TAP around four core objectives: adopting standards of career readiness for transitioning Service members; implementing a new TAP curriculum; implementing a Capstone event; and implementing a "Military Life Cycle" (MLC) transition model. Let me share with you the accomplishments achieved on these core objectives.

First, Career Readiness Standards (CRS) are at the foundation of TAP. CRS are a set of documented activities – such as counseling, coursework, and career planning – that demonstrate the Service member is prepared to pursue personal post-separation career goals. The desired end-state is for each Service member to meet CRS for his/her chosen civilian career path and to complete a viable Individual Transition Plan (ITP) prior to departure from active duty. The Services have successfully implemented CRS across the board.

Second, the Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success) curriculum is now delivered at 206 sites. In addition to the mandatory Benefits Briefings provided by VA and a mandatory Employment Workshop provided by DOL, the Transition GPS curriculum builds the skills needed by transitioning Service members to meet CRS. Service members may attend any of three supplemental tracks focused on specific post-separation goals: Accessing Higher Education (AHE), Career Technical Training, and Entrepreneurship.

The third core objective was the “Capstone” event, which all Service members complete in order to verify they have met CRS and have developed a viable ITP. Service members who have not met CRS receive either further training or a “warm handover” to an interagency partner for post-separation support. The Services have successfully adopted this practice.

The final core objective was the implementation of the MLC transition model. The MLC model is intended to align key transition preparation activities with pre-determined “touch points” across the Service member’s military career. The touchpoints are unique to each military Service. Today’s transitioning Service members are better prepared to transition to civilian life because of the continuing integration of this model.

While we have accomplished the four initial core objectives, we continue to work closely with the Services to gather lessons learned, improve the curriculum, and instill a culture of planning for post-military service throughout the Service member’s career.

Our agency partners deserve recognition in this endeavor. A very detailed Memorandum of Understanding outlines roles and responsibilities for the Department and our five interagency partners. It sets the stage for close coordination at every military installation in the United States and overseas. The interagency TAP Executive Council (EC), comprised of Assistant Secretary-level executives, monitors the execution, assessment, modification, and resourcing of TAP. The lead for this governance structure has, as planned, smoothly migrated from DoD in FY 2014, to DOL in 2015, and now to VA for 2016. Within DoD, the Transition to Veterans Program Office, under the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, oversees TAP and coordinates the year-round EC activities.

I am also pleased to note the great support we have received from the highest levels of the Department and military leadership. In 2014, then-Secretary Hagel 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 military members and families. 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. Also, in March 2015, then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dempsey issued a memorandum to Commanders at all levels about their role in TAP and 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. These are two examples that transition support is "on the radar" of our most senior leaders.

I would like to share with you a few accomplishments in several key areas of our program.

EVALUATION

DoD, in collaboration with our interagency partners, has 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. It uses a variety of rigorous program evaluation methodologies, such as the Transition GPS participant assessment, site visits, and performance measures. The suite of established performance measures begins with the VOW to Hire Heroes

Act and CRS compliance. Long-term outcome measures of the TAP are also a priority and include use of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill for completion of a college degree and new business formation rate for those interested in pursuing entrepreneurship. Additional long-term, outcome-oriented evaluations are also being developed by VA, DOL, and SBA to strengthen the interagency evaluation approach and ensure that the TAP is continuously improved.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

As stated, a mandate of the TAP evaluation strategy is performance measurement, beginning with VOW Act compliance and CRS requirements. Between October 2014 and August 2015, 151,680 Service members separated from active duty. Based on data verified by the Defense Manpower Data Center, 94.3 percent of eligible Service members met the VOW Act mandate. This mandate includes pre-separation counseling, VA Benefits briefings, and the DOL Employment Workshop. Eighty-eight percent of eligible Service members either met CRS or received a warm handover to appropriate partner agencies. These results indicate the incredible commitment of the Services and our partner agencies to prepare Service members for civilian life.

TRANSITION GPS PARTICIPANT ASSESSMENT RESULTS

The Transition GPS curriculum is currently taught in “brick-and-mortar” classrooms on military installations, as well as delivered virtually on Joint Knowledge Online. At the completion of each Transition GPS module, and again at the end of the entire program, each Service member is asked to complete a voluntary, anonymous online assessment. This assessment gathers Service member feedback on the effectiveness and value of Transition GPS,

the quality of the facilitators and learning resources, and the Service members' intent to apply their learning toward their transition preparation and confidence in their ability to do so.

The most recent participant assessment data (third quarter of FY 2015) shows 83 percent of respondents reporting that they gained valuable information and skills to plan their transition; 82 percent citing that the training enhanced their confidence in transition planning; 83 percent saying that they intended to use what they learned in transition planning; and 85 percent responding that they knew how to access appropriate resources.

Of the additional Transition GPS tracks, we have seen highest demand for the AHE course, which prepares Service members who plan on pursuing higher education after separation. As an example of feedback about the tracks, our participant assessment data shows us that 90 percent of respondents cited that the AHE track enhanced their confidence in transition planning; 92 percent said that they intended to use what they learned in transition planning; and 94 percent responded that the learning resources and materials were useful.

SITE VISITS

As with the implementation of any large-scale program redesign, especially one requiring a significant culture shift, the biggest challenge is effective communication to adopt changes and make them work. DoD has made a concerted effort with our partners to message change and solicit feedback from the field. We have interviewed Commanders, convened focus groups with Service members, staff, Senior Enlisted Advisors, and Commanders, and traveled as observation teams during Staff Assistance Visits (SAV). We actually doubled SAVs from 10 in 2014 to 21 in 2015.

We continue to see implementation of MLC transition preparation during these observations and forums. We have learned that Service members are aware of TAP workshops and are eager to participate. Those who have attended the workshops serve as “champions,” encouraging their peers to attend the Transition GPS modules and tracks.

Commanders at installations with high throughput of transitioning Service members are putting forth their best efforts to meet new, tough standards, such as the limit of 50 students per TAP class. At some installations, this might mean offering five or six Transition GPS classes a week, concurrently, at various locations across the installation. All of the installations we visited in FY 2015 had government laptops available for classroom use. At more and more sites, Wi-Fi enables Service members to use their own devices in the classroom. Our Navy colleagues make use of over 250,000 DVDs of the Transition GPS curriculum to gain skills while afloat.

The field’s input also conveyed a recurring lesson: Shared responsibility. The continued success of TAP will depend upon a high level of meaningful interaction between Commanders, the chain of command, their TAP staffs, and other staff such as installation Education Officers and Certified Personal Financial Counselors. Commanders must understand their responsibility to ensure that Service members meet CRS, and TAP staff plays an integral role in helping Commanders fulfill that responsibility. The TAP staff must embrace increased coordination, counseling, and training responsibilities, as well as their consultative role to Commanders in reviewing CRS in anticipation of “Capstone.” Most importantly, Service members need to understand their responsibility to meet CRS and the availability of TAP to maximize their own preparation for transition. The TAP Interagency EC will continue to support military leaders, TAP staff, and individual Service members so these new responsibilities can be fully met.

MEASURING CULTURE CHANGE

To monitor the culture change being driven by the TAP redesign, we are using the DoD Status of Forces Survey to capture Service members' attitudes toward post-military career planning and leadership support for such planning. This annual 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. We have already seen implementation of the MLC transition preparation culture reflected in the survey. For example, of those 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 will be monitoring these yearly results carefully.

CURRICULUM

Our Service members have access to the Transition GPS curriculum regardless of their duty station or location. We have converted all components of the "brick-and-mortar" classroom curriculum into a virtual curriculum hosted on DoD's Joint Knowledge Online. This means 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* part of military training. Since the virtual curriculum was launched in October 2013, more than 100,000 unique users have completed more than 700,000 online modules.

Additionally, in response to high levels of interest and feedback, and in alignment with the goals of the MLC model, we have created additional virtual curricula, including a module called "Higher Education Preparation." This module was developed to assist Service members

in making wise decisions for the use of tuition assistance. This curriculum is intended to help first-term Service members understand the importance of lifelong adult learning, how education should align with career success, how to compare institutions of higher learning to select the best educational match for the Service member, and how to effectively use tuition assistance to support educational goals.

The TAP Interagency EC has completed two review cycles of the Transition GPS curriculum, allowing for updates of resources, materials, and content. The reviews are based on feedback provided by Service members, facilitators, subject matter experts, interagency partners, 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.

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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

In collaboration with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Hiring Our Heroes Foundation, we have helped shape the environment in which employers gain early access to transitioning Service members. In 2015, thousands of Service members, Veterans, and spouses have 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 last assessment (August 2015), 94 percent of attendees who responded to a survey indicated that they felt better prepared for transition after attending these events.

DoD has also partnered with federal agencies to both support transitioning Service members and fill workforce gaps. The Department of Labor (with their employer and labor partners) helps to ensure that transitioning Service members are able to connect with Registered Apprenticeships, and has taken steps with the VA to make it easy for veterans to gain access to their GI Bill during their apprenticeship. Currently, approximately 95,000 active Service members from the Marines, Navy, and Coast Guard 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 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. And 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, Customs and Border Protection accepted over 300 applications from Navy and Air Force personnel.

Private-sector employers have found innovative ways to employ transitioning Service members through the development of on-the-job training programs and registered apprenticeships authorized pursuant to 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. Both industry and federal agencies are developing career pipelines for transitioning Service members; I will defer to my colleagues to discuss the SkillBridge programs implemented at their installations. We are eager to increase such pipelines through

America's Apprenticeship system, which aims to expand U.S. apprenticeships and make these training opportunities available to more workers and employers.

I can also report that we have made strong progress in information technology, research, and strategic communication that has improved how we manage and facilitate transition preparation. Examples are included with this testimony.

CONCLUSION

The Department's focus on transition assistance 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 their military service. We are working hard to increase the awareness of the valuable skill sets that Service members can 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.

I believe we will continue to see our Service members succeed more quickly in their post-separation goals, whether that is 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 Subcommittee for your outstanding and continuing support of the men and women who proudly wear the uniform in defense of our great Nation.