

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
PRESENTATION TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBJECT: AIR FORCE TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

STATEMENT OF:

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Chairman Heck, Ranking Member Davis, and Distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, on behalf of Secretary of the Air Force, Deborah Lee James, we appreciate the leadership and support you continue to provide on matters affecting the readiness and quality of life of our Airmen and their families. Today, the Total Force Airmen of your Air Force are highly trained and experienced, with relentless drive and determination. These attributes are especially commendable when considering the demands overseas contingency operations, humanitarian support missions, and funding constraints have put on our remarkable warriors and their families. As we look towards the future, we continue to emphasize our primary objective of supporting our Air Force missions around the world, as well as our objective of preparing our Airmen for life and success in the civilian sector after transitioning from military service. Our Air Force leadership is fully engaged and firmly committed to accomplishing these objectives.

Since 2011, the Air Force has been sharply focused on the redesigned Transition Assistance Program (TAP) to support Airmen as they transition back to civilian life. The VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 (“VOW Act”), and the Veterans Employment Initiative, drove a host of TAP actions to expand training and employment services for Active Duty, Reserve, and Guard members when they transition from the military to the private sector. Further, the VOW Act and Veterans Employment Initiative mandated that all Airmen separating or retiring from the Air Force complete the Transition Assistance Program, which includes pre-separation counseling, Department of Veterans Affairs benefits briefings, attendance at a Department of Labor Employment Workshop, and a Capstone event that either validates that servicemembers have completed all requirements, or arranges further assistance, in an effort to help foster a smooth transition.

To that end, two of the biggest and more progressive changes to the Air Force Transition Assistance Program are implementation of the Military Life Cycle Transition model and Air Force Credentialing Opportunities Online tool. We will briefly highlight these two programs.

First, the Air Force has embraced a “begin with the end in mind” Transition Assistance Program construct by preparing our Airmen for civilian life from the start of their military careers. We do this by leveraging our already existing professional development programs as touch points in the Military Life Cycle Transition model, and encouraging greater cooperation between the variety of offices collaborating on transition efforts. For example, for years the Air Force has had the First Term Airmen’s Centers where all Airmen are required to attend the program at their first permanent duty station. During this multi-day program, Airmen are introduced to many topics, including professional development opportunities and a four-hour financial brief, which includes developing a personal budget. They are also introduced to the Military Life Cycle which showcases how transition assistance information will be addressed throughout their career. The Military Life Cycle’s touch points include reenlistment counseling, permanent change of station and off-duty education briefings, and feedback sessions where information on professional development is discussed.

Secondly, the Air Force has implemented the Air Force Credentialing Opportunities Online tool. This tool provides a mechanism that correlates skills and training for Military Occupational Specialties with skills and training required for civilian certifications and licenses. This translation of the military experience into civilian skills is an important part of building career ready Airmen. This program also pays for any examinations and re-certifications required for civilian credentialing. The combination of military training and corresponding civilian

training makes our transitioning Airmen highly marketable and desired resources for public and private industry, thus enhancing their opportunities for employment following military duty.

Starting in technical school, Airmen are provided information that details the courses and capabilities their training provides and how this foundation can lead to an Associate's Degree awarded by the Community College of the Air Force. Embedded in an Airman's formal Career Field Education and Training Plan is information on credentialing as well as educational opportunities provided by the Community College of the Air Force. The college is a tremendous contributor to the educational development of our Airmen and awards over 22,000 associates degrees from 68 programs annually. The Air Force continues to value post-secondary education as a force enabler, recognizing it positively affects recruitment, retention, and readiness. Further, this education is a key component in developing our Airmen as it directly enhances critical thinking skills. These skills strengthen a member's performance capabilities, contribute to mission success as well as personal growth, and ultimately assist their our members when transitioning from the military.

In terms of collaboration, we prepare our Airmen for transition in partnership with the Department of Labor, Veterans Affairs, Office of Personnel Management, Department of Education and the Small Business Administration. Collectively, these partners deliver a purposeful Transition Assistance Program that helps ensure transitioning Airmen are ready for careers in civilian life -- whether as a full-time student, employee and/or business owner. Additionally, these partners engage industry and provide opportunities for the Air Force and our Sister Services to participate in roundtable discussions with industry leaders to foster continued connections and skill set correlation between employers and transitioning service members.

One important population of transitioning Airmen is our Wounded, Ill and Injured. In addition to these members offering the civilian community a firsthand look at Air Force developed skills, they also extend a unique opportunity to witness truly resilient Airmen. The Transition Assistance Program assists these recovering Airmen with identifying areas of expertise and matching their capabilities with related career or educational opportunities, thereby increasing the likelihood of a successful transition. The impact of a recovering Airman's journey is powerful and serves as an inspiration for all contributors in the Transition Assistance Program, to include our civilian partners.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our Airmen and their families continue to be the backbone of our Air Force and we do everything we can to foster their success while in uniform as well as their separation or retirement from the military. Investments in them are inextricably linked to our Service's ability to recruit, develop, support and retain a world-class, all-volunteer Force. The Air Force remains committed to ensuring Airmen, as they depart military service, are ready for the challenges and rewards of civilian life and we extend a great deal of gratitude to our private sector partners. Mr. Chairman, again, we appreciate the leadership and support of this subcommittee and we are exceptionally proud of our Total Force Airmen. With your backing and our collective commitment, we will continue to ensure our Airmen are ready when they transition back to the private sector. We are creating a win-win situation where our Airmen succeed as employees, students, or business owners, as well as serve as essential and productive members of this great nation's civilian society. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and pending your questions this concludes my remarks.