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ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**STATEMENT OF**

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**BEFORE THE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL**

**OF THE**

**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

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## **Introduction**

Chairman Heck, Ranking Member Davis, and distinguished members of this subcommittee, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to testify about the Navy Transition Assistance Program (TAP), and our efforts to seamlessly transition Sailors to civilian life, and employment, and which may include further education for some individuals.

In fiscal year 2015, approximately 35,000 Sailors transitioned out of the Navy, and these numbers are likely to be sustained over the next several years. Navy is an expeditionary force that routinely deploys. Our Sailors serve in diverse career fields, among them Navy Special Warfare, air traffic control, health care, advanced electronics and nuclear field. Civilian employers routinely pursue Sailors as potential employees because of the world-class training and skills they obtain in the Navy, even as we offer incentives to retain these Sailors, who possess critical skills, to ensure fleet readiness. But, for Sailors who separate or retire from the Navy, we offer a robust TAP to help them make a seamless transition to life beyond the Navy.

## **Navy Transition Assistance Program**

Sailors are encouraged to begin the transition process approximately 24-months, but no later than 12-months, prior to separation. During this period, each transitioning Sailor participates in mandatory pre-separation counseling (10 U.S. Code §1142) that introduces them to the various programs and services available to assist them. Sailors complete a checklist to document counseling received, as well as requests for additional services and briefings, so they may be referred based upon their individual needs.

Navy provides the five-day *Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS)* Workshop at installations world-wide, via Fleet and Family Support Programs. Depending on the installation population, *Transition GPS* Workshops may be tailored for separation, involuntary separation, retirement, or rank. Frequency of classes is also dependent upon installation population. Additionally, upon request, Fleet and Family Support counselors provide individual transition counseling, résumé-writing and other transition-related workshops.

Navy Fleet and Family Support Centers also conduct first-term and mid-career workshops through the Career Options and Navy Skills Evaluation Program (CONSEP). These four-day courses are designed to assist active duty service members in achieving Navy, and future civilian, career goals. Training topics provide vital information on career-making decisions, upward mobility, college and certification opportunities, apprenticeships, as well as financial management and investment strategies, which enhance the Sailor's ability to achieve personal and professional success.

## **Re-Designed Transition Assistance Program**

In collaboration with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Small Business Administration, and the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Labor, and Education; Navy implemented a re-designed Transition Assistance Program, which includes the following elements:

1) Career Readiness Standards (CRS) – A set of common, discreet, and measurable, transition “readiness” standards for Sailors to meet prior to separation. The desired end-state is for each Sailor 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. These standards are designed to increase each Sailor’s abilities to successfully overcome any challenges that may be faced in pursuit of choosing a career path.

2) *Transition Goals, Plan, Success (GPS) Curriculum* – A series of training that includes the Department of Labor Employment Workshop (DoLEW), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Benefits Briefings, Financial Education, Military Occupational Code Crosswalk, Family/Special Issues, and an ITP review. Additionally, participants may select from two-day training tracks in Accessing Higher Education, Entrepreneurship, or Technical Training.

3) Military Life Cycle – Incorporates preparation for Sailors’ career transition throughout their military service – from accession through transition from the Navy and reintegration into civilian life. Today’s transitioning Sailors are better prepared to transition to civilian life because of the continuing integration of this model.

4) *CAPSTONE Event* – A forum provided for Service members to validate CRS are met, and to refer members, as needed, for additional training prior to separation or retirement.

Navy officials continue to meet regularly with representatives from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the other Uniformed Services, and interagency partners, to evaluate and improve the Transition Assistance Program.

### **Navy Transition Assistance Core Workshop Curriculum**

The mandatory Navy *Transition GPS* Core Workshop is a five-day curriculum. On day one, Navy transition staff covers the following topics:

1) Transition Assistance Overview: includes a Welcome Address / Workshop Schedule of Activities, Topics for Family Considerations/Special Issues, the Value of a Mentor, and a review of available Fleet and Family Support services.

2) Military Occupational Code (MOC) Crosswalk: Upon completing the MOC Crosswalk module, Sailors are provided documentation of their military career experience and skills; translation of their military occupation experience to civilian sector skills; and identification of gaps in their training and/or experience that need to be filled to meet their personal career goals. The MOC Crosswalk enables Sailors to develop a clear line-of-sight between their military skills and training and career fields of their choice.

3) Financial Planning: The financial planning seminar prepares Sailors to build an integrated 12-month budget that reflects post-military employment, education, or training goals. Instructors and financial planning staff are available for follow-up counseling, if requested by the Service member.

On days two through four, the Department of Labor (DOL) delivers the approved Employment Workshop, while on day five, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) conducts a VA Benefits briefing, and Sailors review progress on their Individual Transition Plans.

Navy continues to improve our classroom delivery experience. In fiscal year 2015, we updated the *Transition GPS* computer software and enhanced WiFi capability, greatly improving the classroom experience. In fiscal year 2016, one-year ahead of schedule, we will replace all 2,493 *Transition GPS* computers with updated models, which will run faster and have extended battery life. Along with the computer refresh, all information-technology equipment will be updated to include WiFi capacity, routers, scanners, printers, and associated equipment. This upgrade will ensure Sailors have a real-time resource in the classroom to research job, education, and other transition-related opportunities.

In fiscal year 2015, additional classroom capacity was added in Navy's Northwest Region to accommodate an additional aircraft carrier homeported in the Region for long-term maintenance. We continue to expand and adjust our delivery approach to accommodate Sailors in isolated locations by delivering, in coordination and cooperation with VA and DoL, in-person *Transition GPS* classes in Souda Bay, Crete. We are exploring the delivery of limited in-person *Transition GPS* classes at Navy's newest and most remote bases, in Romania and Poland, in fiscal year 2016.

### **Education, Technical Training and Entrepreneur Workshops**

In addition to completing the *Transition GPS* Core Curriculum, transitioning Sailors may also participate in a series of two-day tailored tracks available within the *Transition GPS* curriculum, which includes:

- (1) an Accessing Higher Education track, for those pursuing an advanced education degree;
- (2) a Technical Training track, for those seeking job-ready skills and industry-recognized credentials in shorter-term training programs; and
- (3) an Entrepreneurship track, for those who may wish to start a business.

### **Navy CAPSTONE Event**

Ninety days before separating from the Navy, Sailors participate in a Navy-hosted *CAPSTONE Event*, to validate the process, and to verify that they have completed the *Transition GPS* curriculum and achieved Career Readiness Standards. Staff also reviews potential challenges Sailors may face as a veteran, and reviews available tools and resources transitioning Sailors learned about in *Transition GPS* workshops. Sailors requiring additional assistance are referred to supplemental training opportunities. Additionally, through the *CAPSTONE Event*, all Sailors are offered a 'warm handoff' to appropriate government agencies, and organizations that will provide them with continued benefits, services, and support in their new capacity as Navy veterans, including completion of CRS, if they are not fully accomplished prior to separation.

While beneficial for all transitioning Sailors, this is particularly instrumental in supporting at-risk Sailors, such as those subject to rapid or involuntarily separation.

### **Military Life Cycle Transition Model**

The new transition program incorporates career readiness and transition preparation into the entire continuum of a Sailor's career. In the past, transition and preparation for the civilian workforce occurred late in a Sailor's military service – just prior to separation. Under this enhanced program, these concepts are incorporated earlier to ensure that counseling, assessments, and access to resources that build skills or establish credentials, occur earlier in a Sailor's military tenure.

Navy leverages the Navy Retention and Career Development program, designed to improve Sailors' ability to achieve their professional goals, to facilitate the military life cycle. Individual Career Development Plans are created based upon Career Roadmaps for each enlisted rating, with assistance from Navy Command Career Counselors. Rating Roadmaps include information on skill training, job description, personal and professional development, Career Development Boards, Navy qualifications and certifications, civilian occupations, Navy Credentialing Opportunities On-line (Navy COOL), U.S. Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP), Professional Military Education (PME), and Voluntary Education.

Navy incorporates aspects of the *Transition GPS* curriculum into our Career Development Boards, which are routinely held during key points in a Sailor's career. Aligning these key activities with pre-determined "touch points" facilitates individualized attention, together with instruction, resources and services, to build the skills necessary for each Sailor to meet their professional goals throughout their military career and beyond. Additionally, imbedding touch points across the military lifecycle is particularly helpful in addressing at-risk Sailors who may require a higher level of support in meeting their goals. For example, we ensure that Sailors:

(1) are registered for, and know about, *eBenefits*, a joint VA/DoD web portal that provides resources and self-service capabilities to veterans, service-members, and their families to research, access and manage their VA and military benefits and personal information;

(2) are informed about VA benefits for which they are eligible while serving on active duty, as well as after they depart the service as Navy veterans; and

(3) understand the importance of maintaining their personnel records, and obtaining credentials and certifications they have earned for skills obtained while serving in the Navy.

The Career Development Program is a key component of transition. Essentially, a Sailor's Individual Career Development plan becomes their Individual Career Transition Plan.

### **Education and Credentialing Opportunities**

While serving on active duty, Sailors are encouraged to take advantage of programs that acknowledge military training and experience. Navy Credentialing Opportunities On-line (COOL) supports Navy's career development and transition programs by helping Sailors gain civilian certifications and licenses for skills acquired during their service. This helps translate each Sailor's military training and experience into concrete documentation that prospective employers can easily recognize, and which demonstrates that a Sailor's skills are commensurate with, or exceed, those of their civilian counterparts. At least one certification is currently available in each of the 81 Navy enlisted ratings, as well as collateral duty and leadership occupations. Since program inception in October 2007, Navy COOL has provided support to over 130,000 certifications & licenses for over 41,000 Sailors in every enlisted rating and pay grade. Navy also participates in the United Services Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP), which is a formal military training program that provides Sailors the opportunity to improve their job skills and to complete civilian apprenticeship requirements while on active duty.

In addition to the aforementioned programs, Navy funds educational opportunities that enhance post-military job-ready skills through the highly-valued Tuition Assistance Program, and encourages transitioning service members to take full advantage of their GI Bill and other education benefits while serving on active duty. Many Sailors are already enrolled in college, and some have already earned college degrees. Those interested in pursuing their education goals are strongly encouraged to attend the specialized Accessing Higher Education or Career and Technical Training track. Specifically, Sailors are briefed on these tracks during *Transition GPS* workshop, and required Pre-separation Counseling.

### **Employment Skills Training**

Navy encourages commanders, commanding officers and officers-in-charge, when operational commitments permit, to authorize eligible Sailors to pursue employment skills training during their final 180 days of active duty service using the Department of Defense *SkillBridge* initiative (<http://www.dodskillbridge.com/>). *SkillBridge*, which is overseen by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness, allows participating businesses and other training providers to gain early access to highly-skilled service members as prospective employees before they become veterans. For example, Navy is currently supporting the Solar Ready Vets pilot program in Norfolk, Virginia. This intensive 6-week program, delivered through a partnership with Tidewater Community College and the Department of Energy, is preparing Sailors for post-military careers in the fast growing solar energy industry, while Navy gains valuable insights partnering with employment skills-training providers. Lessons learned from this pilot program will help Navy better collaborate with companies and training providers that have established SkillBridge training programs on, or near, Navy installations.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss with you the Navy Transition Assistance Program and our continuous efforts to improve support for transitioning Navy veterans, in close and cooperative collaboration with interagency partners. Each Sailor who selflessly serves our Nation in the all-volunteer force eventually separates or retires, and in so doing, has earned our unwavering commitment to ensuring that they possess the tools that position them for success as they transition and as they continue to serve our Nation as honored and distinguished veterans. Thank you, also, for your steadfast support for all Navy men and women – active, reserve and veteran, and for the programs that sustain them during and following their distinguished careers of voluntary service to the Navy and our Nation.