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BEFORE THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

WITH RESPECT TO

*“Strengthening the Transition Assistance Program:
Exploring Outcomes to Improve the Transition to Civilian Life.”*

June 24, 2025

Introduction

Chairman Bost, Ranking Member Takano, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today on improving outcomes for veterans and transitioning service members. Leaving the military is a shared experience for those who serve, but each servicemember's journey is unique. Ensuring the federal Transition Assistance Program is tailored to meet the needs of all those transitioning, while standardizing effective outcome measures is essential to improving the transition process. The sustainable future of the all-volunteer force relies on providing the right care to veterans as they exit, and through their post-service careers.

Background

Hire Heroes USA is the nation's leading veteran and military spouse employment nonprofit. Headquartered in Alpharetta, Georgia, we are proud of our nationwide presence, serving clients in all 50 states and abroad. Hire Heroes USA offers comprehensive, one-on-one employment services to 25,000 transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses annually. Founded in 2005, we are celebrating our 20th anniversary this year and have helped secure employment for nearly 110,000 unique individuals.

The scope and scale of our client population provides us with robust insights into the myriad employment barriers veterans face after they leave the military. Approximately 60% of our clients registered for assistance while still on active duty, and 32% registered after their separation from the military. Around 8% of our annual clients are military spouses.¹ This individualized model grants us a unique lens on interventions both pre- and post-separation.

¹ “Hire Heroes Report,” 2023, <https://www.hireheroesusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2023-Hire-Heroes-Report.pdf>.



I am honored to elevate our clients' experiences for the committee today, especially those related to evaluating and improving the transition process. The transition process must incorporate policy reforms that support the right solutions and outcomes.

The Transition System: A Fragmented Landscape

Each veteran experiences a unique journey after service, including education, embarking on a career path, starting a business, or continuing service to their community. Due to the variety of pathways available when leaving active duty, developing a standardized method of measuring every veteran's success can have its challenges. However, we can effectively evaluate indicators of well-being for veterans in their civilian lives. Data from key nonprofit and research entities in this sector propose solutions for not only assessing but improving outcomes in veteran programming. These datasets reveal several key contextual factors that policymakers should consider when seeking to reform military to civilian transitions: (1) transition is a process, (2) specific needs exist at critical intervals throughout that process, and (3) needs vary based on each individual; and those needs could be impacted by their rank, education, timeline, experience, and other unique factors at time of separation.

First, transition is a process that can extend well beyond the point of separation from the military. Data from The Veterans Metric Initiative (TVMI) longitudinal study conducted by Penn State University's Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness studied the well-being of over 10,000 individuals who separated from the military in 2016. The study examined seven domains of well-being: employment, education, financial security, legal issues, social connectedness, physical health, and mental health. A key finding from the research is that transition from military to civilian life is a process—not a single moment in time. While 65% of veterans reported feeling fully transitioned within three years of separation, 19% still did not feel fully transitioned even six and a half years later.²

The study also highlights that the first two years post-separation are critical for intervention, revealing that specific needs exist at critical intervals throughout the transition process. During this time, 65% of transitioning service members accessed at least one program offering specialized services across the well-being domains.³ Most veterans used multiple services throughout their transition journey, with financial security emerging as a primary concern. Although many pursued higher education after leaving the military, they often did so while simultaneously seeking employment to stabilize their financial situation.⁴

Finally, multiple factors contribute to the unique circumstances surrounding a service member's transition, though rank often serves as a key indicator of transition success. AEI's April 2025 Report highlighted that Junior Enlisted veterans (ranks E1 to E4) face the most challenges post-

² Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness The Pennsylvania State University, *An Overview of the Typical Veteran in Transition* (2025), https://veteranetwork.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/TVMI-VETS_Transitioning-Veteran-Infographic_2025Mar26.pdf.

³ The Pennsylvania State University, "An Overview of the Typical Veteran in Transition."

⁴ The Pennsylvania State University, "An Overview of the Typical Veteran in Transition."



service, including high unemployment, poor economic outcomes, and low utilization of existing services. It further says that despite the robust network of support services available to this group, measurable results are not being achieved.⁵

Supporting these findings, our data indicates that 28% of clients classified as in active duty, reserve, or veteran status, have a rank between E-1 and E-4 (Junior Enlisted). Their top self-identified barriers to employment were Education (27.9%), Lack of Experience (27.6%), Career Change (21.5%), and License and Certification Requirements (18.6%). Our Junior Enlisted clients also report higher rates of unemployment and underemployment compared to other rank categories, and when given access partake in multiple services at a high rate—an average of 2.69 services per client. In 2023, we observed this population shift from being the least likely to most likely to utilize services.⁶

The Need for an Individualized Approach

Individualized employment services—and other educational and vocational resources—are an essential complement to the federal Transition Assistance Program (TAP). A joint initiative led by the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of Labor (DOL), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and other federal agencies, TAP has played an integral part in gradually improving employment and various other outcomes for transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses. However, TAP is an insufficiently individualized process that is not dynamic enough to address the unique employment barriers veterans face. TAP has faced no shortage of challenges in its more than 20-year history, many of which still remain despite recognition by Congress, the military, and the veteran community. A recent GAO report reveals concerning findings about TAP, including a lack of timely completion of pre-separation counseling requirements and inadequate attendance at career-track classes for service members most at risk.⁷

The sheer volume of transitioning service members each year coupled with DoD resource constraints makes a fully one-on-one model exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for the government to implement on their own. Individualized employment services and vocational resources are an essential complement of federal military to civilian transition services, notes the RAND Corporation’s recent investigation into the federal and nonprofit landscape. Their June 2024 report found that the federal government spends over \$13 billion annually on 45 different programs across 11 agencies to support military transition. Approximately 97% of these funds are allocated to education services rather than employment services, despite the fact that employment services are frequently the number one requested support for transitioning service

⁵ Matt Amidon and Brent Orrell, “Sustaining a National Treasure: Veteran Transitions and the Life Cycle of the All-Volunteer Force” (American Enterprise Institute, April 2025), https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/RPT_Amidon_Orrell_Sustaining-a-National-Treasure-Veteran-Transitions-and-the-Life-Cycle-of-the-All-Volunteer-Force_April-2025-5.pdf?x85095.

⁶ “Hire Heroes Report.”

⁷ U. S. Government Accountability Office, *Servicemembers Transitioning to Civilian Life: DOD Could Enhance the Transition Assistance Program by Better Leveraging Performance Information* | U.S. GAO, (Nov. 9, 2023), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-106793>.



members. Upon further investigation into the role of nonprofit organizations in the transition process, RAND found that these organizations fill a critical gap to supplement federal transition programs, particularly in providing individualized employment services.⁸

Data collected and analyzed by research institutions and nonprofit entities show the importance of individualized service delivery during the transition process. Such data should inform future partnerships and collaborations when discussing and determining how best to measure success for our nation's warfighters once they become civilians. Today's veterans and the labor market do not look like those of an age gone by—neither should our transition programs. We need a transition system that fits the challenges of today's veterans and provides opportunities for individuals to overcome challenges and barriers to a successful civilian life.

The Persistence of Underemployment

Absent from much of the data on veteran transition, the less visible and harder to track trend of underemployment is a persistent problem for veterans in the civilian workforce. According to Penn State University's Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness, underemployment occurs "when veterans' skills, education, and experiences are not fully utilized or maximized in a current job role."⁹ The Veterans Metric Initiative (TVMI) data illustrates that 61% of veterans report underemployment three years after separation from the military. This number only drops slightly to 60% of veterans reporting underemployment at six and a half years post-separation.¹⁰

Many veterans experience underemployment because there is not always a direct translation of skills gained from their military experience. Skills translation is especially critical given that 74% of nonveterans hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to just 54% of veterans.¹¹ Hire Heroes USA's data reflect this with approximately 26% of 2023 registrants having a 4-year degree and around 17% having a 2-year degree. The largest share of those jobseekers (40%) enter the job market with degree attainment lower than a bachelor's. When compared with analysis from the Occupational Information Network (O*NET), TVMI's research found that 40% of veterans were underemployed according to O*NET job education requirements.^{12, 13} Perceived insufficient level of educational attainment, regardless of skills and experience, prohibits veterans from landing jobs where they are challenged and fulfilled. This perceived education gap can follow veterans throughout their career—significantly impacting earnings and

⁸ *Federal Programs to Assist Military-to-Civilian Employment Transitions: Limited Scrutiny and Substantial Investment in Education Programs* (RAND Corporation, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR1363-12>.

⁹ "Policy Brief: Mitigating Veteran Underemployment," October 2023, https://veteranetwork.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/PSU_Mitigating-Veteran-Underemployment_OCT-2023-FINAL.pdf.

¹⁰ The Pennsylvania State University, "An Overview of the Typical Veteran in Transition."

¹¹ "Table 3. Employment Status of People 25 Years and over by Veteran Status, Period of Service, and Educational Attainment, 2024 Annual Averages - 2024 A01 Results," Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed June 3, 2025, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.t03.htm>.

¹² "US Departments of Labor, Commerce Release Skills-First Hiring Guide to Help Employers Hire, Promote Workers Based on Skill, Knowledge," DOL, accessed June 3, 2025, <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/osec/osec20241113>.

¹³ The Pennsylvania State University, "An Overview of the Typical Veteran in Transition."



career progression—and reaffirming the need for career support services far beyond the point of transition.

Opportunities in Skills-Based Hiring

The persistence of underemployment among veterans demonstrates a need for realigning outcome measures. Skills-based hiring presents a promising solution to mitigate this. Skills-based hiring refers to “the hiring or promotion of workers around skills, knowledge and abilities that workers can demonstrate they have, regardless of how or where they attained those skills.”¹⁴ A 2023 study from McKinsey notes that “unleashing the value of veterans’ work experience through skills-based hiring could reach almost \$15 billion over ten years.”¹⁵ Our private sector partners recognize this untapped economic potential. According to the National Skills Coalition, 52% of jobs require training beyond high school, but not a four-year degree.¹⁶ Opportunity @ Work, a nonprofit working across sectors to implement skills-based hiring, promisingly reports that ~600,000 jobs have opened up for STAR (Skilled Through Alternative Routes) jobseekers as 26 states removed degree requirements from government job descriptions between 2022 and 2025.¹⁷ This crucial step in removing degree barriers in employment opportunities is an important development for all of our clients, but particularly for the 78% of Hire Heroes USA’s Junior Enlisted clients (ranks E1-E4) without a bachelor's degree.

While the concept of skills-based hiring is not entirely new—every role inherently requires specific skills—validating and leveraging skills has been an uncommon practice until recently. At Hire Heroes USA, elements to support a skills-validation framework were already in place, but much had to be developed. Over the past two years, we collaborated with skill development and validation organizations, job seekers, career coaches, and employers to integrate skills-based work throughout our efforts. Hire Heroes USA’s clients consistently report that they find skills validation valuable for enhancing career development; in fact, 66% of respondents indicated they felt more confident in their job search following a skills-based search webinar.¹⁸ There is clear interest among employers and in emphasizing skills and competencies that would allow job seekers to demonstrate their value more effectively; however, a definitive and market-wide framework has yet to emerge. Ensuring widespread standardization and adoption of this practice will require continued collaboration between employers, nonprofits, validation platforms, and the

¹⁴ “US Departments of Labor, Commerce Release Skills-First Hiring Guide to Help Employers Hire, Promote Workers Based on Skill, Knowledge,” DOL, accessed June 3, 2025, <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/osec/osec20241113>.

¹⁵ “Hiring Veterans Can Help Reduce the US Labor Gap | McKinsey,” accessed June 12, 2025, <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/from-the-military-to-the-workforce-how-to-leverage-veterans-skills>.

¹⁶ “Skills Mismatch,” *National Skills Coalition* (blog), accessed June 12, 2025, <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/skills-mismatch/>.

¹⁷ Chris Francica, “Three Years In: Tracking the State of the Paper Ceiling,” Medium, March 25, 2025, <https://blog.opportunityatwork.org/three-years-in-tracking-the-state-of-the-paper-ceiling-f24450273266>.

¹⁸ “Skills-Based Hiring White Paper Report,” 2024, <https://www.hireheroesusa.org/skills-based-white-paper/>.



federal government. Decision makers at all levels must actively join the movement to remove employment barriers for more than 70 million Americans.¹⁹

The Value of Nonprofit Organizations and Opportunities to Expand Public-Private Partnerships

In addition to the formal Transition Assistance Program, the federal government provides other military transition programs at no cost to the service member. One such program is the U.S. Department of Labor’s Employment Navigator & Partnership Pilot (ENPP) program.²⁰ ENPP provides one-on-one career assistance to transitioning service members and their spouses at select military installations. The program shows great potential as initial reports indicate ENPP participants experienced two months less time from separation to employment and 11% higher wages than those who did not participate in ENPP.²¹

The success of ENPP is due in large part to the nonprofit partners that execute service delivery for the program at no cost to the federal government. Since launching in 2021, Hire Heroes USA has served almost 2,000 veterans, resulting in over 1,125 hired veterans. For Hire Heroes USA’s ENPP referrals, the 2024 average salary upon hire was \$64,485. More recently, Hire Heroes USA has participated with the U.S. Department of Veterans’ Affairs, Veteran Readiness & Employment (VR&E) office. Through this relationship, VR&E case managers refer veterans most in need of individualized employment services to us for support, and we work diligently with the VA system to ensure a smooth client experience.

Behind Hire Heroes USA’s success is our highly individualized approach, where employment services are tailored to the unique needs of each client. Our industry-leading employment model is centered around a team of trained Transition Specialists who work one-on-one with their assigned ‘client’ throughout their employment journey. Our approach not only results in better employment outcomes for veterans and military spouses, but it also leads to higher levels of satisfaction and earnings that surpass the national average for veterans by over 30%.²²

There is a need for more public-private partnerships to grow effective transition programs. Rather than risk duplicity by creating new programs, the government should strengthen existing programs by partnering with nonprofit organizations that are already producing positive outcomes for those they serve. This position has been supported by multiple industry leaders,

¹⁹ “Advocate for Skills-First Government Policies | Opportunity@Work,” accessed June 12, 2025, <https://www.opportunityatwork.org/topics/skills-first-government-policies>.

²⁰ “Employment Navigator & Partnership Program (ENPP),” DOL, accessed June 4, 2025, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/tap/employment-navigator-partnership>.

²¹ Witness Statement, (2025), <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/VR/VR10/20250325/118028/HHRG-119-VR10-Wstate-DevlinM-20250325.pdf>.

²² “Hire Heroes Annual-Report 2022,” accessed June 4, 2025, https://www.hireheroesusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Hire-Heroes_Annual-Report-Digital-2022-V3.pdf.



including the RAND Corporation²³ and AEI²⁴ which cite the need for nonprofit partners to be appropriately funded to do this work. Private organizations, relying on philanthropic support, have filled TAP's shortcomings, but declining resources jeopardize the private sector's continued sustainment of individualized employment programs. Nonprofits continue to absorb an increasing share of the management and measurement of the transition process. The federal government must incentivize their long-term sustainable participation in these programs through mechanisms other than philanthropic support, including contractual agreements, grants, and other arrangements. These collaborations are critical to ensuring service members have access to all the resources they need in a timely manner.

In addition to effective partnerships and individualized service delivery, there is also a need for standardization in data measurement and program evaluation across both private and public programs. We need to move beyond simply counting outputs, such as job placement and starting salary, to outcomes, such as underemployment, and predictors for long-term financial security. Importantly, these outcomes must account for factors such as rank at separation, educational attainment, and existing support systems.

Moving past a one-size-fits-all approach to transition services and towards individualized solutions is key to ensuring that service members are set up for long-term career success, not just temporary jobs. Under the status quo, the success box for veteran employment is checked without building sustainable pathways for upward mobility. Unfulfilling job hopping without career progression is not a successful outcome in our books. However, current guidelines and objectives used by TAP evaluators consider these outputs successful.

Conclusion

This concludes my statement. Chairman Bost and Ranking Member Takano, and Members of the Committee, I once again thank you on behalf of Hire Heroes USA for your leadership on these pressing issues. We are honored to submit our perspective on improving employment outcomes for the thousands of transitioning military members, veterans, and military spouses we serve. We welcome any questions you may have.

²³ *The Role, Effectiveness, and Sustainability of Nonprofit Organizations That Provide Employment Support for Veterans* (RAND Corporation, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR1363-10>.

²⁴ Amidon and Orrell, "Sustaining a National Treasure: Veteran Transitions and the Life Cycle of the All-Volunteer Force."