

**STATEMENT  
OF  
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR**

**BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**SEPTEMBER 12, 2013**

## **Introduction**

Good Morning Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Department of Labor (DOL or the Department) regarding the Veterans' Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) and the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP). I commend you all for your tireless efforts to ensure that America fulfills her obligations to our returning service members, veterans, and their families.

President Obama, Secretary of Labor Perez and I are committed to serving these brave men and women as well as they have served us by ensuring they have the opportunities, training, and support they have earned to succeed in the civilian workforce. The Department will continue to work with Members of Congress to provide our returning servicemembers, veterans, and their families with the critical resources and expertise needed to prepare them to obtain meaningful careers, maximize their employment opportunities, and protect their employment rights.

### **Implementing Veterans' Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP)**

Section 211 of the "VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011" (Public Law 112-56) established VRAP, an important program that provides retraining assistance that enables unemployed veterans aged 35 to 60 to pursue an associate degree or certificate in a high-demand occupation. VRAP presents a valuable opportunity for thousands of unemployed veterans to develop in-demand skills necessary to enter new career-pathways. The Department is committed to the success of this program and has been working diligently with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to carry out the VRAP provisions since the VOW Act was enacted in November of 2011.

DOL has assisted in the administration of VRAP by, among other things, conducting outreach to veterans, developing guidance for the workforce investment system, identifying high-demand occupations, and determining applicants' initial eligibility based on age, employment status, and previous participation in other job training programs. In addition, the Department works to support veterans before, during, and following their participation in VRAP with employment services and assistance, such as assisted job search, resume development, and interviewing skills. The Department takes these responsibilities seriously and has been working diligently to ensure the success of the program.

For example, the Department, in concert with our colleagues at VA, has been active in promoting the awareness of the VRAP program both at the national level and at the grass roots level through the nation-wide network of approximately 2,600 American Job Centers (AJCs), Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) staff, and other workforce system stakeholders. The Department issued guidance, technical assistance, and information to state and local workforce investment systems strongly encouraging them to refer eligible veterans to the program and requiring them to provide participants with employment assistance after completing or leaving the program. This outreach effort has contributed to the enrollment of over 63,000 veterans in training for "high-demand" occupations. Additionally, in collaboration with VA, and to help support the full use of

benefits by eligible applicants, the Department has sent three rounds of emails to individuals who were accepted into VRAP, but who have yet to enroll.

In May 2012, DOL issued formal announcements providing the workforce investment system, including DVOPS and LVERs, with general information on the VRAP (Training and Employment Notice 43-11<sup>1</sup> and Veterans Program Letter 7-12<sup>2</sup>) and formal policy guidance, updated last month, on providing employment assistance to VRAP participants after they exit the program (Training and Employment Guidance Letter 8-12<sup>3</sup>) in October 2012. In addition, upon participants' acceptance into the VRAP program, the Department sends them a welcome e-mail providing information about the network of AJCs, including an online tool to locate AJCs in a selected area. This welcome e-mail further explains that veterans are entitled to priority of service within the AJC network and encourages veterans to reach out to their local AJCs while still in training to begin job search activities. When VA notifies the Department that an individual has exited VRAP, the Department sends a second e-mail reminding the veteran of the AJC network and online resources. Following this second e-mail, the Department provides each state workforce agency with the contact information of each VRAP participant, so that the agency can offer them employment assistance and report the results of their outreach efforts to the Department.

DOL's responsibilities under VRAP have required, among other things, modifications to current reporting systems, approval of new data collections, and development of processes and data management tools to ensure states and local areas can offer employment assistance to VRAP participants as they enter and exit the program, offer employment services, and track their employment outcomes. For instance, to capture data for VRAP participants, the Department created an entirely new reporting system specific to outreach activities and altered its existing reporting systems to capture employment outcomes. In the October 2012 guidance, as updated, the Department provided information to the state and local workforce investment system on how to collect and submit this data. For each VRAP participant, states are now responsible for collecting data on whether the individual received assistance, was contacted and already found employment, was contacted and did not wish to receive assistance, or was non-responsive to the outreach of employment assistance. The first report accounting for all outreach to VRAP participants from program inception through September 30, 2013, is due to the Department by November 15, 2013. Successive reports are due within 45 days of the end of each quarter. The Department has been working directly with its state contacts to ensure outreach is being conducted and will provide additional assistance and monitoring as formal outreach reporting begins later this fall.

Moreover, DOL is leveraging the core employment services provided under the Wagner-Peyser Act to track the employment outcomes of VRAP participants who receive employment assistance from AJC staff. Specifically, the Department is making modifications to its Labor Exchange Reporting System (LERS), currently used by several DOL programs, to collect information about services provided to and employment outcomes of VRAP participants. Only

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<sup>1</sup> [http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEN/ten\\_43\\_11.pdf](http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEN/ten_43_11.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dol.gov/vets/VPLS/VPLs/VPL%2007-12.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL/TEGL\\_8\\_12.pdf](http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL/TEGL_8_12.pdf)

participants who accept the Department's offer for employment assistance and enroll at an AJC are included in this reporting.

LEERS outcomes include three measures used across employment and training programs serving adult populations, commonly referred to as the Common Measures, to gauge program success. These are as follows: Entered Employment Rate; Employment Retention Rate; and Average Earnings. The Common Measures are captured using state wage records and are reported to the Department within 45-days of the end of each quarter. The capture of outcomes is automatically initiated after a participant has gone 90 days or more without receiving an employment or training service.

As described earlier, the Department has updated the standard state performance reporting systems to provide employment outcome information for those VRAP participants who receive services from AJC staff. In addition, DOL has been working with VA to develop methods for more comprehensive reporting of performance outcomes for all VRAP participants. This broader VRAP reporting has posed some challenges to the public workforce investment system, comprised of AJCs, state workforce agencies, and various partner organizations, which is by design decentralized and locally-driven. The Department has had to reengineer current data-reporting systems and reverse reporting processes to allow an exchange of information between the Department and the states. This task has required both a memorandum of agreement and the development of an interagency data-transfer agreement between the Department and VA. The data transfer agreement between the Department and VA is currently being finalized and will increase the Department's access to VRAP participant data. Additionally, the Department is beginning work with the 54 states and territories to develop data-transfer agreements that will further facilitate the dissemination of VRAP participants' contact information and give states the option to receive participants' Social Security numbers in addition to the contact information they are already receiving. The Department has also sought and received approval for a new data collection specific to the workforce investment system's outreach efforts. These processes, which sometimes take years to complete, have been carried out in a matter of months.

In addition, some states have reported to the Department challenges in maintaining their performance data reporting, both in terms of limited physical computer systems and technical staff. The Department has responded by providing extensive technical assistance in the form of webinars, guidance documents, tutorials, and a dedicated e-mail helpline for inquiries. The Department will continue to work with the states and others to ensure the success of VRAP.

### **Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP)**

Another important program aimed at providing training and employment services to veterans is the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP). The HVRP provides employment-focused and supportive services to assist homeless veterans attain meaningful civilian employment and to stimulate the development of effective service delivery systems that address the complex problems facing homeless veterans. The HVRP is one of the only nationwide Federal programs that exclusively focuses on helping homeless veterans to reintegrate into the workforce.

HVRP funds are awarded to eligible entities through a competitive grant process outlined in the annual Solicitation for Grant Applications. Eligible entities in PY 2013 included: State and local Workforce Investment Boards, Native American tribal organizations, for-profit/commercial entities, public agencies, and non-profits, including community-based organizations. Grantees provide an array of services to homeless veterans through a holistic case management approach, which includes critical linkages to a variety of support services available in local communities. Successful grant applicants must specifically describe how their outreach to homeless veterans will build an effective level of collaboration with other entities, such as the Department of Veteran Affairs, Grant and Per Diem (GPD) grantees, Housing and Urban Development and Veterans' Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) grantees, Health and Human Services (HHS) grantees, and Department of Veterans' Affairs Homeless Veteran Supported Employment Program (HVSEP).

HVRP operates on the principle that when homeless veterans attain meaningful and sustainable employment, they are on a path to self-sufficiency and their susceptibility to homelessness is diminished. HVRP is employment-focused; each participant receives customized employment and training services to address his or her specific barriers to employment. Services may include occupational, classroom, and on-the-job training, as well as job search, placement assistance, and post-placement follow-up services. HVRP's client-centric, "hands-on" approach has successfully helped place thousands of previously-homeless veterans, some of whom were chronically homeless, on a path to self-sufficiency.

Within the umbrella of the HVRP, the Department funds two additional programs designed to address difficult-to-serve subpopulations of homeless Veterans, the Homeless Female Veterans and Veterans with Families Program (HFVWWF) and the Incarcerated Veterans' Transition Program (IVTP). HFVWWF is a competitive grant program that targets the subpopulation of homeless female veterans and veterans with families. The IVTP demonstration project grants currently authorized as a pilot program that sunsets on September 30, 2013, are designed to support incarcerated veterans who are at risk of homelessness by providing referral and career counseling services, job training, placement assistance and other benefits. Eligible IVTP participants include veterans who have been incarcerated and are within 18 months prior to release, or within six months after release from a correctional institution or facility.

In addition, through HVRP the Department supports "Stand Down" events. A Stand Down is a local community event collaborated between local VA programs, other government agencies and community agencies serving the homeless, typically held over one to three days, where homeless veterans are provided a wide variety of services, which can include temporary shelter, meals, clothing, hygiene care, medical examinations, immunizations, state identification cards, veteran benefit counseling, training program information, employment services, and referral to other supportive services. Funding for employment services and incentives for homeless veteran participants, such as hot meals and climate appropriate clothing, is provided through non-competitive grants awarded on a first-come, first-served basis until available funding is exhausted.

## **HVRP Grant Process**

Most HVRP grants are competitive in nature, with the Department soliciting bids by advertising opportunities on the Federal government's consolidated website: [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov). Once the bid period closes, the Department assembles grant review teams under the direction of the Department's Grant Officer. These teams review each bid and score it according to the selection criteria announced in the solicitation. The bids are then ranked based upon their objective scores, although the Department reserves the right to consider geographical dispersion and other factors when making the final selections. Once selections are made, Congressional notifications are completed and the Department issues a press release of the grant awardees. DOL staff then conducts post-award meetings to ensure all new grantees are fully informed of grant implementation and reporting requirements.

All HVRP grant recipients are measured against four performance outcomes outlined in our policy guidance and if a grantee is unable to meet any of the four outcomes the grantee will be placed on a corrective action plan. The performance outcomes are: (1) Enrollments; (2) Placements; (3) Placement Rate; and (4) Cost per Placement. DOL staff works closely with grantees to help them succeed and to achieve all of the four performance outcomes. DVOP and LVER staff also support HVRP grantees by providing critical resources to help grantees achieve entered employment and retention goals through case management, direct employer contact, job development, and follow-up services.

We in the Department are proud to report that from July 2011 to March 2013, the HVRP enrolled 16,412 participants and 10,744 (66 percent) were placed into employment, earning an average wage of \$10.74 per hour. During this same period, over 65 percent of those who were placed into employment continued to be employed 6 months later. Despite the myriad challenges in moving unemployed homeless veterans into employment and housing, the Department believes the HVRP has shown encouraging results. The Department remains committed to the Administration's goal of ending veteran homelessness by 2015 and looks forward to working with the Committee to ensure the continued success of the program.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the VRAP and HVRP programs display our Nation's commitment to our servicemembers, veterans, and their families. The Department of Labor is dedicated to the success of these programs and will continue to work diligently to provide these brave men and women with the employment and training services they need and deserve. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Takano, and Members of the Subcommittee this concludes my statement. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.