

**STATEMENT
OF
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VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Introduction

Good afternoon, Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing. As Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy at the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) at the Department of Labor (DOL or Department), I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the Department of Labor's programs and initiatives pertaining to veterans' employment.

The Department's charter, for over 100 years, has been to "foster, promote and develop the welfare of working people, to improve their working conditions, and to enhance their opportunities for profitable employment." The Department's collective resources and expertise are integrated with state workforce agencies and local communities to meet the employment and training needs of all Americans, including veterans, transitioning service members, members of the National Guard and Reserve, and their families.

As the Federal government's leader on veteran employment, VETS ensures that the full resources of the Department are readily available for veterans and service members seeking to transition into the civilian labor force.

DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) administers the national workforce system – a system that supports economic growth and provides workers and employers with critical resources and support to maximize employment opportunities. Each year, more than 16.9 million Americans, including 1.2 million veterans, receive employment assistance through the workforce system at nearly 2,500 American Job Centers (AJCs) across the country. ETA and VETS fund the counselors in the AJCs who work directly with veterans on their employment and training needs. ETA also funds and oversees the state-operated Employment Service and the Federal-State partnership for the administration of unemployment compensation, including the Unemployment Compensation for ex-service members (UCX) program that provides unemployment benefits to separating service members. VETS' partnership extends to ETA's Office of Apprenticeship, which leads the effort to provide apprenticeship opportunities to our transitioning service members and veterans.

Section 2 of the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002, as codified at 38 U.S.C. 4215, established “Priority of Service” for veterans, which allows veterans and their eligible spouses to receive priority access to workforce training programs directly funded, in whole or in part, by DOL. The Department is committed to Priority of Service for veterans.

The Federal Government took important steps last year to improve how the nation’s training programs serve job-seekers and workers, including veterans. Last year’s Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is the culmination of a four-year bipartisan effort on the part of the Administration and Congress to design a modern workforce system that grows our economy by equipping job seekers, workers and veterans with the skills and credentials needed to secure good jobs and advance in their careers, and matching employers with the skilled workers needed to compete and win in the global economy. Implementing WIOA, along with the Administration’s other job-driven training reforms, will help to strengthen the network of nearly 2,500 American Job Centers, provide greater accountability and transparency for consumers, and establish an effective blend of job training and postsecondary education known as career pathways that will help veterans advance in their careers while earning an industry-recognized credential. VETS will continue to work closely with ETA to finalize implementation of WIOA. During FY 2016, the agencies will implement performance management systems to collect the outcome metrics defined in WIOA and other data on services provided to veterans served through AJCs.

The President’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Budget builds on these improvements, including a number of investments of particular benefit to veterans. The Budget includes a \$500 million increase for employment services to ensure that all displaced workers, including veterans, get the in-person assistance they need to find a new job or be connected to the services or training they need to prepare for one. Included in this request is funding to provide Reemployment and Eligibility Assessments and Reemployment Services (REA/RES), an approach with demonstrated success, to all transitioning veterans receiving UCX. Veterans would also benefit from the increases in the Budget to expand registered apprenticeship and training.

VETS also collaborates with several other agencies within DOL in support of veterans’ employment. For example, the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) focuses on disability policy and employment services and has a long history of working with us and with our military and civilian partners on issues affecting disabled veterans.

The Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) is responsible for administering the affirmative action provisions of the Vietnam Era Veterans’ Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974 (VEVRAA). This law prohibits employment discrimination against protected veterans by covered Federal contractors and subcontractors. VEVRAA also requires contractors and their subcontractors to take affirmative action to employ these veterans. In March 2014, new rules became effective that require businesses with federal contracts of \$100,000 or more to establish annual hiring benchmarks for protected veterans that we anticipate will increase veterans’ employment opportunities.

DOL’s Wage and Hour Division enforces important leave entitlements for veterans and their families through the Military Family Leave provisions of the Family and Medical Leave Act

(FMLA). The Military Family Leave provisions were first added to the FMLA in 2008 and revised in 2010 to provide protections specific to the needs of military families.

DOL's Women's Bureau develops policies and standards, and conducts inquiries to safeguard the interests of working women, including women veterans. The Bureau also advocates for equality and economic security for women veterans and their families, and promotes quality work environments.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) publishes monthly, quarterly, and annual employment data on veterans and, each March, publishes an annual supplemental report called the "Employment Situation of Veterans." BLS recently published a report on women veterans in the labor force examining the demographic, employment, and unemployment characteristics of women veterans. This data is critical to understanding the veteran employment situation. In addition to BLS, the Department's Chief Evaluation Office sponsors research and studies to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of veteran employment programs.

Our partnerships throughout DOL extend VETS' ability to achieve its mission, and bring all of DOL resources to bear for America's veterans, separating service members, and their families. VETS' mission is focused on four key areas: (1) preparing veterans for meaningful careers; (2) providing them with employment resources and expertise; (3) protecting their employment rights; and, (4) promoting the employment of veterans and related training opportunities to employers across the country.

Prepare: The DOL Employment Workshop

As the military drawdown continues through FY 2017, the Department of Defense estimates that approximately 250,000 service members (including members of the National Guard and Reserve) will leave the military annually over the next several years. Many separating service members will face a difficult transition and will struggle to find a job worthy of their talents in an improving, but still-challenging, labor market.

Under the leadership of President Obama, the Administration is committed to ensuring that America fulfills its obligations to our separating service members, veterans, and their families by providing them with the services and support they need to successfully transition to the civilian workforce. As nation-wide unemployment peaked in 2010 and veteran unemployment rates reached 8.7 percent, Congress and the Administration sought to assist veterans with the "VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011" (VOW Act). Also in 2011, First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden created the Joining Forces Initiative to coordinate public- and private-sector resources to better meet the employment, education, and health care needs of our veterans and their families.

VETS contributes to the Administration's commitment through the redesigned Transition Assistance Program (TAP). TAP, as codified at 10 U.S.C. 1144, is a collaborative effort led by the Departments of Labor, Veterans Affairs (VA), and Defense (DoD), aimed at providing separating service members and their spouses with the training and support they need to transition successfully to the civilian workforce. Through TAP, DOL brings its extensive expertise in employment services to bear to provide a comprehensive three-day employment

workshop at U.S. military installations around the world. In 2003, VETS expanded the Employment Workshop to overseas military installations, and in FY 2005, VETS began to offer courses to returning members of the National Guard and Reserve via the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration program. The VOW Act made participation in the DOL Employment Workshop mandatory for most transitioning service members, including those demobilizing from the National Guard and Reserve.

In FY 2014, as a member of the TAP Senior Steering Group Curriculum Working Group, DOL began an annual curriculum evaluation. This included analysis of results from the web-based Transition GPS participant survey instrument developed by DoD, and input from various stakeholders. Based on this evaluation, DOL revised the Employment Workshop curriculum to include Equal Employment Opportunity and Americans with Disability Act content, the Veteran Employment Center content, and enhanced information on Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act training, dislocated worker training, and registered apprenticeship programs. The FY 2015 curriculum review will begin in April 2015, in conjunction with the TAP Senior Steering Group Curriculum Working Group's planned review of the entire Transition GPS curriculum.

The Department's FY 2016 budget request includes \$14.1 million for the TAP program, an increase of \$100 thousand over the FY 2015 appropriated level. This additional funding will allow VETS to develop a mobile application for the online delivery of TAP course curricula, in order to better reach overseas service members who are unable to attend an in-person TAP course, as well as to allow TAP attendees easier access to course materials after they leave the classroom.

Since the inception of the TAP program over 20 years ago, the Department has provided training and services through Employment Workshops to over 2.6 million separating or retiring service members and their spouses. Last year, DOL conducted more than 6,600 Employment Workshops for over 207,000 participants at 206 military installations worldwide. Of the 207,000 participants, more than 9,000 were members of the National Guard and Reserve.

DOL is pleased to report that the new Employment Workshop curriculum has been well received. Of the over 11,000 participants who most recently responded to a survey in FY 2014 Q4, 91% reported that they would use what they learned in their own transition planning and 89% reported that the DOLEW enhanced their confidence in transition planning. The data strongly suggest that the Department's revised Employment Workshop is meeting the high expectations of its audience. The Department's administration of the TAP program has also generated strong support from Veterans' Service Organizations, including The American Legion, who testified before this subcommittee last month that, "was highly impressed both by the amount and the quality of information that was conveyed...by instructors who were contracted by the Department of Labor."

The Department is in receipt of the Report of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission. We appreciate that the level of cooperation between government agencies is recognized in the Commission's report. DOL looks forward to working with our federal partners to address the Commission's recommendations to better prepare service members for transition to civilian life.

Provide: Employment Resources and Expertise (Competitive and Formula Grants)

The Department provides a vast array of services to transitioning service members, veterans, and their spouses to help them with job searching, accessing training programs to bridge skills gaps, and identifying employment opportunities. At the center of the Department's efforts are two VETS-administered grant programs: Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG), a formula program that supports State staff positions at approximately 2,500 American Job Centers (AJCs) across the nation to promote veterans employment, and the competitive Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP). The President's 2016 Budget maintains FY 15 funding levels for VETS' grant programs (\$175 million for JVSG, and \$38.1 million for HVRP).

Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG)

JVSG provides funding to 54 states and territories so they can exclusively serve eligible veterans, as defined in 38 U.S.C. 4101(4) and 4211(4), and other eligible spouses as defined in 38 U.S.C. 4101(5) and can perform outreach to employers. JVSG funds are provided to fund two staff positions: Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) staff.

Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialists (DVOP)

DVOP specialists are authorized by 38 U.S.C. 4103A and must provide intensive services to eligible veterans and eligible spouses to meet their employment needs, prioritizing service to special disabled and other disabled veterans, as defined by 38 U.S.C. 4211, and to other eligible veterans in accordance with priorities determined by the Secretary. The statute also requires that DVOP specialists place maximum emphasis on assisting veterans who are economically or educationally disadvantaged. An eligible veteran or eligible spouse is determined to have a Significant Barrier to Employment (SBE) if he or she attests to belonging to at least one of the six criteria below:

1. A special disabled or disabled veteran, as those terms are defined in 38 U.S.C 4211(1) and (3); who are entitled to compensation (or who but for the receipt of military retired pay would be entitled to compensation) under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs; or, were discharged or released from active duty because of a service connected disability;
2. Homeless, as defined in Section 103(a) of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11302(a));
3. A recently-separated service member, as defined in 38 U.S.C 4211(6), who at any point in the previous 12 months has been unemployed for 27 or more weeks;
4. An offender, as defined by WIOA Sec. 3(38), who may be incarcerated or who has been released from incarceration;
5. Lacking a high school diploma or equivalent certificate; or
6. Low-income (as defined by WIOA at Sec. 3(36)).

VETS recently modified the definitions for unemployment duration and for ex-offenders, as reflected in the above criteria, in response to concerns expressed by Veteran Service

Organizations (VSOs) regarding constraints in meeting the number of veterans eligible for DVOP services. These changes expand the definitions to be more consistent with new language in WIOA and increase the number of veterans who are eligible for DVOP services.

As explained in 38 U.S.C. 4101(9), the “intensive services” provided by DVOP specialists are the same “intensive services” defined in WIA, and include: comprehensive and specialized assessments of skill levels and service needs; development of an individual employment plan to identify the employment goals, appropriate achievement objectives and appropriate combination of services for the participant to achieve the employment goals; group counseling; individual counseling and career planning; and short-term prevocational services that may include development of learning skills, communication skills, interviewing skills, punctuality, personal maintenance skills, and professional conduct to prepare individuals for unsubsidized employment or training.

As an example of the impact our DVOP specialists make, consider the story of Specialist Scott Butcher. Scott enlisted on July 12, 2005 and served honorably in the US Army through March 29, 2013. He completed three tours in Iraq and received the Iraq Campaign Medal with Campaign Stars and the Combat Infantry Badge. When he first entered his AJC in Cincinnati in August 2013, he was 28 years old, married, and living with his parents. His wife was pregnant and due with their first child in February 2014. Scott had just begun receiving unemployment insurance, lacked job search skills and did not have a current resume.

During intake, an AJC staff member determined that Scott had significant barriers to employment and scheduled him for intensive services with DVOP specialist Douglas Oliver. Scott received training in resume writing, job search, and interviewing skills. He was also referred to the Clermont County Veterans’ Services Commission to receive assistance in applying for a VA disability rating for a service-connected condition. Mr. Oliver then provided Scott with job development contacts, submitted his resume to potential employers, and notified employers of Work Opportunity Tax Credit and on-the-job training funding availability.

Scott started employment on September 30, 2013, as a Sales Associate with Total Quality Logistics in Milford, OH, nearly six months after separating from the Army, but less than two months after walking in to an American Job Center. As of February 2, 2015, Scott remains employed with Total Quality Logistics.

Local Veterans’ Employment Representatives (LVER)

LVERs perform a wide range of duties on behalf of our veterans specifically related to outreach to the employer community and facilitation within the state’s employment service delivery system. These duties are outlined in law in 38 U.S.C. 4104(b). LVERs must be assigned duties that promote to employers, employer associations, and business groups the advantages of hiring veterans. When employer outreach is primarily accomplished by a “business services team” or like entity, the LVER must be included as an active member of that team. LVERs advocate for all veterans served by the AJC with local businesses, and other community-based organizations

by participating in appropriate activities such as: planning and participating in job and career fairs; conducting employer outreach; in conjunction with employers, conducting job searches and workshops, and establishing job search groups that include veterans; coordinating with unions, apprenticeship programs and businesses or business organizations to promote and secure employment and training programs for veterans; informing Federal contractors of the process to recruit qualified veterans; providing training and technical assistance to AJC staff and stakeholders regarding veteran issues and concerns; promoting credentialing and licensing opportunities for veterans; and coordinating and participating with other business outreach efforts.

LVERs are also responsible for “facilitating employment, training, and placement services furnished to veterans in a state under the applicable state employment service delivery systems” (38 U.S.C. 4104(b)(2)). VETS defines this facilitation duty as the act of capacity building within the state’s employment service delivery system to ensure easier access to the appropriate employment and training services for job seeking veterans. LVERs play an important role in assisting with the development of the service delivery strategies for veterans in their assigned AJC as well as educating all AJC partner staff with current employment initiatives and programs for veterans.

Development and Training for DVOP Specialists and LVER Staff

DVOP specialists and LVER staff must receive job-related training within 18 months of their appointment. This training is provided by the National Veterans’ Employment and Training Institute, which is administered by VETS. In FY 2014, 100 percent of staff completed the required training courses in case management, labor employment, and employment partnership promotion.

JVSG Refocusing

On April 10, 2014, VETS and ETA jointly released a refocusing strategy that provided clarifying guidance to state workforce agencies (SWAs) on the roles and responsibilities of the Wagner-Peyser (WP), Workforce Investment Act (WIA), and JVSG programs. The Department implemented the JVSG refocusing initiative for numerous reasons including, but not limited to the following: to improve workforce programs’ service delivery strategies for veterans and eligible spouses; to meet anticipated demand for services from an increase in transitioning service members; and to ensure compliance with the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011, Public Law 112-56. This guidance consists of three main pillars:

- Ensuring veteran participants are referred to the appropriate program (WP/WIA, JVSG);
- Ensuring DVOP specialists and LVER staff are performing their statutorily-mandated responsibilities; and,
- Increasing the rate of intensive services to JVSG eligible participants.

The DVOP corps nation-wide has the capacity to support 328,000 participants and deliver intensive services to 90 percent of them. However, over 1.2 million veterans seek assistance annually at AJCs. In order to comply with statutory requirements to prioritize employment

assistance to those veterans most in need, the Secretary of Labor identified categories of veterans with significant barriers to employment as the population eligible for DVOP services. Using the definitions provided in Veterans' Program Letter 03-14, VETS estimates that approximately 417,000 veterans annually meet those conditions.

Additionally, the Secretary identified veterans between the ages of 18-24 as a special population eligible for DVOP services because of the exceptionally high rate of unemployment experienced by this cohort. Subsequently, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 added to the population eligible for DVOP services those transitioning service members who are in need of additional assistance to secure civilian employment, and those who are wounded, ill or injured and in Medical Treatment Facilities along with their caregivers.

VETS has established metrics to track the number of veterans receiving intensive services, setting an ambitious goal of 75 percent of JVSG participants receiving intensive services in FY 2015 and 90 percent by end of FY 2016. Additionally, VETS and ETA ensure that no veteran is ever turned away from an AJC. All veterans receive Priority of Service, and all recent separatees are entitled to six months of intensive employment services.

VETS understands that some stakeholders are concerned that LVERs can no longer provide case management services to veterans. Under refocusing, VETS clarified the roles of LVERs so that they are focused on employer outreach as required in statute, as it is absolutely critical to ensure that the job provider side of the veteran employment equation is as thoroughly addressed as the job-seeker side. VETS has also recently issued further guidance in response to concerns that LVERs' focus on employer outreach means LVERs have been prohibited from any contact with veterans. VETS is addressing its internal audit procedures to ensure that scores are not adversely impacted when LVERs have contact with veterans in the course of connecting them with employers, given current limits in reporting systems.

Wagner-Peyser and JVSG Performance Metrics

As shown in Table 1, average six-month earnings, employment entry, and retention for all veterans improved from Program Year (PY) 2012 to PY 2013.

Table 1. Common Measure Results, PYs 2012-2013, Combined Outcomes of Wagner-Peyser Employment Service and Jobs for Veterans State Grants*

| Measure | PY 2012 Result | PY 2013 Result |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|
| Percent of Veterans employed in the first quarter after exit (Entered Employment Rate (EER)) | 50.2% | 52.9% |
| Percent of Veterans employed in the first quarter after exit still employed in 2nd & 3rd quarters after exit (Employment Retention Rate (ERR)) | 79.6% | 81.0% |
| Average six month earnings of Veterans in the second and third quarter after exit (Average Earnings (AE)) | \$16,870 | \$17,243 |

*Table 1: As reported in the Labor Exchange Reporting System, ETA-9002D and forms 9132 for the states of Texas, Utah and Pennsylvania.

The Department’s Chief Evaluation Office recently completed an analysis of services and outcomes for veteran and non-veteran job seekers served by federally funded employment services, using statistical adjustment to account for demographic, educational, and other differences in the two groups. The data in the study were comprised of 28 million unduplicated customers—two million of whom were veterans—and covered employment services enrollments for nine quarters from January 2011 to March 2013.

Table 2. Employment, Employment Retention, and Average Nine-Month Earnings by Veteran Status, Regression Estimates*

| Performance Outcomes | JVSG Veterans | Non-JVSG Veterans | Non-Veterans |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Entered Employment | 48% | 46% | 47% |
| Employment Retention | 69% | 68% | 68% |
| Nine-Month Earnings | \$ 20,625 | \$ 20,297 | \$ 19,654 |

*Table 2: Wagner-Peyser Data Files, PY2010 Q3 through PY 2012 Q3 (nine quarters, January 2011 through March 2013).

Table 2 shows that, veterans utilizing JVSG services, compared to the adjusted results for non-veterans, exhibited had the highest employment rates, highest earnings, and quickest time to first staff assisted service. The wage gap is considerably smaller for women veterans served by JVSG than for non-veteran women. In the first nine months after exit, male-female gender earnings gaps for JVSG veterans (\$2,386) are 34 percent smaller than gender earnings gaps for non-veterans (\$3,638).

Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP)

The Department is committed to the Administration’s goal of ending homelessness among veterans by the end of 2015. In leading this effort, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), currently chaired by Secretary Perez, has generated powerful national partnerships at every level to work toward ending homelessness across the nation. Through these interagency efforts and many others, the Administration has achieved historic progress. While homelessness among veterans has declined, much work remains to be done.

Authorized by 38 U.S.C. § 2021, VETS administers the HVRP to provide employment and training services to homeless veterans so that they can be reintegrated into the labor force, and to stimulate the development of effective service delivery systems which address the complex problems homeless veterans face. The HVRP is one of the few nationwide federal programs focusing exclusively on helping homeless veterans to reintegrate into the workforce.

VETS awards HVRP funds annually on a competitive basis to eligible applicants, including state and local Workforce Investment Boards, tribal governments and organizations, public agencies, for-profit/commercial entities, and non-profit organizations, including faith and community based organizations.

Successful HVRP grant applicants must specifically describe how their outreach to homeless veterans will build an effective level of collaboration with other entities, such as VA's Grant and Per Diem grantees, the HUD-VA Supportive Housing Program, VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families grantees, Health and Human Services (HHS) grantees, and VA's Homeless Veteran Supported Employment Program. Legislation is needed to allow veterans who are residing in HUD-VASH or were identified as homeless in housing assisted through targeted homelessness programs to be eligible for HVRP.

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 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.

Historically, through HVRP, VETS has funded two additional types of grants designed to address difficult-to-serve subpopulations of homeless veterans: the Homeless Female Veterans and Veterans with Families (HFVWF) and the Incarcerated Veterans' Transition Program. Through HVRP the VETS also supports "Stand Down" events and technical assistance grants.

One example of a veteran served through the HVRP program is Ms. Catherine Vidal of New York, a 36-year-old Army veteran who was referred to the HVRP program by the VA's Supportive Services for Families Program on Long Island. She was homeless and very eager to find a job so she could support herself and maintain contact with her child. Catherine was staying with friends, but when that was no longer possible, she slept in the city parks.

Catherine's work experience was in the field of graphic arts and she was a chemical operations specialist in the Army. However, when she came to the HVRP grantee Services for the Under Served (SUS), she was seeking a position where she could "give back" and was hopeful of obtaining a peer specialist position or other entry-level work in human services. She took full advantage of the computer lab for her job search and enthusiastically participated in job club workshops and meetings with her career coordinator and job developer in spite of her housing issues. Catherine was steered toward several employment interviews through the HVRP, one of which was as a Veteran Peer Support Specialist within SUS' Veterans division. She applied and was interviewed for the position by a human resources staff member who was impressed with her motivation and obvious desire to assist veterans in need.

Catherine was hired shortly thereafter and began work as a Veteran Peer Support Specialist on July 11, 2014. In her position, she plays an important role in supporting veterans' wellness and personal recovery goals. She is also heavily involved in community outreach activities to educate and recruit Gulf War era-II veterans. This is a full time position and Catherine currently earns \$40,000 per year with benefits. She has now been in her position for six months and is stably housed in her own apartment.

Homeless Female Veterans and Veterans with Families (HFVWF)

HFVVWF are competitive grants that specifically assist the subpopulation of homeless female veterans and veterans with families who are at risk of becoming homeless. The grants support direct services through a case management approach that leverages federal, state, and local resources. Eligible veterans and their families are connected with appropriate employment and life skills support to ensure a successful integration into the workforce.

Stand Down Grants & Technical Assistance Grants

Through HVRP, the Department also supports “Stand Down” events. These events, typically held over one to three days in local communities, provide an array of social services to homeless veterans. Stand Down organizers partner with federal and state agencies, local businesses and social services providers to offer critical services, including 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, are provided through non-competitive grants awarded on a first-come, first-served basis until available funding is exhausted.

The HVRP grant program also provides funding to the National Veterans Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC). The NVTAC provides a broad range of technical assistance on veterans’ homelessness programs and grant applications to existing and potential HVRP, HFVVWF, and Stand Down grantees; interested employers; Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs); and federal, state, and local agency partners.

HVRP Program Performance

HVRP’s client-centric, hands-on approach has successfully placed thousands of previously-homeless veterans, some of whom were chronically homeless, on a path to self-sufficiency. In FY 2014, the HVRP program received an appropriation of \$38,109,000 with which the Department awarded 37 new HVRP grants, 82 option year HVRP grants, 18 HFVVWF grants, and 66 Stand Down grants. Table 3 lists, for HVRP and HFVVWF grants, the following: participants enrolled, participants placed into employment, the average costs per participant, and average hourly wage at placement.

Table 3. HVRP, including HFVVWF Participant Statistics, PYs 2012-2013*

| Performance Outcomes | PY 2012 | PY 2013** |
|---|----------------|------------------|
| Participants Enrolled | 17,480 | 16,133 |
| Placed Into Employment | 11,317 | 10,225 |
| Average Cost Per Participant | \$1,985.34 | \$1,901.38 |
| Average Hourly Wage at Placement | \$11.22 | \$11.50 |

* As reported in the Veterans’ Employment and Training Service Operations and Program Activity Report (VOPAR) System, HVRP Program Status Report.

**The PY 2013 data listed is as of December 31, 2014. PY 2013 will be finalized on March 31, 2015.

Protect: Employment Rights Through USERRA, Veterans' Preference, VEVRAA, and VETS 100/4212 Reporting

Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA)

VETS receives and investigates claims arising under USERRA, 38 U.S.C. 4301-4335. The Act prohibits discrimination in employment based on prior service in the uniformed services, an individual's current service in the uniformed services, or intent to join the uniformed services. USERRA also provides reemployment rights with the pre-service employer following qualifying service in the uniformed services. Additionally, USERRA prohibits discrimination against individuals who attempt to enforce their rights under USERRA and prohibits retaliation against those who testify in any proceeding under the Act. VETS also has two separate compliance assistance tools, the USERRA and Veterans' Preference Advisors which assist users in determining if they have a valid reason for complaint, and allows them to electronically file a complaint. These two Advisors are among the Employment Laws Assistance for Workers and Small Businesses (elaws) program's most popular Advisors averaging over 15,000 users per month. VETS provides its USERRA Annual Report to Congress each year, which includes more detailed information regarding program and enforcement outcomes.

In FY 2014, VETS and the Office of Special Counsel (OSC) concluded a three-year demonstration project (from August 2011 to August 2014) to assess each agency's performance in reviewing and resolving Federal-sector USERRA cases. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) evaluated the agencies' performance using metrics, including case outcomes, customer satisfaction, timeliness, cost, and capacity. As reflected in GAO's final report, GAO-15-77, released on November 25, 2014, VETS scored better than OSC in each measured category.

GAO reported that, between August 2011 and August 2014, VETS resolved 308 (or 97 percent of the 319) USERRA cases, and OSC resolved 366 (or 84 percent of the 434) cases it received. On a survey sent to claimants and administered by OPM, VETS respondents reported higher average satisfaction on every question than OSC respondents, with pronounced differences in scores on timeliness, access to staff, and overall experience. VETS' average investigation time of closed cases was about 41 days and OSC's was about 151 days. DOL spent about \$1,112 per case, whereas OSC spent about \$3,810.

Veterans' Preference

Under the Veterans' Employment Opportunities Act (VEOA), 5 U.S.C. 3330a-3330c, VETS is responsible for investigating claims alleging a Federal agency's failure to apply Veterans' Preference in hiring or during a reduction-in-force, and claims from veterans alleging a lack of access to a Federal agency's covered employment opportunities. Additionally, Secretary Perez co-chairs the Council on Veterans Employment Steering Committee and VETS actively participates in the development of policy and oversight addressing federal veterans' preference.

VETS 100/4212 Reporting

In March 2014, the Department's published rulings, updating regulations under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974 (VEVRAA), went into effect. These laws prohibit employment discrimination against qualified individuals on the basis of disability or veteran status by federal contractors and subcontractors, and they require affirmative action to recruit, employ, train, and promote qualified individuals with disabilities and protected veterans. VETS is responsible for collecting annual reports on veteran employment from Federal contractors. The VETS-100 report applied to government contracts entered into prior to December 1, 2003, with a value of \$25,000 or greater. The VETS-100A applied to government contracts entered into on or after December 1, 2003, with a value of \$100,000 or greater. The reports included the total number of a contractor's employees who belong to the categories of veterans protected under VEVRAA, and the total number of those employees who were hired during the period covered by the report.

Beginning with the 2015 reporting cycle, VETS implemented a new form to replace the VETS-100 and VETS-100A reports for reporting veteran hiring, the VETS 4212. This change was undertaken pursuant to President Obama's 2011 direction to federal agencies to reduce burdens on the regulated community by streamlining existing regulatory requirements where possible. The VETS 4212 report reduces reportable items by nearly 50 percent compared to the former reports, and is expected to save Federal contractors nearly \$245 million in costs and more than one million burden hours over the next ten years. In addition, the data collected through the VETS 4212 Report will enable contractors to better assess their effectiveness in hiring veterans and complying with VEVRAA.

VETS partners closely with the Office of Federal Contractor Compliance Programs (OFCCP) to ensure that federal contractors understand their obligations regarding veteran hiring, and then connects these employers with employment-ready veterans to help them meet their goals. Most recently, VETS met with the Dulles Regional Chamber of Commerce to discuss veteran hiring initiatives. As a result, five companies are now engaged with their local AJC in Northern Virginia and three are already in the process of hiring additional veterans.

Promote: Employer Outreach, Intra/Inter-Agency Coordination, and Stakeholder Outreach, Women’s Veteran Program

Employer Outreach

VETS’ Office of Strategic Outreach (OSO) was chartered to develop a national engagement and integration strategy that informs and coordinates action within and between the government, private sector and communities to enhance veterans’ employment opportunities and leverage the national workforce system. OSO conducts engagements with federal, state, and local governments; private sector employers and trade associations; institutions of higher learning; non-profit organizations; and Veteran Service Organizations to establish and develop a network that enables service members, veterans, and families to successfully integrate into their communities. This office provides a valuable bridge between national and regional employers who are eager to commit to hiring veterans and workforce development staff at American Job Centers who are tasked with building local employer relationships and assisting veterans in entering gainful employment.

VETS has initiated a regional engagement and integration strategy by staffing a Regional Outreach Specialist with each of the six Regional Offices nationwide. These outreach specialists will coordinate outreach activities with the corresponding VETS Regional Administrator and corresponding state directors of VETS at the direction of VETS OSO.

The partnerships and working relationships initiated and developed to facilitate veteran employment have been significant. VETS continues to work closely with its government partners including the Departments of Veterans’ Affairs, Defense, Energy, Transportation, Agriculture, and the Small Business Administration. VETS is also engaged with the Office of Warrior Care and Policy and the Wounded Warrior organizations of each military service, and plans to support the DoD’s federal internship program exclusively for recovering service members, Operation Warfighter.

VETS is working closely with Joining Forces, “Warriors for Wireless,” “Troops to Truckers” and “Helmets to Hardhats”, several trade associations and several labor unions regarding industry-wide veteran hiring initiatives. VETS has partnered with over 50 private industry leaders and companies including JP Morgan Chase, US Bank, Sodexo, Blackstone Group, JB Hunt, UPS, Tesla, Toyota, Humana, Hospital Corporations of America, Sprint, Home Depot, Walmart, Starbucks, Kraft, Coca-Cola, General Electric, Microsoft, and many others to implement practical strategies to help each company institutionalize their veteran hiring initiatives.

Registered Apprenticeships

VETS is working to increase the use of apprenticeships in the United States, not only to expand opportunity for workers, but to expand opportunity for businesses, too. And, the GI Bill is a vital way that employers and other Registered Apprenticeship sponsors can help veterans meet their expenses during an apprenticeship. DOL (Office of Apprenticeship and VETS) has collaborated with the White House, VA, State Apprenticeship Agencies, State Approving Agencies, and other

stakeholders to negotiate and develop a new outreach campaign for over 10,000 Registered Apprenticeship programs to encourage them to be "Approved for the GI Bill." The outreach campaign included a joint letter from ETA's Assistant Secretary Portia Wu and VA's Under Secretary for Benefits, Alison Hickey to all Registered Apprenticeship programs as well as fact sheets for veterans and employers, and the two required VA forms for the employers to become certified to allow their current and future veteran apprentices to use their GI Bill benefits in an apprenticeship.

In 2014, the VA and DOL developed a streamlined system for new Registered Apprenticeship programs so that, at the time of registration with DOL, Apprenticeship staff will assist employers with the VA certification for GI Bill benefits. This new process will provide employers with "one door to the government" for their Registered Apprenticeship and veterans benefit needs.

Through this outreach campaign, more employers and Registered Apprenticeship programs than ever will be certified to provide the GI Bill benefits that their veteran apprentices have earned.

Women Veterans Program (WVP)

DOL has the lead for the Administration on many issues facing women in the workplace, including paid family leave, increasing the minimum wage, gender pay equity, and increasing women's participation in non-traditional career fields. Women veterans, who comprise 10 percent of the veteran population, but only two percent of all working women in America, are a critical segment of this constituency. The Women Veteran Program (WVP) collaborates with the Women's Bureau and Federal partners, such as VA's Center for Women Veterans, Center for Minority Veterans and Office of Rural Health, and non-profit organizations to continuously monitor the issues facing of women veterans and ensure that DOL's employment services are meeting their needs.

In FY 2014, WVP conducted broad meta-analysis of the employment situation for women veterans. The analysis included a review of 18 years of unemployment rates for women veterans, women non-veterans, male veterans, and male non-veterans, and a more in-depth examination of the 2013 and 2014 Current Population Survey Annual Averages. Annual averages were used because the monthly data for women veterans is extremely volatile due to the small sample size.

This review demonstrated that women veterans are younger, more educated, and more likely to be of racial/national origin minority status than male veterans. As such, women veterans are more likely to be in the subpopulations that have higher unemployment rates, such as veterans currently enrolled in school, those under 35 years old, and those who served in Gulf War II.

Women veterans who utilize JVSG services experience higher entered employment rates and higher wages than their non-veteran female peers. JVSG services are successful because they are customized for each woman veteran and her individual needs.

Advisory Committee on Veterans' Employment and Training and Employer Outreach (ACVETEO)

One of the primary means by which the Department engages with key stakeholders from both the public and private sectors and VSOs is through its ACVETEO. The ACVETEO is a non-discretionary advisory committee established under 38 U.S.C. 4110 that is required to assess the employment and training needs of veterans and their integration into the workforce; determine the extent to which VETS' programs and activities are meeting such needs; assist the Assistant Secretary for VETS in conducting outreach activities to employers with respect to the training and skills of veterans and the advantages afforded employers by hiring veterans; make recommendations to the Secretary, with respect to outreach activities and employment and training needs of veterans; and carry out such other activities necessary to make required reports and recommendations.

For FY 2014, the ACVETEO focused its efforts on considering how, and with what effect, the resources of VETS could be best positioned to advance the employment situation of the nation's veterans. Specifically, the Committee focused on the following themes: (1) veterans and employer outreach activities, (2) transition assistance and support (employment), and (3) employment and training activities/needs impacting focused populations.

ACVETEO's report was submitted to both Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees on January 9, 2015. The Department is currently preparing its response to recommendations and looks forward to sharing these observations with this Committee upon completion.

Conclusion

DOL's focus is clearly targeted on employment – this is our core mission and competency. Creating opportunity for our veterans to thrive in the civilian economy through meaningful employment is a priority for DOL leaders and for every agency within the Department, and we work closely with our partners at the Department of Veterans Affairs and Defense to do so. DOL's connection with the state workforce agencies in nearly 2,500 AJCs across the nation facilitates veterans' employment with large national employers as well as small and medium sized businesses that do most of the hiring. DOL's long-established relationship with State Workforce Agencies is a partnership that delivers proven and positive results. The Administration wants to ensure that we build on these established relationships and the improvements called for in WIOA to build a workforce system and American Job Centers that can better help our transitioning service members and veterans move into family-sustaining jobs. For this reason, the Administration would have strong concerns with any legislation that would undermine our progress or ability to help veterans and transitioning service members achieve positive employment outcomes. The Department looks forward to working with the Subcommittee to ensure that our transitioning service members, and veterans, and their families have the resources and training they need to successfully transition to the civilian workforce.

Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my written statement. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this hearing. I welcome any questions you may have.