

**WRITTEN STATEMENT**

**OF**

**FRANK DIGIOVANNI  
DIRECTOR  
FORCE READINESS & TRAINING**

**OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND  
READINESS**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

**REGARDING**

**“A REVIEW OF LICENSING AND CREDENTIALING STANDARDS FOR  
SERVICEMEMBERS AND VETERANS”**

**BEFORE THE**

**HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

**SEPTEMBER 10, 2015**

Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this afternoon to discuss licensing and credentialing standards for Service members and veterans. My testimony will discuss these standards from the perspective of the Department of Defense (DoD), including summarizing the progress we have made; the current status of our activities; and our future planned efforts.

DoD recognizes and acts upon the firm belief that attainment of civilian licenses and credentials during military service is critical to the ability of transitioning Service members and veterans to translate their profession of arms, military training, and experience to civilian jobs. The Department has undertaken numerous initiatives to connect military training and experience with civilian credentials and licenses, several of which are described here.

### **DoD Credentialing and Licensing Task Force and Accomplishments**

In June 2012, DoD created the Credentialing and Licensing Task Force to collaborate with other federal agencies, the Services, and outside stakeholders to reduce credentialing barriers and increase opportunities for transitioning Service members. The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness (OASD(R)) has been leading this effort.

Accomplishments under the Task Force include:

- DoD and the Services implemented pilot credentialing programs in seven major areas, including truck driving, healthcare support, logistics, automotive mechanics, aircraft mechanics, information technology (IT), and manufacturing. Active-duty Service members representing more than 50 occupational specialties have participated in these programs.

- As an example, significant progress has been made in the high-demand manufacturing trades, such as welders and machinists. Graduates of the Army Ordnance School's 91E Advanced Individual Training can now earn welding certifications from the American Welding Society (AWS) as well as machinist certifications from the National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS). Since FY 2013, more than 2,000 Soldiers have earned AWS welding certifications, while more than 2,350 Soldiers have earned NIMS machinist certifications.
- All four military Services now offer "Credentialing Opportunities-On Line" (COOL) websites that disseminate detailed information on civilian credentials that map to military occupations, information on potential gaps between military training and civilian credentialing requirements, and resources available to fill gaps and attain credentials.
- Since 2012, State legislatures, with the assistance of the DoD-State Liaison Office and other mechanisms, enacted 79 bills designed to remove barriers to Service member and veteran licensing. These bills covered health-related and commercial occupations and included bills to specifically address Emergency Medical Technician/Paramedic, Licensed Practical Nurse, and Commercial Driver's License. Currently all 50 states have made accommodations in one or more occupations to support Service members to use their training towards obtaining occupational licenses. Additionally, 40 have made statutory changes to allow Service members to receive credit towards academic degrees, which can support their ability to obtain employment in credentialed occupations.

In addition, to promote civilian job skills training and future employment for transitioning Service members, DoD works closely with other federal agencies and with private organizations. For example, in early 2014, DoD launched the new SkillBridge initiative. This initiative implements an innovative authority enacted by Congress, 10 U.S.C. Section 1143(e), for which Congress deserves tremendous credit. This authority allows eligible Service members to participate in civilian training, apprenticeships, and internship programs, beginning up to six months before their service obligation is complete. A leading SkillBridge provider is the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry, whose program for welding and pipefitting is already at seven installations and has graduated some 800 Service members; virtually all of the graduates have received jobs.

Additionally, as part of the interagency Transition Assistance Program (TAP), the Department of Veterans Affairs provides an optional Career Technical Training Track (CTTT). This workshop assists transitioning Service Members in identifying and pursuing credentialing and licensing options that lead to meaningful civilian occupations that match their interests and skills in high demand industries. CTTT also provides information on funding methods for these credentialing and licensing opportunities, such as the GI Bill® or no-cost public-private partnerships.

As a result of all these efforts over the past three years, tens of thousands of Service members have earned valuable civilian credentials.

### **Current Credentialing and Licensing Initiatives**

Building on its accomplishments, DoD is currently undertaking an array of credentialing and licensing initiatives to further institutionalize our efforts. To this end, the Department is

developing a draft DoD Instruction that will consolidate and codify in a comprehensive manner all Congressional legislation pertaining to credentialing since the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2012. This Instruction also defines the high-level parameters for Service credentialing programs consistent with the FY 2015 NDAA (Section 551) requirements to include payment for Service member credentialing, as well as establishment of criteria to ensure the quality of the credentials and the associated resources to help the Service member prepare for attaining the credential.

By the beginning of FY 2016, all Services will have a program in place to pay for Service member credentialing; and will either have completed or are in the final stages of drafting policy guidance for their credentialing programs. Once DoD publishes its Instruction, we will work to continue to institutionalize our efforts by monitoring newly implemented Service credential payment programs and policies and adapting as necessary. We will also work to expand all Service members' credentialing opportunities by identifying credentials that are related to Service members' collateral duties, such as fitness and managerial certifications.

DoD is also further institutionalizing its Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL) programs. The Office of the Secretary, with the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps, have established a Joint Services Credentialing Work Group that meets regularly to share information and collaborate on ongoing enhancements to the Services' COOL programs. The Department also continues to screen credentials to ensure they meet recognized standards of quality. DoD is finalizing preparations for launching a DoD COOL web site that will serve as a single entry point to each of the Service's COOL web sites and will emphasize steps that credentialing organizations and employers can take to help facilitate credentialing of service members.

Lastly, organizationally, DoD leadership recently extended the DoD Credentialing Task Force through December 31, 2017, allowing for continued top level coordination among the Services on credentialing issues. DoD also continues to implement its SkillBridge initiative, including taking steps to ensure that any new SkillBridge opportunities implemented for transitioning Service members include appropriate licensing and credentialing aspects where applicable.

### **Future Planned Licensing and Credentialing Efforts**

We thank Congress for all of the supportive tools provided to date to help the Department in reducing credentialing barriers for our Service members and veterans. Due to the success of these efforts at the Federal level, we have reached a point where the key remaining obstacles to connecting military training and experience with civilian credentials and licenses now mostly stand at the state level. We plan to continue to work with states to reduce these barriers, including refining state regulations, promoting greater recognition of military training and experience by state licensing boards, raising awareness about military trained applicants' eligibility for licensure, and strengthening education partnerships with community colleges. In the end, we have discovered that the clearest path to giving Service Members credentials for their training is through mechanisms like community colleges.

Community colleges offer a particular opportunity for facilitating licensing and credentialing of Service members and Veterans. We seek to improve partnering between states, community colleges, and the military. Community colleges can play a critical role in preparing transitioning and separated Service members for a smooth transition to skilled careers, and in providing valuable bridge training. For example, some community colleges have divided the

courses included in their programs that prepare students for certifications and licenses into modules, awarding veterans partial credit for the modules that they test out of, and awarding them the remaining credit for the modules that they complete. More community colleges need to implement this and other more veteran-friendly approaches to training.

As we seek to strengthen community colleges in this area, we also plan to focus more on building partnerships with industry groups. A particular promising area for such partnering is the development of “pipeline courses” at community colleges that could provide custom-driven curricula that would provide “gap training” in certain high-demand sectors, particularly the skilled trades. Along these lines, we hope to focus on developing programs to grant experiential credit. For example, our research has found that only four of 395 accredited paramedic training programs offered competency based testing and awarded academic credit for military experience. Training for military medics can be more “task-focused” and custom-designed to address additional needs, also allowing civilian academic training to be reduced from 18 to less than 12 months.

DoD is working to provide particular focus on assisting transitioning Service members in the combat arms (such as infantry, armor, etc.). Although combat arms skill sets may not directly translate into civilian occupations, these veterans have acquired well-recognized “soft skills” (such as leadership, responsibility, adaptability, willingness for training, etc.) that are universally applicable to the civilian work world. These skills are in particular high demand in the broad range of industries where there are already “skills gaps.” We plan to continue working with credentialing agencies and other stakeholders, including employers and the Department of Labor, to boost the opportunity for these veterans to fill these occupations where skill gaps exist. We will further research these gaps as well as effective practices for filling them, and recommend

potential next steps to be taken by DoD, the Services, public, and private partners to increase employment opportunities.

At the same time, DoD will explore the potential use of civilian credentialing for the type of soft skills possessed by combat arms specialties. In addition, as part of the further implementation of SkillBridge, DoD will continue to explore the applicability of industry-based and employer-based standards that can ease the ability of Service members to enter the civilian workforce, especially for transitioning combat arms members.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. On behalf of the men and women in the Armed Forces and their families, I want to thank you and the members of this Subcommittee for your steadfast support.