



**Testimony by  
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**Submitted to the  
Committee on Veterans Affairs  
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity  
United States House of Representatives**

**“A Review of Licensing and Credentialing Standards for Servicemembers and Veterans:  
Do Barriers Still Remain”**

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On behalf of the nation's governors, thank you for the opportunity to update the Subcommittee on state efforts to accelerate pathways for servicemembers and veterans to receive civilian occupational licenses and credentials.

### **Supporting Servicemembers, Veterans and their Families**

Thousands of men and women have returned from overseas deployments and are making the transition back to civilian life. Military servicemembers bring valuable and unique experience to the civilian workforce, but many of them continue to experience difficulty accessing the benefits and services they deserve. Despite a multitude of programs to assist former members of the military with their post-service transition, they continue to face difficulties with federal red-tape, poor records management and insufficient coordination between government agencies.

To facilitate servicemembers' transition to civilian life, governors have undertaken a variety of initiatives to help veterans navigate the myriad programs and resources available to them, remove barriers and improve program efficiency. NGA is supporting these efforts by providing technical assistance, sharing state best practices and helping lead national efforts to identify solutions to veterans' employment challenges.

As discussed below, one major area of focus for the National Governors Association (NGA) has been a partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to conduct a demonstration project to engage governors in streamlining veterans' licensing and credentialing.

In addition to this ongoing work, NGA last year conducted a comprehensive survey of state and territorial initiatives to support members of the military, veterans and their families. The survey covers areas such as education, employment, family support, tax and financial benefits, transition support services and licensing and certification. The results were published this past February as a compendium of state programs and is attached to my testimony.

### **Overview of the NGA Veterans Licensing and Certification Demonstration**

Members of the United States' military are trained in hundreds of occupations with relevance in the civilian workforce. However, receiving a civilian license or certification in many of those occupations can require completing formal state administrative processes and meeting training and education standards. Despite highly relevant skills and experience, some veterans find that they must go through a lengthy process to obtain the formal documentation, training or education required to enter their occupation of choice. Those requirements impose additional costs on veterans and on taxpayers, who pay both for the initial military training and for re-training outside of the military through veterans' education benefits.

Recognizing states' regulatory authority in the licensure of several high-demand civilian occupations, Section 237 of the *Veterans' Opportunity to Work to Hire Heroes Act of 2011* (The VOW Act) authorized DOL to conduct a demonstration project to engage governors in streamlining veterans' licensing and credentialing, with the ultimate goal of identifying the most efficient process for moving veterans into civilian employment.<sup>1</sup>

In response, DOL contracted with the NGA Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) to carry out that 18-month demonstration project. As part of the project launch, the NGA Center developed a competitive process to select six states to participate in the 18-month demonstration: Illinois, Iowa, Nevada, Minnesota, Virginia and Wisconsin.

Each participating state selected up to three high-demand occupations to focus their licensing and credentialing strategies that corresponded with one of the three pre-selected military occupational specialties. The selected occupations included: Emergency Medical Technician/Paramedic, Licensed Practical Nurse, registered nurse, physical therapy assistant, bus and truck driver and police patrol officer.

The effort, launched in May 2013, included 12 months of intensive technical assistance from the NGA Center to help state teams develop and implement accelerated pathways to licensure for veterans in each state's selected occupations. Under the demonstration, states took steps to identify the skills veterans earned in the military, translate them in a way that civilian licensure boards will accept and help veterans take advantage of streamlined pathways for civilian licenses. Those streamlined pathways included waiving required tests and training requirements and creating new courses to fill in skills gaps without requiring veterans to undergo duplicative training.

While state strategies over the course of the demonstration were diverse, at the close of the demonstration in December 2014, the NGA Center was able to identify a common process based on state experience – a state “blueprint” – to guide states interested in undertaking similar efforts to connect transitioning servicemembers and veterans with civilian employment opportunities. A preview of the state blueprint is featured in the recently released Project Interim Report.<sup>2</sup>

The interim report further describes an additional component of the project - a cost study to inform Congress about the potential federal cost savings of removing licensing barriers at the state level. The study will estimate cost savings to federal programs administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and DOL when a veteran completes an accelerated pathway towards licensure versus duplicative training under a full length pathway. The results of the cost study will

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<sup>1</sup> P.L. 112-56, Title II

<sup>2</sup> [Veterans' Licensing and Certification Demonstration Interim Report](#) (2015).

be available in the Final Project Report to be completed this fall. Initial findings suggest substantive savings to federal programs given the potential of accelerated pathways to avoid duplicative training and reduce time towards meeting the requirements for a credential. The cost savings are found through programs such as GI Bill tuition and VA housing benefits.

Both the interim and final project reports will offer substantive insights and ways forward for the federal government and states to help veterans transition to the civilian workforce by addressing licensing and certification barriers. The following is intended to provide a high level summary of some of the key lessons learned from the demonstration to date that can inform thinking on how the federal government and states can work together to help address licensing barriers at scale.

### **Key Findings from the Veterans Licensing and Certification Demonstration**

States are working to reduce licensing and certification barriers for veterans. Between 2013 and 2015, 39 states issued executive orders or passed legislation to assist veterans in transferring skills gained in military service to civilian employment. NGA's review of this work suggests that successful implementation of accelerated pathways requires both active coordination and the open flow of information across federal and state agencies, regulatory authorities, and education institutions. Specifically, NGA uncovered five general lessons learned that will inform future state efforts.

#### **➤ Governor-Led Coordination**

The commitment and ongoing involvement of the governor's office is critical to successfully mobilize and coordinate executive action by diverse state agencies and to shepherd any necessary statutory changes with the state legislature to address barriers for veterans to licensing and certification.

Demonstration experience indicates that, in addition to the governor's office, five other state agencies are positioned to play a central role in successfully implementing accelerated civilian pathways:

- *State departments of veterans affairs* – The state department of veterans affairs can play a central role, on behalf of the governor's office, in coordinating the operational activities of the other agencies involved;
- *State licensing boards* – State licensing boards have the responsibility for approving the accelerated pathways leading to civilian certification or licensure;
- *Postsecondary educational institutions* – Postsecondary educational institutions have the responsibility for developing the curricula underlying the accelerated pathways;

- *State workforce agencies* – State workforce agencies interface directly with veterans and employers based on their responsibility to deliver unemployment compensation benefits and employment services; and
- *State approving agencies* – State approving agencies are responsible for approving and monitoring the quality of the education programs for veterans that qualify for payment of GI Bill education benefits.

In addition to orchestrating the participation of this diverse group of state agencies over the course of the demonstration, some governors issued executive orders applicable to the development and implementation of accelerated pathways. Governors also engaged their legislatures to remove statutory barriers to accelerated pathways or to establish statutory incentives or benefits supportive of accelerated pathways, such as tuition-free enrollment for veterans at state postsecondary schools.

➤ **Strong Partnerships Between State Educational Organizations and Licensing Boards**

Constructive partnerships between postsecondary schools and their governing state agencies, on the one hand, and state licensing boards, on the other hand, make a key contribution to successfully negotiating the operational details of accelerated pathways to civilian licensure.

State educational organizations and state licensing boards have existing relationships that relate to their complementary responsibilities for developing and approving education and training programs that lead to licensure for civilian workers who follow traditional career preparation pathways. For example, before investing in any new education program leading to licensure, educational organizations seek some assurance that the program will receive a favorable hearing from the state licensing board as an approved pathway to licensure. As a result, if both constituencies agree that accelerated pathways for veterans have value and both are willing to support that effort, accelerated pathways can become a reality. However, if either body has serious reservations about the value of this course of action, successful implementation is unlikely because neither has the authority to implement an accelerated pathway on its own.

➤ **Collaboration with National Associations of State Licensing Boards**

National associations of state licensing boards can expedite state level efforts by providing a foundation for designing occupation-specific curricula that support the implementation of accelerated pathways.

A key example from the demonstration is the gap analysis by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN). That organization compared a standard civilian curriculum for the Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) occupation with the training curricula for four different categories of Army, Navy and Air Force medics, identifying for each civilian curriculum

element the extent to which the four military curricula met the civilian standard. All six demonstration states targeted the development of accelerated pathways to LPN. One of the six had conducted its own gap analysis before becoming aware of the NCSBN gap analysis. The other five states relied on the NCSBN gap analysis in various ways in pursuing accelerated pathways to LPN. Given NCSBN's clear contribution to the success of the demonstration, collaboration with other national associations to develop occupational gap analyses is a key step to accelerating pathways in other occupations.

➤ **State-to-State Communication and Collaboration**

Cross-state communication and collaboration play a key role in confirming the feasibility of developing accelerated pathways and in identifying strategies to facilitate their implementation.

Demonstration states learned extensively from each other, relied heavily on each other for examples of successful practices and even benefitted from the efforts of a state outside the demonstration as a source of information and as an example of a model accelerated pathway to LPN. Specifically, at the time the demonstration was getting underway, GateWay Community College in Phoenix, Arizona, had just completed the process of developing and gaining state licensing board approval for an accelerated LPN pathway for veterans, based on the NCSBN gap analysis. Four demonstration states consulted directly with the director of the GateWay program, who travelled to one demonstration state to provide an in-person briefing to interested state staff. In the end, two demonstration states adopted the GateWay model as the model for their accelerated LPN programs. Avenues for future interaction and sharing of best practices across states can offer other states valuable insights to carry out similar efforts.

➤ **Effective Information Sharing**

Demonstration states continue to struggle with the limited availability of state-level information on the military occupational specialties of transitioning servicemembers and recently separated veterans. This lack of core information makes it difficult to estimate the level of demand for accelerated pathways for the different civilian occupations and to prioritize the occupations to be targeted for pathways.

Accelerated pathways to civilian licensure for former military personnel assume that the candidates have prior military training, education and occupational experience that relate to the licensed civilian occupation. Educational institutions considering the development of accelerated pathways seek a measure of assurance that there will be a sufficient number of appropriate candidates, so that the programs can be self-sustaining.

To document the demand for accelerated pathways, the information on transitioning servicemembers and recently separated veterans should have three characteristics:

- It needs to include the military occupational specialties of the candidates;
- It needs to relate to candidates who already reside in the state or who plan to reside in the state upon separation from the military; and
- It needs to be available at the time shortly before or shortly after separation from the military, because transitioning servicemembers and recently separated veterans are the most likely candidates for accelerated pathways.

While the demonstration states devised unique and creative approaches to respond to critical information challenges, in general information on potential candidates that has all three characteristics is not readily available and cannot easily be developed. That reality not only complicates state efforts to assess the demand for accelerated pathways in particular occupations, but also complicates state efforts to conduct outreach to potential pathway candidates. For accelerated pathway programs to succeed, information on soon-to-be separating servicemembers and veterans eligible for and currently receiving employment benefits must be more widely and readily available.

The demonstration states' collective experience provided valuable learning opportunities for other states looking to streamline pathways to licensure for veterans and begin the process of designing and implementing state strategies. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution for states to create accelerated pathways, the demonstration clearly shows that when state, federal and private sector partners support the formation of a cross-agency team equip them with good information and examples to build from such efforts can improve employment opportunities for transitioning servicemembers and veterans.

Addressing barriers to better information sharing on candidates for civilian licensure is a key area where federal and state partnership could be strengthened. This was a key challenge identified during the NGA licensing and credentialing demonstration project. Budget and bureaucratic challenges at all levels of government continue to affect the efficiency and speed with which veterans can access benefits and services. Records management and information sharing would benefit from improved coordination among federal, state and local authorities and have a demonstrable effect on the quality of services provided to military servicemembers.

NGA appreciates the Subcommittee's attention to this important issue and looks forward to continuing to work with Congress and federal agencies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of transition and employment programs for veterans.