

**STATEMENT OF  
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VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION  
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

**October 22, 2015**

Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) program. The VSOC program is administered through our Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Service.

Since inception of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2009 through August 2015, VA has issued nearly \$55 billion to send 1.45 million Veterans and their qualified dependents to institutions of higher education (institutions) under the program. VA's VSOC program helps Veteran students and their qualified dependents succeed and thrive through a coordinated delivery on-campus of benefits assistance and counseling by professionally experienced and trained VR&E counselors. The VSOC program is a collaborative effort between the host institution and VA with the purpose of providing a supportive, on-campus environment whereby Veterans may obtain benefits assistance and peer support. With our 79 VSOC counselors at 94 college and university partners, we are able to provide on-campus access to our services to approximately 78,000 Veterans.

## **VSOC Program Overview**

VA's VSOC program began in 2009 as a pilot project in which one VR&E counselor was assigned to the University of South Florida campus. VA realized the success of the pilot, and by the end of 2012, the VSOC program grew to include 27 full-time VR&E counselors who served over 9,600 students spanning 32 campuses in 16 states. In late 2012, invitation letters were sent to colleges and universities nationwide to solicit their interest in participating in the next VSOC expansion. To date, the program has expanded to include a total of 79 VSOC counselors providing on-campus services at 94 colleges and universities throughout the United States.

Acting as the primary "on-campus" representative on behalf of VA, the VSOC counselor provides outreach and support to all Veterans on campus. To better assist Veterans in transitioning from the military to the college environment, VSOC counselors offer a broad range of counseling services, including educational, vocational/career, and adjustment counseling. They provide vocational testing and career/academic and adjustment counseling to resolve any potential problems that may interfere with or disrupt a Veteran's success while attending college. VSOC counselors also use all appropriate and necessary resources on campus, in the community, and within VA to ensure that Veterans' needs are met in regards to issues or problems that may hamper the successful completion of their educational programs. VSOC counselors also assist Veterans with referrals for more intensive health services, including mental, physical, or other health treatment, through our Veterans Health Administration medical centers, community-based outpatient clinics, or Vet Centers. VSOC counselors establish and

maintain an effective network of other appropriate service providers and stakeholders who are available to assist Veterans in need. The desired outcome is to provide Veterans with enhanced opportunities to achieve success in their academic endeavors and to prepare for entering the labor market in viable and enduring careers.

### **VSOC Update**

With its team of 79 VSOC counselors at 94 partner institutions across the country, VR&E continues to provide educational and vocational counseling and other on-site services to an available population of approximately 78,000 Veterans on campus. The majority of Veterans receiving services visited a VSOC counselor in-person, with the others communicating with their counselor by telephone or email. In an effort to expand available on-campus services, VSOC counselors are coordinating with host institutions to establish or enhance peer-to-peer Veteran mentoring programs to address military-to-college transition issues. At the beginning of each fall and spring term, VSOC counselors conduct orientation sessions to assist newly enrolled Veterans in acclimating to the college campus environment. This fall, VA is working in conjunction with partnering institutions to host “Back to School” informational events at 10 selected VSOC sites. These events will introduce newly enrolled students and educators to the Veteran student community, familiarize Veterans with their VSOC counselors and the services they can provide, and ultimately work to cultivate the most supportive community for Veterans at each institution.

VA is committed to the VSOC program and recognizes the demand and need for this program as Veterans take advantage of their well-earned GI Bill benefits. VA

continues to receive inquiries from institutions that are interested in assigning a VSOC counselor to their institution. VA evaluates interested institutions for potential future participation in the VSOC program, and we will continue to inform the Committee of the evolution of the program in the future.

### **Conclusion**

VA continues to assess and improve the VSOC program for a most deserving population of men and women who have decided to commit to furthering their educational and vocational goals. Through the updates noted, VA is substantially improving and materially enhancing the VSOC program, to include evaluating additional institutions for possible future participation.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer questions from you or any of the other members of the Subcommittee.