

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
UNTIL RELEASED BY THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE  
ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

**STATEMENT  
OF  
MR. JUDD H. LYONS  
DIRECTOR  
DEFENSE PERSONNEL AND FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER  
OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR  
PERSONNEL AND READINESS  
BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

**NOVEMBER 8, 2017**

Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this afternoon to discuss the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the findings and recommendations of the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) recent report entitled, "Transitioning Veterans – DoD Needs to Improve Performance Reporting and Monitoring for the Transition Assistance Program."

On December 15, 2015, the Department testified before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on the TAP in response to the question "Is transition assistance on track?" Our response, then and now, is yes. In addition, TAP is an adaptive, evidence-based program. Accordingly, the Department is continuously improving the program to meet the needs our transitioning Service members.

The Department reported, in our December 2015 witness statement, we have achieved the four core TAP redesign objectives identified in 2012. These four core objectives are: (1) Adopting "career readiness" standards (CRS) for transitioning Service members; (2) Implementing a revamped TAP curriculum with learning outcomes; (3) Implementing a Capstone event; and (4) Implementing a "Military Life Cycle" (MLC) transition model. In the 23 months since then, the TAP has continued to mature and align with a changing military environment and population. I will highlight some of the improvements we have made to the TAP since 2015, building upon the original four core objectives, as well as additional efforts currently underway. Specifically, I will address improvements and work underway to program evaluation, curriculum revisions and other enhancements across the MLC, the Capstone event and assisting at-risk Service members, and private and public engagement to enhance Service

members' military-to-civilian transition. I will also specifically address the recommendations made by the GAO for TAP improvements.

## **PROGRAM EVALUATION**

### *TAP Interagency Evaluation Plan*

The first core objective achieved of the original TAP redesign was to adopt CRS for transitioning Service members for successful transition preparation. Building on the CRS as a key underlying foundation, the TAP interagency governance has been focused on TAP as a data-driven program. This is shaped by the interagency TAP Evaluation Plan, which presents a systematic and singular interagency approach to evaluating the performance of Service member transition assistance services. Both the FY2015-2016 and FY2017-2018 TAP Evaluation Plans were reviewed and approved by Office of Management and Budget. The interagency TAP Evaluation Plan supports three overarching goals: 1) provide accountability to ensure the program is effectively and efficiently executed in accordance with law, policy, and leadership intent; 2) measure and improve customer satisfaction; and 3) measure and improve program effectiveness. As part of this plan, methods and tools were developed to assess the processes for TAP delivery, immediate results of program delivery (e.g., whether separations comply with statute and policy), and the desired systemic impacts of the program (e.g., veterans successfully obtain employment, start new businesses, and/or seek additional education).

### *Site Visits and Transition GPS Participant Assessment*

The Service Inspectors General provide accountability that the program is delivered on military installations in accordance with law, policy, and leadership intent. We developed the

web-based Transition GPS Participant Assessment to assess and improve customer satisfaction with the Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success) curriculum and the TAP. This assessment is used to gather voluntary feedback from transitioning Service members who participated in the TAP. Questions are designed to assess the quality of the course content and materials, facilitators, and facilities. Participants are asked about each module or track individually, as well as the overall TAP. Results consistently demonstrate that Service members perceive the TAP as valuable and high quality. For example, during Quarter 3 of FY2017: 91 percent of respondents said they gained valuable information and skills to plan their transition, 91 percent said the training enhanced their confidence in transition planning, 91 percent indicated that they intended to use what they learned, and 93 percent knew how to access appropriate resources to answer questions about transition. The TAP interagency governance consistently uses feedback from this assessment to inform future changes to policy, curriculum, facilitator training, and other program elements.

#### *Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) Act and CRS Attainment*

The TAP governance monitors and examines a host of output measures and outcome indicators to gauge the effectiveness of the program, such as CRS compliance, veteran unemployment rate, new business formation rate, and education persistence/graduation rate for those using their GI Bill benefits. To measure initial TAP effectiveness, we rely on VOW Act and CRS compliance. The Department made the VOW Act and CRS compliance of Service members transitioning to civilian life an Agency Priority Goal (APG) in FY2014. The Department took this charge seriously and has refined the ways in which data is collected, examined, and reported. For example, at the beginning of FY2014, VOW Act compliance was

tracked using only attendance data, and our APG combined the Active and Reserve Component into a single performance measure. In FY2015, DoD began relying on the DD Form 2958 to track both VOW Act and CRS compliance. The DD Form 2958 verified from the Service member's commander (or designee) that all VOW Act and CRS requirements were met prior to the Service member's separation, retirement, or release from active duty. At that time, the compliance rates also reflected only the known eligible Service members (i.e., those for whom a complete (or partially completed) DD Form 2958 was received by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC)). In FY2015, separate performance measures were also created for the Active and the Reserve Component for both VOW Act and CRS compliance to allow more accurate and transparent tracking of the APG. The Department continues to work towards improving the quality of data on VOW Act and CRS compliance. On November 7, 2016, the Department deployed a new TAP-IT Enterprise System and electronic form (DD Form 2648), which further streamlined the data collection processes and precluded commanders (or their designees) from signing partially completed forms, increasing the completeness of information documented on each Service member.

With more involved command and senior leadership support, improved data tracking, and accountability using known verified DD Form data received by DMDC, VOW Act and CRS compliance was more than 85% for both known eligible Active and Reserve Component Service members by the end of FY2015 and more than 90% by the end of FY2016. Even as data tracking methods have become more precise and sophisticated with the electronic form (i.e., the DD Form 2648), the verified DD Form data received by DMDC shows more than 90 percent for both known eligible Active and Reserve Component Service members continued VOW Act and CRS compliance for FY 2017. That is good news, but we have much work to do to improve our

data capture of the electronic form, particularly for our Reserve Component Service members. As of August FY 2017 data indicates, 12.8% of Active Component Service members and 54.1% of Reserve Component service members have compliance information that remains unknown – that is, these Service members do not have a completed DD Form 2648 documented in the TAP-IT Enterprise System. The Department continues collaboration with the Services and DMDC to identify and resolve any gaps in data collection and transmission to reduce the number of separations with ‘unknown’ compliance and ensure data completeness and accuracy regarding compliance reporting. This is a key area of focus in FY2018.

The TAP interagency governance is also better able to support Service members with the new TAP-IT Enterprise System and electronic form. With the launch of this new electronic form in November 2016, the TAP interagency partners are able to receive individual-level data on transitioning Service members who have ‘opted in’ to be contacted for follow-on transition support. The Department of Labor (DOL) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) currently receive this ‘opt in’ data from the DoD and are exploring ways to best utilize this data to enhance support. Additionally, data sharing among the Department and the TAP interagency partners will address the question of what additional services our transitioning Service members receive if they are provided a warm handover (e.g., due to failing to meet CRS), as well as the outcomes of these services.

#### *Enhanced Long-Term Outcomes of TAP*

The TAP interagency governance is currently discussing planned enhancements to the TAP Evaluation Plan to capture the systemic, long-term impacts of the program. Identifying new data collection mechanisms for these outcomes is challenging. For example, not all desired

outcome data is owned by the TAP partner agencies (e.g., earnings data), and data must be shared or combined with other data which requires cross-agency agreements. The TAP interagency governance is committed to developing a roadmap to enhance the TAP long-term outcomes by the end of FY2018 to ultimately improve our understanding of the efficacy of the TAP and where we need to improve.

## **CURRICULUM AND OTHER ENHANCEMENTS ACROSS THE MLC**

The second and fourth core objectives of the original TAP redesign were to implement a revamped TAP curriculum and implement a MLC transition model. While both original objectives were achieved, the Department has continued to make advancements.

The Department and our partners continuously update and improve the TAP curriculum across the MLC. The TAP interagency governance has established a regular 2-year battle rhythm for reviewing, assessing, and updating the curriculum, alternating between an in-depth and technical review. Both reviews use feedback provided by Service members through the Transition GPS Participant Assessment, facilitators, subject matter experts, and other key stakeholders. This systematic review process is critical to stay ahead of the changing needs of our transitioning Service members, as well as the evolving global economic needs to provide qualified skilled talent to the industry and public sector pipeline.

The TAP interagency governance is currently conducting an in-depth curriculum review, with revised curriculum to be implemented in CY 2018. The Department identified improvements in all four DoD modules: Resilient Transitions, Financial Planning for Transition, Military Occupation Code (MOC) Crosswalk, and the Accessing Higher Education (AHE) track. Based on Service member feedback, recent legislative changes, and recent research on

challenges transitioning Service members face in their first 12 months post-separation, more substantial revisions are planned for the Resilient Transitions and Financial Planning modules this year. The MOC Crosswalk and AHE curriculum were substantially revised during the last in-depth review in 2015.

In terms of this year's in-depth review, the improved Resilient Transitions module will include a new interactive activity to promote participant discussion on transition challenges and available post-transition resources, as well as a discussion on key differences between military and civilian workplace culture. In terms of the Financial Planning module, this module will be further tailored to transition in accordance with new financial literacy requirements specified in the FY2016 National Defense Authorization Act. With financial readiness training occurring across the MLC, Service members demonstrate a higher level of knowledge regarding financial readiness when they attend the TAP. As such, this TAP module can spend less time on basic financial information and more time on transition-specific information, such as civilian salary equivalency to military compensation, expectation of changes in tax burden, and understanding the basics of health insurance.

These proposed DoD revisions were piloted at two military installations with participants from all Military Services in October 2017, with planned deployment in January 2018 along with the revised U.S. Small Business Administration Entrepreneurship Track. Likewise, the DOL and VA planned improvements will be piloted early CY 2018, with planned deployment in April 2018.

While the TAP interagency governance continues to improve the curriculum at the final touchpoint – Transition – within a Service member's MLC, we are also making advances across the MLC as well. Through implementation of the MLC transition model, Service members are

engaging in career preparation and transition assistance planning much earlier in their careers – starting at their first permanent duty station, or home station for the National Guard and Reserves. This represents a significant, yet critical cultural shift for the Department. For example, at the first permanent duty station, Service members develop an Individual Development Plan (IDP) which documents professional and personal goals, as well as the training, certifications, and higher education needed to achieve those goals. Service members are also provided information on apprenticeships, instruction on resumes and financial preparedness, and they register for eBenefits. As their career progresses, their IDP is continuously updated with current certifications, technical training and documentation of higher education. At significant life events, such as promotion, military occupational change and/or marriage, Service members are provided updated information on impacts to financial readiness and career opportunities, among other key touchpoint activities. As another example, in October 2015, the Department began providing a new virtual curriculum earlier in the MLC – the Higher Education Preparation module. This module is designed to assist Service members in identifying their career goal, the educational path to achieve that goal, and utilizing tuition assistance (during military service) to fund their education. The Department is also currently collaborating with our TAP interagency partners to identify additional curriculum and/or other resources to provide Service members at earlier touchpoints across the MLC. The intent is to ensure thoughtful career planning and preparation across one’s military career.

### **CAPSTONE EVENT AND ASSISTING AT-RISK SERVICE MEMBERS**

The third core objective of the original TAP redesign was to implement a Capstone event to ensure: Service members complete the VOW Act requirements; meet the CRS; and have a

viable Individual Transition Plan (ITP), including a post-transition housing and transportation plan. For Service members who fail to meet one or more of these criteria, the Military Services provide a warm handover to appropriate partner agencies and other relevant resources. This core objective was achieved.

However, while the warm handover process was robust for those failing to meet VOW/CRS, DoD and our interagency partners identified areas within the warm handover process in need of improvement. For example, since 2013, the Services identified transitioning Service members without a viable post-transition housing plan who are at an increased risk for homelessness. It was evident after reviewing warm handover data in late 2015, that more needed to be done to improve the execution and monitoring of the warm handover. The Department also recognized Service members separating without an honorable discharge face increased risks (e.g., for suicide). The Department sought to strengthen our support to these two vulnerable populations. Specifically, in April 2016, DoD issued two Memoranda to the Services to address these concerns. The first Memorandum, entitled “Warm Handover Guidance for Transitioning Service Members Without a Post-Military Housing Plan,” requested the Services issue immediate guidance requiring commanders and their designees to ensure a warm handover to the VA and/or the DOL for those transitioning Service members without a viable post-military housing plan. The second Memorandum, entitled “Warm Handover Guidance for Transitioning Service Members Who Do Not Separate with an Honorable Discharge,” requested the Military Services issue guidance immediately to commanders or their designees directing them to execute a warm handover to the DOL for those transitioning Service members that do not separate with an honorable discharge. The Department continues to place emphasis on these at-risk populations to ensure they are receiving the additional support needed. For example, DoD, VA,

and DOL are working in collaboration with the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) to further prevent homelessness among our veterans.

DoD and VA have also been recently collaborating to begin examining other ‘at risk’ populations that may be better served during their military-to-civilian transition in FY 2018. This may have implications for future changes to the TAP curriculum and/or warm handover processes. For example, one of our more recent joint efforts is geared toward suicide prevention of Service members and veterans. Within this broader joint effort is the establishment of a DoD/VA Transition Working Group focused on identifying the population at risk for suicide following a military-to-civilian transition, and ways in which to better support this high risk population prior to separation. Another population at higher risk for suicide is women veterans. The Department and the VA are initiating a new “Women’s Health Initiative” pilot study, to be implemented at several Air Force and Army installations. The pilot focusing on women veterans separating within 12 months, will provide supplementary information on VA services specifically available to women and track associated outcomes (e.g., enrollment in VA health care). Based on the pilot findings this supplementary curriculum may be implemented more broadly in the future to address needs of transitioning women Service members and veterans.

Finally, while not an ‘at risk’ population per se, the Department continues to review whether we are providing the National Guard (Air and Army National Guard) and the Reserves (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps Reserve) the time, resources, and support unique to those populations. Specifically, the Department is leveraging the Status of Forces Survey (SOFS) to pulse Reserve Component (RC) members’ perceptions of the TAP, and how perceptions are changing over time. The Department also recently commissioned a research study, entitled “Needs Assessment of Reserve Component Member Transitions,” to more

comprehensively investigate the needs of transitioning RC members and provide recommendations regarding updates needed to the TAP. Study findings are expected in FY 2019. The Department continues to conduct research, gather feedback from RC members, and consider potential changes to policy within current law to address unique needs of RC members.

## **PRIVATE AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

Another area Department has made improvements and continues to break new ground is through implementation of collaborative and informative private and public engagements between the Department, federal interagency partners, the Military Services, transitioning Service members, employers, and other stakeholders. First, the Department maintains robust private and public engagement operations to raise awareness of the value transitioning Service members and veterans bring to the civilian workforce. In fact, we disseminate to employers the findings from a recent RAND Corporation study, which enumerates the non-technical “essential” skills (e.g., leadership, decision-making, team building) our Service members obtain while in uniform. These essential skills represent the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce skills that are highly sought after by civilian and public-sector employers.

Second, the Department connects with, informs, and strengthens private and public efforts to better prepare transitioning Service members to become career-ready as they transition to civilian life. Since August 2016, the Department completed over 200 private and public engagements with Federal, State, industry, education, and community stakeholders. The Department established collaborative relationships and partnerships through participation in the DOL’s Advisory Committee on Veterans’ Employment, Training, and Employer Outreach and through interactions with over 25 federal Departments/Agencies. Best practices have been

garnered and shared through engagements across the country with over 30 industries/corporations (e.g., Microsoft, Walmart, Amazon, J.P. Morgan Chase), over 20 two-year and four-year colleges and universities (e.g., Columbia University, Carnegie Mellon University, Duke, University of Houston, University of Washington-Tacoma), and numerous Service member/veteran-focused institution and coalitions (e.g., the Bush Institute, the Institute for Veterans and Military Families, the Veterans Jobs Mission Coalition).

Two examples of key private and public engagements include collaboration with the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol and our partnership with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes Program. The U.S. Customs and Border Patrol staff are now co-located on several military installations to connect with interested and qualified transitioning Service members. In close collaboration with DoD and the Services, CBP has made significant changes to their recruitment requirements and business processes to streamline and reduce the amount of time it takes to process applications for employment. Another key engagement that has paid great dividends is our collaboration with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes Transition Summits. Over the past two years, our partnership has grown from 17 annual transition summits at military installations around the world to over 40 transition summits scheduled for CY 2018, including Germany, Japan, and Korea. Each summit connects employers of every size and industry with, on average, more than 1,000 talented transitioning Service members, veterans, and military spouses on military installations in the U.S. and overseas. Attendees are invited to participate in a series of town hall-style panel discussions, networking receptions, employment workshops, and a job fair. Over 90% of Service member attendees who responded to a post-event survey identified they felt better prepared for transition after attending these events.

The Department remains fully committed to collaboration with Federal, State, industry, education, and community stakeholders to ensure continuous coordination and information sharing. This ensures Service members receive access to education, training, and opportunities that best prepare them for their military-to-civilian transition. Private and public engagements directly support and enhance stakeholder commitments that support successful transition of our Service members.

These are several improvements to the TAP since 2015. The Department, the Services, our interagency partners, transitioning Service members and their families recognize the tremendous enhancements to the TAP over the past two years. In addition, the Department appreciates the importance placed on the TAP by Congress and the GAO. We view the recent GAO study on the TAP as an opportunity to receive external feedback to further advance this important program.

## **GAO REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

Before addressing the recommendations from the GAO Report on “Transitioning Veterans - DoD Needs to Improve Performance Reporting and Monitoring for the Transition Assistance Program,” DoD would like to acknowledge GAO’s tremendous work in conducting this review of the TAP. The GAO team leading this effort was professional, thorough, and supportive of the unique needs of DoD, the Military Services and the installations they visited. There was a collaborative and cordial spirit among the GAO team and the various DoD stakeholders that allowed GAO to conduct their business in a timely and effective manner.

In light of the redesigned TAP, Congress asked GAO to examine various aspects of the program implementation. This GAO report addresses four overarching questions: 1) To what

extent does DoD publicly report TAP performance transparency; 2) How many Service members participated in TAP and what factors affected participation; 3) How many service members met CRS or received referrals to partner agencies for additional services; and 4) To what extent does DoD monitor key areas of the TAP implementation and how well do the TAP performance measures inform these monitoring efforts?

In order to address these questions, GAO surveyed 181 Military installations; analyzed DoD participation data for FY 2016; reviewed and analyzed TAP data reports and performance measures; and interviewed officials at DoD, the Services, Service members, and our interagency partners. GAO also visited seven installations (two each from Army, Navy, and Air Force, and one Marine Corps). The audit was conducted from February 2016 to September 2017. As a result, GAO states in their report, “GAO is making six recommendations, including that DoD improve transparency in reporting TAP participation and career readiness rates and monitor certain key areas of TAP implementation, including timeliness of participation and access to supplemental 2-day classes.”

The Department acknowledges at the outset that, overall, we concur with GAO recommendations for the TAP. However, there is one recommendation, and sections of a few other recommendations, that the Department does not fully support. The Department’s position on each GAO recommendation is as follows:

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** GAO recommends the Secretary of Defense publicly report DoD’s performance and career readiness attainment for all TAP-eligible Service members and members of the National Guard and Reserve rather than exclude those for whom data are missing or clarify the extent of missing data. (DoD Partially Concur)

DoD acknowledges the FY 2016 Agency Priority Goals (APG) performance measures provided to the public via performance.gov did not provide a clear explanation regarding missing data. However, in FY 2017 DoD provided language in reporting the APG performance measures data that clearly addressed the extent of the missing data for the public. The following is an extract of DoD's Transition to Veterans Program Office FY 2017 third quarter "Separation VOW Compliance Reserve Component" performance measure language, as reported through DoD channels for publication to the public via performance.gov: "Compliance rate reflects only the known eligible Service members, that is – those for whom a completed DD Form 2648 (or legacy DD Form 2958) was received by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). Through May FYTD 2017, DMDC received completed DD Forms for 41.0% (8,953) of the 21,861 Reserve Component VOW Act eligible separations." Similar language was used in reporting VOW Compliance for active duty service members.

In addition to the currently reported VOW Act compliance and career readiness standards attainment for VOW Act eligible Service members, DoD will provide a more transparent description of the extent of the missing data along with the currently reported compliance rates to offer important insight as to the number of Service members for whom data is unknown. The Department feels strongly that compliance should only be computed based on data known and should include a description of the extent of the missing data to offer insight as to the number of Service members for who compliance data is unknown. This information will be included in the FY 2018 Q1 reporting and beyond. As stated above, an explanation of the extent of missing, unknown data has been included in the DoD Agency Priority Goal: Transition to Veterans reporting for FY 2017, which was outside the scope of GAO's analysis for this report. DoD will

also continue working to reduce the extent of missing data, as it is critical to be able to track VOW Act compliance and CRS attainment of all of our transitioning Service members.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** GAO recommends the Secretary of Defense monitor and report on the extent to which Service members participate in TAP within prescribed timeframes. (DoD Concur)

The Department acknowledges tracking when Service members participate in TAP is valuable for effective transition preparation. DoD currently has the capability to retrieve data documenting when a Service member begins the TAP process (i.e., with the Pre-Separation/Transition Counseling signature date) and his/her separation date. Comparing these dates can determine the extent to which Service members participate in TAP within prescribed timeframes. Likewise, DoD can compare the Capstone event completion date to the Service member's separation date. However, the currently collected data will not allow for parsing out Service members who are short-notice separations; and, therefore, could not adhere to the prescribed timeframes. The capability to parse out such transition cases is critical for proper interpretation of the data and use of this data for future program improvements. In order to implement this recommendation, DoD will first need to identify the IT requirement and associated cost (for example, what new field(s) may need to be added to the electronic form (DD Form 2648)), as well as any needed TAP staff training, to collect data denoting short-notice separations. Based on availability of funds for FY 2019, DoD anticipates the earliest this data can be collected will be FY 2019, and the earliest for monitoring and accurate reporting of the data will be FY 2020.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense monitor and report on the extent to which Service members who elect to receive supplementary 2-day classes are able to receive training. (DoD Non-concur)

The Department does not concur with this recommendation. The focus of the current TAP is for transitioning Service members to meet CRS. Nine CRS are deemed common and applicable to all Service members. Moreover, for Service members interested in pursuing higher education and/or career technical training as part of their ITP, they must also meet four additional educational-oriented CRS. The 2-day tracks were developed and made available to help those who need assistance in meeting these additional CRS. While the additional 2-day tracks are voluntary, Service members are encouraged to take advantage of these tracks. All Service members are able to participate in the additional 2-day tracks, as these tracks are available both via classroom setting and online through Joint Knowledge Online. While DoD does track the extent to which Service members attend the 2-day tracks, it is important to note that CRS attainment, not simply course participation, is the critical variable to monitor and report. DoD will research barriers to Service members accessing the additional 2-day tracks.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense monitor and report on the extent to which service members attend TAP in a classroom settings unless allowed by regulation to participate online. (DoD Concur)

The Department acknowledges tracking whether Service members participated in TAP in a classroom setting or online is important. This is feasible with existing data. However, it is not uncommon for Service members to take TAP courses both in a classroom and online. DoD only tracks Service member participation for their most recent TAP courses. For example, if a

Service member completed the Accessing Higher Education Track in the classroom first and then completed it again online for a refresher, this would be tracked as online participation. DoD anticipates the monitoring and reporting of the extent to which Service members participate in TAP via a classroom setting or online (using their most recently completed TAP course) will be by FY 2019. Currently, data collected by DoD does not capture the reason a Service member completes TAP online. The Department will need to identify whether this particular data point could be captured (and how). Upon completion of this research, DoD anticipates having the ability to determine whether this action will be feasible and its associated estimated funding requirements in FY 2019.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** GAO recommends that once DoD monitors and reports data on timeliness, 2-day classes, and the use of online TAP, DoD enable unit commanders and high-level commanders to access this information to help ensure the specific units they oversee are compliant with all TAP requirements. (DoD Partially Concur)

The Department concurs once the capability to collect, track, and report data on TAP participation timeliness and the extent of online and classroom TAP participation has been accomplished, within 12 months the data will be provided to commanders when feasible. The intent of this recommendation should be met at the Service level. Each Service has transition staff who can make this information available to commanders. For example, the Air Force Airman and Family Readiness Centers are responsible for reporting/advising commanders on unit participation. Army Soldier-For-Life installation staff have the same capability, as do the other Services' transition staffs.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense seek ways to minimize the subjectivity involved in career readiness determinations, particularly when judgements are involved, such as the quality of the individual transition plan and the resume. This could include developing guidance on training that provides quality standards for assessing career readiness materials. (DoD Concur)

The Department will work with the Services and DOL to minimize the subjectivity in judgments involving determining Service member attainment of particular CRS, such as the quality of the resume or job application package. This may include developing guidance on quality standards for assessing particular career readiness materials. The Services have personnel at the installation level who are trained in resume writing/review and career planning, and provide quality of life guidance to transitioning Service members and families. Installations may also call upon their local DOL partners for further support. If questions do arise, for example from a Commander about whether the quality of the resume is suitable for CRS attainment, Service members should be referred to their local transition personnel at the Fleet and Family Support Center, Airman and Family Readiness Center, Soldier-For-Life Transition Assistance Center, or the Marine Corps Community Service Center, as well as DOL, for additional evaluation and support. Finally, Commanders must be allowed the ability to exercise their best judgement on CRS attainment for their Service members, with the full knowledge that they have experts available to assist them housed within their respective centers that provide transition assistance at their installation. DoD will work with the Services and DOL to examine and implement ways to minimize subjectivity in judgments involving determining Service member attainment of particular CRS, by the end of FY 2018.

## CONCLUSION

Career readiness and transition assistance preparation is paramount if Service members are going to successfully transition to civilian life. We recognize preparing Service members throughout their MLC to be career-ready upon transition is essential to sustaining the All-Volunteer Force. In order for us to continue to attract dedicated, high quality volunteers to serve in our Armed Forces, the DoD must return this generation of Service members to the Nation with the ability to positively contribute to the national workforce and thrive within their civilian communities.

The Department cannot successfully transition Service members to civilian careers alone. It must have continued strong collaboration with our interagency partners, the support and hard work of our Military Services, especially at the installation level, and collaboration with other external stakeholders. The TAP interagency governance is vibrant, effective, responsive, and committed, as evidenced by the 2016 signing of our updated national Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding the “Transition Assistance Program for Service Members Transitioning from Active Duty.” As stated in the MOU, “The parties will support and advance the ongoing implementation, assessment, and enhancement of TAP. This collaboration will serve to support Service members in pursuing employment, higher education, skills and career training, credentialing, and entrepreneurship.”

Again, let me thank the GAO for their comprehensive and insightful report and recommendations to further advance the TAP for the Nation. In closing, Mr. Chairman, I thank you, the Ranking Member, and the members of this Subcommittee for your outstanding and continued support of the men and women who proudly wear the uniform in defense of our great Nation.