

**STATEMENT OF  
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OF THE  
NATIONAL VETERANS TRANSITION SERVICES, INC. AKA REBOOT  
BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
JULY 21, 2020**

Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Bilirakis, and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of National Veterans Transition Services, Inc. aka REBOOT and our constituency of transitioning service members, veterans and spouses, I am pleased to testify at this hearing concerning “Getting Veterans Back to Work After COVID-19.” REBOOT is dedicated to a single purpose: helping veterans successfully transitioning from military to civilian life.

**About NVTSI/REBOOT**

Founded in 2010, the National Veterans Transition Services, Inc. (NVTSI) is a 501 (c) 3 organization dedicated to assisting veterans in adjusting from a military culture to a civilian life full of personal meaning and promise.

Our mission is to assist veterans in making a successful transition from military service to civilian life, with all veterans achieving, within their potential, their goals in the transition domains of employment and career, education, living situation, personal effectiveness/well-being, and community-life functioning.

We do this by:

- Providing applied early-stage cognitive-behavioral educational intervention, to help veterans “re-boot” from military programming;
- Assisting veterans in developing a successful re-entry plan, and ongoing life planning skills.
- Provide additional personal assessment, employment tools and resources, to attain career and educational goals.

Over the past ten years REBOOT has conducted 118 workshops and graduated over 3500 service members and veterans and has gained national recognition by the White House as a Champion of Change.<sup>1</sup> Their model and system of delivery has been validated independently by the University of San Diego. REBOOT has also successfully piloted six all-female veteran workshops to focus their program on comprehensive reintegration services for women veterans.

### **The Need:**

Leaving the military is a significant social, psychological, and professional transition. Military service means that personal interests and ambitions are put on hold – it’s essentially the leasing of a life for a period of service – sometimes for years.

Multiple and extended deployments, and the intense operational pace of the current conflicts are unparalleled for the US military’s all-volunteer force. Those transitioning back into civilian life need experiences that demonstrate to them how to take their life back.

REBOOT™ supports veterans in regaining a new life direction through 1.) personal transition that inspires them as individuals, 2.) lifestyle transition that reinforces self-mastery in defining personal values and goals, and 3.) career transition that empowers them to transfer valuable skills and experiences into employment opportunities.

Men and women leaving active duty tell us they most want “success in real life” but anxiously need to know the answer to “who I am” and “who I can be” before they answer, “what’s next?”.

The VA’s 2018 Military to Civilian Transition Report “*A Review of Historical, Cultural, and Future Trends*” Transition Report sums it up: “*In a November 2015 study, where more than 8,500 Veterans, active duty Service members, National Guard and Reserve members, and military dependents identified their most significant transition challenges:*”

- *60% Navigating VA programs, benefits, and services*
- *55% Finding a job*
- *41% Adjusting to civilian culture*
- *40% Addressing financial challenges*
- *39% Applying military-learned skills to civilian life*

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<sup>1</sup> White paper: Developing a System to Overcome Failure of Social Reintegration for Military Veterans – NVTSI 2016. Adapted from Helping Veterans Successfully Transition from the Battlefield to the Homefront! By Brianna Bendotti, Grey Hoff, Samantha Kahoe, and Victoria Schaefer-Ramirez Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology Fall 2015.

Other transition factors discovered by REBOOT over a 10-year period:

### **Veteran Employment Issues**

- 85% Want a complete career change
- 80% Don't know what they want to do next

### **Veteran Turnover is High:**

- U.S Turnover - Average across all industries = 18%
- Veterans, 1st year turnover = 45% in first post-service job
- Veterans, 2nd year turnover = 65% – most have left their jobs

### **The Dis-connected Veteran**

- Many veterans are attempting reintegration alone predisposing them to risks
- Approximately 70% of Post-9/11 Veterans not affiliated with a VSO.
- Approximately 75% of Post-9/11 Veterans are under age 45.
- Approximately 25% of Post-9/11 Veterans are of age 45

To this day, there is no collective approach to resolve these issues.

### **The Reintegration Challenge**

Every year 250,000 military service members embark upon the transition from active military duty to civilian life. For many this is difficult process—not just a vocational change; but a multi-faceted and monumental life change. Many of our veteran heroes return home requiring unique support to ensure they successfully adapt to civilian life. Veterans report widespread prevalence of problems in social functioning, including participating in community activities, relating to spouses, and keeping a job. Symptomatic of the reintegration problem are veteran incarceration, and homeless and suicide rates twice as high as those among the general public.

The process for a service member to reintegrate as a civilian is complex, riddled with potential difficulties. These difficulties traditionally occur upon separation from military life and during a veteran's initial transition into the civilian population. There are numerous reintegration challenges that veteran service members face when they return home:

- **Physiological and Behavioral Disorders** – Many service members return from active military duty with serious physiological and behavioral disorders. Research suggests that the burden of mental disorders and symptoms, substance use disorders, and depression are high among veterans within the first year of reintegration. It is estimated that 11-17% of the Gulf War Era veteran population will develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Mental health problems create barriers to reintegration that are difficult to overcome for some veterans.

- Broken Identity – Upon entry into the armed forces, service members and their families assume a new military identity. Upon return home from the armed forces, service members relinquish that identity. Once back home, soldiers may struggle with disconnecting from their military identity and soldier-comrades. They may find it difficult to make new connections with friends, family, and society
- Cultural Gaps between Military & Civilian Life – The differences in values between civilian society and military society create a civil-military cultural gap. Service members experiencing a difficult transition may feel misunderstood and separated from their families and communities. These feelings may exacerbate their reintegration difficulties, resulting in unhealthy behaviors.
- Loss of a structured environment – When the routine and orders are no longer part of life, things can fall apart for a recently separated service member. Life may seem purposeless. One has to learn how to be self-directed and find new meaning in life, a daunting task at best without guidance and support.
- Limited Professional and Social Networks – Frequent relocation while serving in the U.S. Military makes it difficult for military personnel to establish or maintain civilian professional and social networks. Frequent moves also decrease the likelihood of an individual learning about specific career opportunities.
- Lack of Civilian Work Experience – Many enlisted service members enter the military following high school graduation and, therefore, have never experienced post-graduation civilian work. With little or no civilian work experience, some veterans reenter civilian life with minimal direction or understanding of civilian work.
- Translating military experience into civilian job skills – Some job skills acquired during military service (eg. combat arms) do not readily transfer into civilian career skills. Transitioning veterans face a difficult task, many times unguided, to translate military job skills into hireable civilian terms.

All five branches of the military are required to offer transition assistance to separating service members, and military personnel is required to participate in the United States Military Transition Assistance Program, a five-day program primarily focused on vocational preparation and placement. The government provides little support to assist the social identity, cultural, and psychological needs of veterans who must “unlearn” boot camp; however, NVTSI has a foothold on filling this gap with its highly effective REBOOT Workshops™.

The REBOOT Workshop™ is an innovative, evidence-based, intensive three-week workshop that addresses the root causes of reintegration failure from a holistic perspective using cognitive-restructuring to help participants redefine their personal identity, purpose in life, and

desired occupation – from the inside out. The REBOOT Workshops™ curriculum includes one week covering personal transition, one week on lifestyle transition, one week of career transition, and supportive follow-up services. In our ten-year history, NVTSI has become a national leader in veteran transition achieving 95-97% employment/ education success and a 93% retention rate one year after graduation. NVTSI has also proven it can decrease recidivism among incarcerated veterans by 28%.

Over the years NVTSI has become expert at guiding the reintegration process from military to civilian life and is the only entity that is effectively performing this service. REBOOT is designed to be replicated in multiple cities across the nation and is currently serving eight cities and plans to broaden to another seven.

### **Addressing the Gaps In TAP**

The primary focus of the TAP is the vocational preparation and placement needs of transitioning veterans. Career development curriculum and guidance has become the primary motivation, as outlined in the published career readiness standards, neglecting other important factors that aid in successful reintegration. Many veterans still struggle with deep-rooted problems affecting their social functioning. The current TAP does not adequately provide the support for our veterans to successfully transition into civilian life.

While much support is given to career readiness through TAP, there is little support provided to assist the social identity, cultural, and psychological needs of veterans who need to “unlearn” military boot camp. Many of the problems that veterans face, including social functioning, employment issues, anger control, and spiritual struggles, fall outside the traditional scope of medical practice and transition support provided by the VA.

Currently, there are no existing courses offered by the VA that adequately address the psychological and social factors of transitioning from military to civilian life before release or immediately after. Furthermore, few programs exist that are evidence-based and designed for those who are not in formal mental health care.

Even though participation in the TAP is mandated, many transitioning service members still enter civilian life unprepared to bridge the gap between military culture and society at large.

While it is critically important to provide career transition support and guidance for our transitioning veterans, it is equally, and perhaps even more important, that they also receive support to transition their identity from military to civilian life through a required cognitive and psychological support program. A supplemental program to Transition GPS is therefore needed to complement the current transition assistance provided for separating military personnel.

## **The Solution: NVTSI REBOOT Workshops™**

Employing and expanding upon the research behind social and psychological reintegration, NVTSI developed a groundbreaking and comprehensive military transition program that addresses the personal and social aspects of transition, targeted at increasing self-esteem and self-efficacy, the belief in one's ability to succeed in completing tasks and reaching goals. [addresses root causes] Using an innovative approach to learning, REBOOT Workshops™ build upon a service member's military training and skills to help participants redefine their personal identity, purpose in life, and desired occupation. Veterans are immersed in a reflective and engaging curriculum that bridges the gap between military and civilian worlds. The REBOOT Workshop™ is a three-week, cohort-based program that builds emotional, psychological, social, and professional skills necessary for successful reintegration into civilian life. Separating service members generally participate in REBOOT six to twelve months before release. Wives and husbands are invited to attend the workshop.

REBOOT's intensive and innovative approach to reintegration utilizes cognitive-restructuring to help participants redefine their personal identity, purpose in life, and desired occupation – from the inside out. REBOOT Workshops™ provide extensive, personalized transitional training. Through research-based, outcome-driven methods, service members will “reboot” through reflections, exercises, and discussions.

REBOOT Workshop™ facilitators lead interactive cognitive behavioral discussions designed to help participants build self-efficacy, develop a positive outlook, and advance skills necessary to obtain employment and/or pursue further education.

A key differentiator of the REBOOT Workshop™ curriculum is its holistic approach, which promotes a “total person” philosophy to the content. In particular, both Week One and Week Two include work and careers, family, health (mind, body, and spirit), sleep (time and quality), transition and commute, social activities (personal and family), faith and spiritual life, television and computer games activities, hobbies and leisure time, finance (short-term budgets and long-term financial planning strategies), and education and lifelong learning. These areas are discussed throughout the workshops and help participants create a tangible and living written plan. The written plan serves to provide students with a roadmap for comprehensive life success. This holistic approach is what makes REBOOT Workshops™ so unique and effective—the participants are engaged on all levels. With the support of workshop partners and facilitators, veterans will relearn, rebuild, and rebrand.

### **REBOOT Workshops™ Curriculum:**

#### **Week 1 – Personal Transition**

Week 1 focuses on personal effectiveness and well-being. Service members will enhance self-efficacy through 13 multimedia modules that use video and audio sessions, written materials, exercises, practice interviews, and self-assessment.

Participants will relearn and build understanding of how their mind works, and how they can control the way they think in order to achieve success.

### **Week 2 – Lifestyle Transition**

Week 2 focuses on improving the participants' living situation and community- life functioning. Service members will enhance their future outlook through exercises and discussion that enable participants to identify values and talents and develop plans and strategies to achieve specific, meaningful goals. Participants will rebuild and develop a personal life plan that aligns with their personal vision, mission, passions and skills.

### **Week 3 – Career Transition**

Week 3 focuses on the Transition Domains of employment, career, and education. Service members will enhance their career-building knowledge and skills through in-depth assistance with job separation, resume writing, interviewing techniques, job searching, and career planning. Participants will rebrand and define career passion and goals.

**FOLLOW-UP:** Reinforce Training, strengthen opportunities, Monitor success.

The process of fully integrating into civilian life does not conclude upon the completion of the REBOOT Workshop™. Service members are provided additional transition support services beyond the three-week program, including job placement assistance, career exploration, on-going support and case management with a Career Transition Coach, mentoring, refresher seminars, and community reintegration support. NVTSI provides industry networking events and holds weekly musters for graduates to keep them on track and in touch with reintegration tools and process.

### **The Challenge of Getting Veterans back to Work After COVID-19**

Several workforce studies reveal that reskilling veterans will be paramount as we pull out of the COVID-19 Pandemic as noted by the following.

Prior to COVID-19:

**The McKinsey Report** reported that the U.S. is facing a critical skills shortage noting that 50% of the jobs are susceptible to AI capabilities and will displace 40% of the world's jobs.

**Vox.com** reported that the U.S. is experiencing a widespread worker shortage. The U.S. economy had 7.6 million unfilled jobs, but only 6.5 million people were looking for work.

**Genesis10.com** reporting on the Davos 2019 Conference that the “*Skills Gap is Sizeable, but Reskilling Brightens Jobs Outlook.*” The report finds that by 2025, while the shifting division of labor between humans, machines and algorithms may displace 75 million jobs, and another 133 million roles may emerge that are more adapted to the new division of labor.

Post COVID-19:

In a recent article, **Bill Gates** cited that America will lose over 250 million jobs requiring a massive re-skilling initiative in new jobs.

So how will this impact veterans?

Until and unless we address the known reintegration challenges mentioned earlier in my testimony of resolving known reintegration challenges, only attempting to re-skill veterans for the post-COVID-19 Pandemic may result in an increase in veteran unemployment - the evidence says veterans need a behavioral “REBOOT” or reverse-boot camp.

In light of this need, REBOOT calls on Congress to support the rapid implementation of HR 2326 introduced by Congressman Mark Levin calling for the formation of off-base, Community-led Transition Centers to help address reintegration issues.

This will enable local communities to orchestrate resources, coordinate training with local educational institutions, engage employers, and build viable local economies through small business development. But most important, it will help veterans and their families successfully reintegrate into a new life of their choosing.

I leave you with this quote from the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Chairman's Office of Reintegration: Veterans / Families / Communities, of September 2015:

*“As a nation, we cannot meet our full potential in reintegrating veterans and their families back into civilian society unless the military, government, non-profits, veteran-serving organizations,*



*and private partners collaborate around a mutual agenda and partner to address the challenges veterans face in reintegration.”*

Thank you Mr. Chairman.





