

**TESTIMONY OF  
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
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**Introduction**

Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Moore, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on “Military Transition during the COVID-19 Pandemic.” I appreciate the Subcommittee’s continued commitment to facilitate economic opportunities for America’s veterans as we work to put this pandemic behind us, move forward on the road to economic recovery, and look to the future. As Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS), I look forward to working with the Subcommittee to ensure our veterans, transitioning service members, and military spouses have the employment support, assistance and opportunities they deserve. I have been humbled and honored to lead and be a part of VETS for the past five months. I am truly impressed by the talented and committed VETS team, the Department, and our partner agencies, including the Department of Defense (DOD), the Small Business Administration (SBA), and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

America’s veterans comprise one of our Nation’s most capable and resilient talent pools; therefore, it is incumbent upon us to continuously reimagine the demands of our time and strive to enable all veterans, transitioning service members, and military spouses to reach their full employment and career potential. The Department of Labor (DOL or Department) continues to work diligently to ensure these American heroes and their families make a successful reentry into the civilian workforce.

**Meeting the Challenge of COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged every facet of our lives. For many transitioning service members, recently separated veterans, and their families, the pandemic amplified the uncertainty of the military to civilian transition process. In response to this unprecedented public health crisis, VETS’ delivery of services in support of the interagency Transition Assistance Program (TAP) quickly pivoted from in-person instruction to providing virtual services at installations across the globe. The Department has worked with DOD, VA, SBA, other interagency partners, and the state workforce agencies, to take all necessary actions to continue to provide needed services during the COVID-19 pandemic while keeping our service members, veterans, and their families safe. VETS is part of the network of government and non-government organizations that has leveraged information technology to drive how we conduct business, enabling us to effectively serve veterans, transitioning service members, and military spouses during this difficult time.

## **Transition Assistance Program**

In VETS, one of our highest priorities continues to be providing support and services to service members who are completing their military duties and returning to civilian life. TAP – for separating and retiring service members and their spouses, provided under 10 U.S.C. § 1144 – assists these service members and their spouses in making a successful transition into meaningful civilian careers. As part of TAP, VETS conducts a one-day employment preparation workshop that is mandatory for all transitioning service members, and two additional two-day workshops for career exploration and technical career preparation, or general employment preparation. As the consequences of a successful, or unsuccessful, transition compound over time, it is critical that we provide service members with the resources and opportunities necessary to get their transition right. The impact of COVID-19 has made this priority more urgent.

In recognition of the widespread closures of installations during the pandemic, the Department quickly migrated into a virtual environment utilizing various online delivery platforms in order to provide its TAP workshops. From March 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021, VETS conducted approximately 4,500 “brick and mortar” in-person workshops for 71,000 participants and 4,500 instructor-led virtual workshops for 83,000 participants. In-person workshops were conducted following local and state CDC guidelines.

To further improve the transition experience of our service members and help facilitate improved employment outcomes, several VETS’ initiatives are currently underway, or recently concluded. They include:

- Specialized curricula for wounded, ill, and injured service members, and military spouses;
- An “Employment Navigator and Partnership” pilot that is providing in-person employment assistance beyond the classroom;
- A data matching project with the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH) to analyze the most influential factors to transitioning service members’ civilian wage outcomes;
- A Veteran Employment Challenge ([challenge.gov](https://challenge.gov)) for the private sector to develop a new job-matching tool that uses all the capability of modern technology to better connect transitioning service members and employers;
- An apprenticeship pilot program that linked DOL, DOD, VA, and public and private sector resources to help interested service members and spouses enroll in apprenticeship programs prior to separation; and
- Implementation of Off-base Transition Training for veterans and spouses pilot.

## **Curricula**

The “John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2019,” (Public-Law 115-232), required the TAP interagency partners to modify the TAP curriculum for transitioning service members. In response, DOL altered the delivery of its employment-related workshops to align with the new legislative requirements. With a focus on improved outcomes, VETS revised the employment course curricula to provide for a new one-day employment preparation workshop that is mandatory for all transitioning service members; a Service member-elected, two-day workshop for career exploration and technical career preparation; or a two-day workshop for general employment preparation. These changes to TAP were designed to help

transitioning service members make the best career choices among those available to them, taking into account individual skills, interests, and high-demand career fields. All of these workshops are now available in a virtual environment and VETS stands ready to support the Services and individual military installations return to in person “brick and mortar” workshops.

### **Transition Employment Assistance for Military Spouses (TEAMS)**

Military spouses also serve our Nation with distinction and are crucial to retaining an all-volunteer force. VETS developed a course curriculum specific to military spouses who are transitioning with their service member out of the service or to another installation. In February 2021, VETS announced the launch of a monthly series of career workshops to provide employment assistance to transitioning military spouses, also known as the Transition Employment Assistance for Military Spouses curriculum, or “TEAMS”. The TEAMS workshops are designed to help military spouses plan and prepare for their job search in pursuit of their employment goals.

To maximize flexibility for military spouses worldwide, all workshops are instructor-led and delivered virtually. Currently, the Department offers four workshops:

- Marketing Me—to focus on the use of marketing techniques, exploring networking opportunities, and using multiple resources to develop an action plan;
- Your Next Move—to review online resources provided by the Department and to define and explore career opportunities;
- Career Credentials—defines professional credentials and their importance, illustrates pathways for credentialing, and identifies license and credential portability resources; and
- Resume Essentials—designed to help spouses create the most effective resume possible with guidance from trained facilitators, and to learn how to evaluate resumes and understand job application techniques.

The workshops use components of the curriculum used for service members, such as resume development and interviewing techniques, and they include components more specific to the employment needs of military spouses as a result of their frequent moves and the complexities associated with state licensing and credentialing requirements.

Later this month, the Department will pilot five additional employment and career workshops to the TEAMS curricula. These workshops will add to the existing catalog of TEAMS workshops for military spouses and include:

- Federal Hiring—to provide a deep dive into the Federal hiring process, Federal resumes, preferences in Federal hiring, navigating and using USAJobs, and how to search and locate additional information on Federal hiring;
- Interview Skills—to help military spouses prepare for job interviews by researching the potential employer and the position, identifying proper interview etiquette for virtual and in-person meetings, learning techniques to use in practicing interviews, and appropriate interview follow-up actions;
- LinkedIn Profiles—that guide military spouses through the basics of creating a profile to effectively market themselves within LinkedIn;
- LinkedIn Job Search—designed to show LinkedIn from a recruiter’s perspective and

identify how to use LinkedIn to research companies and careers; and

- **Salary and Negotiation Skills**—that teach military spouses how to research and analyze the labor market, identify salary ranges based on the local labor market, and locate information for use in salary negotiations.

While developing the new course curriculum, and in coordination with DOD’s Military Spouse Employment Partnership, VETS continues to evaluate delivery options with DOD to determine the most effective and efficient format for TEAMS, including possible hybrid models that allow in-person programming and digital delivery. For more information on the TEAMS curriculum, please visit [www.veterans.gov/milspouses](http://www.veterans.gov/milspouses).

## **Wounded, Ill, and Injured Curriculum**

The Department is currently working to develop a transition assistance curriculum designed specifically to address the employment needs of wounded warriors. Being developed in coordination with the Department’s Office of Disability Employment Policy, the curriculum will pay special attention to job accommodation resources, so that wounded warriors are able to realize their full potential in the workplace despite injuries they incurred in service. The Department intends to pilot modules of this curriculum later this year.

### **Employment Navigator and Partnership Pilot**

On April 1, 2021, the Department announced the launch of the Employment Navigator and Partnership Pilot (ENPP) to provide transitioning service members, and their spouses, with the needed tools and support to facilitate a successful transition into the civilian workplace. The pilot is in addition to the TAP workshops and supports interested transitioning service members, and their spouses, in selecting career pathways and connects them to partners and resources based upon their interests and values to achieve better employment outcomes. The ENPP will run from April 2021 through Spring 2022 at 13 military installations worldwide.

Employment Navigators will provide pilot participants direct, one-on-one career assistance outside the formal TAP classroom instruction. Transitioning service members, and their spouses, will work with Employment Navigators to complete self-assessments, skills testing, explore career options and identify high-demand occupations and necessary credentials. The Employment Navigators will also assist pilot participants in reviewing detailed labor market information and help them connect with government and non-government partners to identify other services that may be needed. Upon completion of the pilot, the Department intends to study the data related to employment outcomes and partner performance to determine the pilot’s effectiveness. For more information on the pilot, please visit: [www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/tap](http://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/tap).

## **Employment Outcomes / National Directory of New Hires**

To assess the effectiveness of the ENPP, as well as to improve and publicly report on TAP performance as it relates to future employment outcomes, the Department is developing a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Health and Human Services to enable DOL to use the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH) to properly track and analyze employment outcome data. VETS receives daily data on transitioning service members from DOD. This growing database contains demographic information, including highest education level achieved, military base geographic data, and a full list of all the courses each service member participated in during the transition process. By matching the data with the NDNH, VETS can analyze the factors that are most important to a successful transition and report on those outcomes to improve our effectiveness.

## **Veterans Employment Challenge**

Leveraging authority provided under the America Competes Act, and with support in testing and review from DOD and the VA, in December 2019 VETS established the Veterans Employment Challenge (the Challenge). The Veterans Employment Challenge invited private sector organizations to compete to develop a better job-matching tool for transitioning service members and veterans. After three phases that included more than 50 competitors, three finalists conducted field testing in the challenge's fourth phase. The finalists presented their software solutions to transitioning service members from various Army installations through virtual TAP workshops. The transitioning service members evaluated their user experience and provided feedback as part of the competitive review process.

On July 10 2020, the Department announced a pilot prize of \$300,000 to Eightfold AI, who advanced to the Challenge's final phase to demonstrate its job-matching platform to transitioning service members, TAP instructors, and employers from July 27, 2020, to August 21, 2020. On September 18, 2020, Eightfold AI was declared the winner of the Challenge. VETS has been working with Eightfold AI and the Department's Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) to evaluate how the tool could be utilized by the Department. At this time, the Department and Eightfold AI are planning a pilot to better understand the capabilities and limitations of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in assisting transitioning service members find meaningful employment. The results will better inform how VETS and the Department can utilize AI to benefit American workers, including transitioning service members, veterans, and their spouses.

## **Apprenticeship Pilot**

On April 1, 2020, VETS launched an Apprenticeship Pilot at eight U.S. military installations to offer transitioning service members, and their spouses, opportunities to be hired into apprenticeship positions, prior to separation, in industries and locations that match their interests. Sixteen Apprenticeship Placement Counselors (APC) leveraged their networks of prospective employers, industry associations, and stakeholders to connect the participants to viable apprenticeship opportunities across the country. Apprenticeships offer effective pathways to gain critical job skills and connect talented workers with employers. Apprentices receive relevant paid workplace experience; classroom instruction; and a portable, nationally recognized credential.

According to Department's Office of Apprenticeship analysis, 94% of all registered apprenticeship apprentices retain employment after completing their program, and the average annual salary for registered apprenticeship graduates is \$70,000. Transitioning services members are well equipped to become apprentices as they are goal-oriented, hard-working, responsible, and have proven leadership skills.

COVID-19 certainly had an impact on the execution of this pilot. Not only did military installations switch from in-person TAP services to virtual, but many employers' business operations, training programs, and recruitment were also halted, delayed, or otherwise impacted. To adapt to this new environment, DOL redesigned its outreach and engagement strategies in order to meet the transitioning service members, and their spouses, where they were, as well as to strengthen employer connections.

The pilot concluded on March 31, 2021. During the pilot, APCs placed 82 transitioning service members and 3 military spouses into apprenticeships. As the formal pilot has concluded, DOL is committed to providing continuity of service for all transitioning service members, and their spouses, by allowing those who were enrolled in the pilot to continue receiving apprenticeship placement assistance. We continue to maintain a virtual APC capacity to assist those service members and spouses still active in the program. In addition, two APCs will remain at the Ft. Bliss pilot site through the end of Fiscal Year 2021. VETS is working with the Department's Chief Evaluation Officer to complete a study on the Apprenticeship Pilot. VETS will apply insights, lessons learned and best practices into the Employment Navigator and Partnership Pilot as well as the overall transition assistance portfolio, to inform and assist service members interested in pursuing apprenticeship as a career pathway.

### **Off-base Transition Training Pilot**

Section 4303 of the "Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020" (Public Law 116-315), extends and expands existing authority to conduct an off-base transition training (OBTT) pilot. VETS intends to take a three-pronged approach to implement the pilot. To be responsive to the needs of veterans and their spouses impacted by the pandemic, VETS' initial action will be to extend virtual delivery of the Department's TAP workshops to veterans and their spouses. Secondly, VETS will leverage the existing State Workforce Agencies and American Job Center networks and provide additional grant flexibilities to States most impacted by COVID-19 to hire additional Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) staff.

Finally, VETS will staff contract employment coordinators in select pilot States in various National Guard and other Reserve facilities to improve how pilot States serve the employment needs of Reserve Component (RC) Members. The RC has over 800,000 service members in uniform. VETS intends to leverage this pilot to determine its efficacy in improving employment outcomes for this important population that has repeatedly answered the call during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Conclusion**

The Department looks forward to working with the Subcommittee to ensure that our transitioning service members and their spouses have the required resources and training to navigate a successful military to civilian transition. Throughout the past year we have learned invaluable lessons about best practices, our capacity to implement new initiatives, and our vulnerabilities in providing services in support of TAP. We will continue to prioritize our support of the military-to-civilian transition process and leverage our interagency and non-governmental partners to enable our transitioning service members and military spouses to reach their full potential in the civilian labor force.

Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Moore, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you again for the opportunity to highlight the important work VETS' is doing to generate positive employment outcomes for the men and women who have served our country.