

Thank you Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Moore and members of the Subcommittee for inviting me to speak today on this very important topic of veteran employment amid the COVID-19 pandemic. As a veteran and as the Director of the Arizona Coalition for Military Families, the mission of providing economic opportunity to service members and veterans is both professional and personal.

Communities in Arizona are no different than communities across the United States. We have seen the significant impact of the pandemic on service members, veterans and their families. Unemployment, underemployment and reduced hours have resulted in increases in food insecurity, as well as requests for assistance with housing, utilities, transportation and other essential needs. Through partnership with organizations like the Bob Woodruff Foundation and the Military Officers Association of America, we have addressed these needs in our community.

On the positive side, the pandemic has opened up opportunities for more virtual networking, job seeking, and career preparation. Some veterans have become more proactive in seeking out educational opportunities like certifications and credentialing to improve, or upskill, their career potential. Employers were able to learn that permanent remote positions, which are a great fit for active duty spouses, have strong merit, and we proudly celebrate each of our Arizona Veteran Supportive Employers who hire them.

And while I'm on the subject of digital benefits, in my written brief to the committee I have included Governor Ducey's great efforts to increase digital access, credential attainment and universal licensing, among other things and encourage you to take a look at those later as well.

Where Arizona differs from other communities, is that it has a vast ecosystem of support that has helped to gird against the effects of the pandemic waves. You see, over a decade before the pandemic, we established a robust and sustainable effort to assist veterans with securing meaningful employment.

It started at the height of the post-9/11 deployments when some returning National Guard units had unemployment rates upwards of 50% and spousal unemployment was barely a talking point. At that time the public and private sector stakeholders came together, and since then our effort has only grown and expanded to serve all military members, veterans and family members, with a network of over 200 Arizona Veteran Supportive Employers and over 450 partner organizations, that provide over 3,000 resources.

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So as the pandemic hit, our unified effort quickly adapted to the virtual world. We are pleased to share that, amidst all that, the median salary at placement for our candidates last year was \$71,500.

Our effort focuses on matching candidates to employers for the best possible outcomes, while addressing issues and barriers that might prevent career placement or progression. And because this effort works hand in hand with Arizona's workforce system we eliminate conflicts of interest and reduce the prevalence of underemployment by focusing on both quality and quantity of placements.

Our partnership includes our Governor's Office, U.S. Department of Labor, Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, Arizona Commerce Authority, Office of Economic Opportunity, Department of Economic Security, ARIZONA@WORK, our active duty, guard and reserve units, Chamber of Commerce, Veteran Supportive Campuses, and many more. On the employer side, our Corporate Council on Veteran Careers is a Network of Veteran Supportive Employers who share how they strengthen their recruiting, hiring and retention of military-connected career seekers. What I'm describing is the active and thriving collaboration of the military, government, and community; the key stakeholders are at the table, engaged and working in partnership for the benefit of those we serve and to strengthen our workforce.

We have a data-driven and human-centered approach to advancing economic opportunity, which is all part of our Be Connected® ecosystem of support that addresses the needs of the entire military, veteran and family population across all of the social determinants of health. This robust ecosystem was made possible by the Clay Hunt Act, Be Connected® Leadership including Director Wanda Wright, and the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, and the advocacy of the late great Senator McCain and Senator Sinema.

Arizona's collective will to work together across sectors and systems for the good of those who've served, has had a very positive effect on our workforce. We hope that there will continue to be support for comprehensive programs that address the veteran workforce with end-to-end, innovative, cross-sector solutions that address not only workforce needs but all of the social determinants of health that impact the wellbeing of our military, veteran and family population from a proactive, upstream prevention approach.

Thank you for your time today.