

**TESTIMONY OF  
MARGARITA DEVLIN, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**“A Whole of Government Approach in Support of Servicewomen”**

**October 26, 2021**

**Introduction**

Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Moore, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the Department of Labor (DOL), I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear today to discuss the programs and resources provided by DOL's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) in support of service women transitioning to civilian life. I am truly honored to be before you and am encouraged by the work this Committee does on behalf of our Nation's veterans.

I began serving veterans 26 years ago at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and I am proud to continue to serve veterans in my new role as VETS' Deputy Assistant Secretary for Operations and Management. Today's veteran population looks very different than it did a quarter century ago. In 1996, there were 1,241,000 women veterans. By 2020, the number of women veterans had increased by 663,000 (53 percent) to 1,904,000. Meanwhile, the population of male veterans has decreased by nearly 7,000,000 (29%) from 1996 when there were 23,459,000 male veterans.<sup>1</sup>

VETS is prepared to meet the diverse needs of our evolving veteran community. Our vision is to enable all veterans, transitioning service members, and military spouses to reach their full potential in the workplace. Our top priorities are (1) getting the military to civilian transition right, (2) leveraging the right strategic partnerships to maximize employment outcomes, and (3) advancing equity and inclusion in our underserved veteran communities.

**Optimizing Military to Civilian Transition**

VETS is the agency responsible for the portion of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) focused on educating transitioning service members on how to prepare for and seek post-military civilian employment. Between March 1, 2020 and September 30, 2021, more than 242,000 transitioning service members and their spouses attended DOL's TAP workshops. Women service members made up nearly 34,000 of the participants during that time period. As the implications of transition compound over time, it is important that we provide these service members with the resources and opportunities necessary to obtain employment after separation from the military, regardless of their immediate plans.

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

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1996 & 2020 Current Population Surveys, Annual Averages, Unpublished Tables.

service members. In response, DOL altered the delivery of its employment workshops to align with the new legislative requirements. With a focus on improving TAP participant performance outcomes, VETS revised the employment course curricula to provide a one-day employment fundamentals workshop that is mandatory for all transitioning service members. There are also two-day career track workshops, one for career exploration and technical career preparation, and one for general employment preparation. DOL's career track workshops comprise two of the four elective courses that service members participating in TAP must choose from. These changes to TAP were designed to help transitioning service members and their spouses make the best career choices among those available to them, taking into account individual skills, interests, and high-demand career fields. The self-paced online versions of the DOL 2-day workshops (Employment Workshop and the Career and Credential Exploration Workshop) are now live on the Department of Defense's (DoD) Learning Management System. *(You can find them at <https://www.tapevents.org/courses> under "All Courses" or "Transition Tracks" selections.)*

In Fiscal Year 2022, DOL will complete development of and implement a transition assistance curriculum based on the employment fundamentals mandatory workshop, designed specifically to address the employment needs of wounded warriors. This course is being developed in coordination with the Department's Office of Disability Employment Policy, VA, the Military Departments' various wounded warrior programs, and other stakeholders who serve veterans with disabilities. The curriculum will include job accommodation resources to enable wounded warriors to more effectively realize their potential in the workplace.

In addition to TAP employment workshops, VETS conducts other programmatic pilots to identify improved ways to reach transitioning service members and assist them with their unique employment needs. From April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021, pursuant to Public Law 115-245, VETS conducted an apprenticeship pilot at eight military installations to provide transitioning service members, and their spouses, opportunities for placement into Apprenticeships, prior to separation, in industries and locations that match their interests. Apprenticeship programs open career pathways for women to stable employment, increased skills, higher wages, and opportunities for advancement.<sup>2</sup> In total, 79 transitioning service members and 3 military spouses were placed into Apprenticeships. The apprenticeship placements were in a wide variety of apprenticeship programs that include industries such as Information Technology (IT), finance, cybersecurity, construction, automotive, and transportation. Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many apprenticeship programs were conducted in person. The pilot was being deployed just as the pandemic made in-person programs impractical. Over time, apprenticeship programs transitioned to a virtual format and began to accept individuals into their programs again. Despite the challenging circumstances of the past year, veterans did benefit by being placed into apprenticeships, and DOL VETS learned valuable lessons that we are applying in our ongoing service to veterans. Although the pilot has concluded, VETS will continue to encourage and direct veterans into apprenticeship programs. DOL incorporated the functions and applied the lessons learned from the apprenticeship pilot into the new Employment Navigator and Partnership Pilot, which began on April 1, 2021.

VETS is also implementing another pilot initiative, the Off-Base Transition Training (OBTT) program. Implemented in accordance with 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), OBTT is an extension of TAP for veterans and their spouses, at locations other than active military

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<sup>2</sup>Women's Bureau, Advancing Opportunities for Women through Apprenticeship: A Case-Based Resource Guide. Retrieved October 6, 2021 from Apprenticeship Case Studies | U.S. Department of Labor (dol.gov).

installations for a period of five years, at a minimum of 50 locations, and in at least 20 states with high rates of veteran unemployment. In addition to the population that is eligible to participate in the OBTT under the law, the Department will also expand eligibility to members of the National Guard and Reserves and their spouses. VETS will use the most current veteran unemployment data to ensure the OBTT is piloted in the states with the highest unemployment rates among veterans.

### **Leveraging the Right Strategic Partnerships to Maximize Employment Outcomes**

The Department of Labor is the Federal authority on employment, and VETS is the DOL agency responsible for addressing veteran employment. VETS partners with DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) to serve veterans through the public workforce system—a system that supports economic growth by providing workers and employers important resources to maximize employment opportunities. VETS' main point of integration is through Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG), which are authorized under 38 U.S.C. §4102A(b) and offer employment and training services through State Workforce Agencies nationwide. The JVSG program assists veterans with significant barriers to employment and other eligible individuals to facilitate their transition to meaningful employment and assists employers in filling their workforce needs with job-seeking veterans. The workforce system offers assistance to veterans through a nationwide network of nearly 2,400 one-stop job centers (referred to as American Job Centers, or AJCs) that provide services funded and coordinated by DOL, state and local governments, and other Federal partners. Last year, more than 3.2 million Americans, including 203,269 veterans (of which 31,425 were women) received staff-assisted employment assistance at an AJC. This assistance may include job search services, career planning and counseling, and job training.<sup>3</sup> Veterans receive priority of service in all DOL funded services, regardless of whether they are eligible for JVSG services.

VETS also administers the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) to address the employment needs of one of the most vulnerable populations of veterans, those who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of it. HVRP provides employment and training services to help veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness reenter the job market. HVRP is the only federal nationwide program that focuses exclusively on the employment of veterans experiencing homelessness. In Fiscal Year 2021, the Department awarded \$52 million in HVRP grants. In Performance Year 2020 (the most recent year in which outcomes are available), HVRP recipients placed 59% of women veteran participants in employment where there was no gender wage gap. Of over 14,500 veterans served, 11% were women. A strength of HVRP is its employment focus and "hands-on" approach where veterans experiencing homelessness receive customized employment and training services.

At VETS, we are well aware that no Federal agency can operate alone in this ecosystem. I am impressed with the integration and partnerships that VETS has established and continues to develop at the Federal, local, state, and national level. VETS partners with DOD, VA, the Small Business Administration, the Office of Personnel Management, and the Department of Education to administer the TAP program. VETS partners with VA to ensure continuity and integration of VA's education programs with VETS employment programs. VETS also provides training to VA service providers on employment related topics, with a recent emphasis on apprenticeship training for Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) counselors.

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<sup>3</sup>U.S. Department of Labor. Veterans' Employment and Training Service. Annual Report to Congress, 2020.

One recent example of VETS leveraging formal partnerships is the Employment Navigator and Partnership Pilot (ENPP) that provides one-on-one career assistance to transitioning service members and their spouses at select military installations worldwide. VETS signed memoranda of understanding with nine organizations that have agreed to serve as partners in support of ENPP. Partner organizations' support will include apprenticeship opportunities, hiring events, digital matching of skills and experiences, employment mentorship and networking with organizations committed to employing veterans, employment referrals and placement, workforce training, and wrap around services within communities for additional support services. VETS selected organizations with demonstrated experience in providing employment and training services to transitioning service members and their spouses. Since the inception of the pilot, 17.9% of ENPP participants have been service women. Early employment outcomes data from the ENPP pilot looks promising and we look forward to sharing it with this Committee and the public soon.

### **Advancing Equity and Inclusion in Our Underserved Veteran Communities**

Not only do women veterans face many of the same transition challenges as their male counterparts, they also encounter the additional employment challenges facing all working women. Among all veterans, 1 in 10 is a woman. Among all women, only 1 in 68 is a veteran (whereas 1 in 7 men is a veteran). The women veteran population skews younger than the male veteran population (median age for women veterans is 51, male veterans, 65) and among veterans under 35, 1 in 5 is a woman. The divide among women, however, grows larger for younger ages – only 1 in 103 women under 35 years old is a veteran (1 in 25 men is a veteran). The low percentage of women veterans among women makes our collaboration with other agencies all the more important.<sup>4</sup>

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been particularly hard on working women. One reason for this is the closure of schools and daycare centers kept children at home. Mothers continue to provide the majority of child care and women are less likely than men to be in jobs that allow telework (22% women, 28% men).<sup>5</sup> Another reason is that women tend to be more concentrated in industry sectors most effected by the economic impact of COVID-19 (restaurants, retail establishments, the hospitality industry, and health care).

The workforce participation rate for all women dropped slightly from 58.5% in 2019 to 57.2% in 2020 (all men: from 70.9% to 69.3%), while the unemployment rate for all women increased significantly from 3.5% in 2019 to 8.2% in 2020 (all men: from 3.6% to 7.7%). While women veterans did suffer an increase in unemployment like their non-veteran peers, it is worth noting that the unemployment rate for women veterans in 2020 at 6.7% was not statistically different from male veterans at 6.5%, and was lower than women non-veterans at 8.2% (male non-veterans: 7.8%). This

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<sup>4</sup>U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020 Current Population Survey, Annual Averages, Unpublished Tables (Some calculations done within VETS).

<sup>5</sup>National Bureau of Economic Research. (April 2020). The Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality, Working Paper 26947, NBER Working Paper Series; as cited by Bureau of Labor Statistics. (September 2020). COVID-19 recession is tougher on women, Monthly Labor Review. Retrieved October 6, 2021 from <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2020/beyond-bls/covid-19-recession-is-tougher-on-women.htm>.

difference among women may be due, in part, to women veterans being more likely than women non-veterans to work in government (31% and 17%; respectively).<sup>6</sup>

As we build back the economy, we cannot simply recreate the same structures that have alienated and failed to adequately serve many Americans in the past, including veterans from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. This pandemic has exacerbated existing economic inequalities. Women veterans are more likely to be of minority status than male veterans. In fact, women veterans are more likely to be African American than male veterans or women non-veterans (22%, 12%, 13%, respectively; male nonveterans 12%).<sup>7</sup>

To build back better, VETS is taking a proactive approach by reaching out to underserved veteran communities, such as LGBTQ veterans, veterans of color, and women veterans, who have not traditionally interacted with DOL and other segments of the federal government at the same rate as other veteran communities. By engaging with new partners, we will increase awareness of VETS programs and work towards removing barriers to equitable access. In 2020, the average unemployment rate of black women veterans was 6.8%, as compared to 10.8% of black women nonveterans, which may indicate that veteran status and the programs that serve them help women veterans to overcome some, but not all, barriers that disproportionately impact women and minorities.

We know disparities exist between the outcomes of minority veterans and their non-minority veteran peers. Several recent reports highlight significant differences in how these subpopulations fare compared to their peers. By developing a more nuanced understanding of the challenges that different groups of veterans face, we can better target outreach and interventions to help these underserved populations overcome barriers and thrive. VETS is conducting listening sessions with Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) in order to understand the unique challenges encountered by veterans of different communities. VETS is also continuing to improve its data maturity to strengthen the analytical capabilities needed to better serve historically excluded and minority veterans.

## **Conclusion**

The decline in the monthly women veteran unemployment rate from 6.5 percent in September 2020 to 3.3 in September 2021 is very encouraging. Due to the volatility of monthly data for smaller populations, such as women veterans, we also track a rolling annual average for women veterans. The most recent twelve-month average unemployment rate for women veterans, from October 2020 – September 2021, was 4.3%, compared to 5.7% for women non-veterans and 5.0% for male veterans. These improvements in employment for women veterans are due in part to the work by VETS and our partners to connect employers – eager for the skills and value our veterans provide – to our nation’s service members, veterans, and their spouses, who have proven their resiliency time and time again.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019 & 2020 Current Population Surveys, Annual Averages, Unpublished Tables.

<sup>7</sup>U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019 & 2020 Current Population Surveys, Annual Averages, Unpublished Tables.

<sup>8</sup>U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020-2021 Current Population Surveys, Monthly, Unpublished Tables.

I am honored to be a part of the VETS team. While excellent work has been done to support transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses, we recognize that there is always more work to do, and we are consistently reviewing our programs to determine areas where we can improve our customers' experiences and employment outcomes. We are committed to assisting women veterans, as with all veterans, to enable them to reach their full potential in the workplace. As the lead Federal agency on veteran employment, VETS looks forward to working with this Committee and our many partners and stakeholders to continue providing opportunities that all veterans can have a good job and opportunity for advancement. I thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify today and am happy to answer any questions you may have.