

**STATEMENT OF
DIVERGENCE ACADEMY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ON DRAFT LEGISLATION
MAY 18, 2022**

Discussion Draft

To expand and improve the Department of Veterans Affairs Covid-19 veteran rapid retraining assistance program and high technology pilot program, and for other purposes.

The high technology pilot program commonly known as Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses (VET TEC) was specifically intended to provide G.I. Bill-eligible veterans the opportunity to enroll in high technology programs that provide training sought by employers. This program solves two important National Issues, rapidly getting veterans meaningful employment while filling the technology skills gap in the American workforce.

While the boot camps are for training, Institutes for higher learning (IHLs) are for education. Both pathways are important and should be viewed as complementary avenues to knowledge and employment rather than competitive. Both must be made available to the modern knowledge worker as upskilling and reskilling in today's digital economy become the norm. Workers no longer expect their jobs to represent a progression through a single career during a lifetime. They instead expect that their current job or trade will, at some point, disappear or evolve, forcing them to prepare for new jobs in several new careers at unpredictable moments throughout their lives.

Bootcamps, Divergence calls them immersive programs, stay responsive to the needs of a fast-changing labor market. We update our curriculum much faster than an IHL based on direct input from employers. Degree programs can take up to two years to complete. There are some exceptions, but by the time they go through all the committees and boards get approval, the technology has often become outdated, whereas we update our curriculum every time we teach it to the latest stable version.

Rather than creating a competitive landscape between Immersive Program Providers and IHLs, facilitate broader collaboration between the two. Immersive programs, designed well, highlight new career pathways to hesitant veterans. Once employed and confident about the direction a new career offers, veterans will then use G.I. Bill benefits to supplement applied practical skills with education at an IHL in the pursuit of a relevant degree.

Divergence Academy has partnered with Dallas College on Corporate Learning and Registered Apprenticeship Programs and has been doing so since 2017. The most valuable lesson we can share with other institutions is how to leverage IHL's resources to help students succeed and keep the cost of running the boot camps down—more on the management side than the instructional side.

As a preferred provider, it has taken a significant fiscal and investment over the last two years using A/B testing to develop a robust placement services program that understands how to get veterans career ready while educating employers on the advantages that veterans bring. IHL's would need to go through a similar process, essentially restarting the learning curve and bringing the pilot program back to the original start line. It is our recommendation to continue following the pilot program and aggressively track the metrics identified: Job placement and

retention rates; median annual salary for employed graduates; the percentage of program completers employed at least six months in the field of study.

If the original intent of Vet Tec remains true, to get veterans into the workforce as soon as possible with relevant high-tech skills, then allow the pilot program to run the intended course and collect best practices in innovative education that can be shared widely at the end of the five-year mark. If IHL's are allowed to participate then it is our recommendation that they be held to the same crucial metrics of employment outcomes.

Divergence Academy provides career readiness support and applied technical training for veterans transitioning into high demand, high technology programs. We do not do this by outsourcing training to a remote provider, or by using a cookie-cutter, one size fits all, approach. Divergence Academy provides small, intimate, remote live classes modeling a 21st century one-room Schoolhouse. IHLs who provide immersive style programs often outsource this to large conglomerates such Triloggy Education Services and Ed to Go, defeating the purpose of expanding Vet Tec to IHLs anyway.

Department of Veteran Affairs, Department of Labor, Department of Education, and Department of Commerce should be encouraging newer, innovative, education models and investing in the current preferred training provider programs. These innovations should then be captured and share widely with IHLs and any other programs vested in upskilling the current work force.

We thank the Chairman, Ranking Member, and the Subcommittee Members for your time, attention, and devotion to the cause of veteran education and are happy to provide additional details at any time.

Sincerely
Divergence Academy
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