

**STATEMENT OF
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VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Introduction

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to testify today. It has been an honor to lead the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) for the last three years.

VETS' mission is to prepare America's veterans, service members, and military spouses for meaningful careers, provide them with employment resources and expertise, protect their employment rights, and promote their employment opportunities. VETS administers programs designed to address the employment, training, and job security needs of over 196,000 military service members who transition to civilian life each year,¹ 8.6 million military veterans in the U.S. civilian labor force,² over 775,000 Selected National Guard and Reserve members,³ and nearly 920,000 military spouses (578,952 active duty and 344,716 Guard and Reserve spouses).⁴ Along with our partners, we are committed to ensuring the best transition for our service members and their families. Below, VETS provides its views on the legislation being considered at this hearing:

H.R. XXX, to amend titles 10 and 38, United States Code, to make improvements to certain programs for a member nearing separation, or for a veteran who recently separated, from the Armed Forces, and for other purposes.

Section 2 of the bill contains several amendments related to the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). Subsection (l) of Section 2 would amend 10 U.S.C. § 1144 to codify the Employment Navigator & Partnership Program (ENPP) into law. While we support the intent of codifying the program, as drafted, this subsection would enact a variety of highly prescriptive requirements that would limit which entities could enter into contracts with DOL to provide "individualized employment counseling for members of the Armed Forces and their spouses." Further, the subsection would limit the number of those partnerships to a minimum of five and a

¹ See Department of Defense Congressional Report, *Improvements to the Transition Assistance Program*, August 2022.

² See Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Household Data Annual Averages 2023, [Table 48 - Employment status of persons 18 years and over by veteran status, age, and sex](#), available at: <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat48.htm>.

³ Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center, Military Personnel Report, Selected Reserve Personnel by Reserve Component and Rank/Grade (Updated Monthly), July 2023, available at: <https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/workforce-reports>

⁴ Military OneSource – [Demographics Profile of the Military Community](#), 2022, available at: <https://demographics.militaryonesource.mil/>.

maximum of ten organizations. And it would require that each entity be compensated based on each individual who receives employment services provided by the entity.

DOL is currently carrying out ENPP under our current TAP statutory authority. While we support specifically codifying ENPP into law, we strongly oppose the restrictive requirements in the bill, which seem designed to ensure Federal contracts for a limited number of large organizations at the expense of other mid-sized and smaller organizations. These anticompetitive requirements are not needed and run contrary to the goal of providing ENPP to all service members and their spouses through 59 (and growing) non-governmental partner organizations in all parts of the world, including communities where smaller and more local organizations may be better situated to provide those services.

We have serious concerns about compensating ENPP partner organizations for each individual who receives employment services provided by the entity, as ENPP currently does not incur such costs to the Federal government or participants. Under the VETS program model, Employment Navigator services are incorporated within the overall VETS TAP contract. ENPP partner services (such as job placement, hiring events, training services, and local supportive services) are provided through no-cost agreements with the individual partner organizations. Currently, for eligibility, organizations applying to be ENPP partners need to demonstrate that their programs are mature, self-sufficient, and at no direct cost to DOL, the Transitioning Service Members (TSMs), or their spouses. For those eligible organizations, DOL enters into agreements for ENPP partnerships. In effect, Employment Navigators are referring TSMs to organizations, under ENPP voluntary partnerships with DOL, to receive services that those organizations already provide. DOL believes this current model is effective and allows the maximum flexibility for ENPP partners and ENPP operations. On the other hand, creating a payment structure as required by this subsection would create a strong financial incentive for ENPP partner organizations to serve as many TSMs as possible, regardless of how successful they are in placing them into employment with good wages and job quality or considering the service members' own satisfaction in the job placements. Moreover, the subsection provides no direct mechanism for DOL to improve those outcomes or otherwise hold those contractors accountable. I would also like to highlight that scaling the ENPP worldwide for all TSMs would require additional resources for VETS. Moreover, incorporating the cost structure outlined in this subsection would require additional resources for successful implementation.

ENPP is designed to provide an individualized approach for our service members and their spouses, by taking the concepts of what they learn in our TAP workshops and putting them into practice. Each TSM served by ENPP may have differing needs, be at different stages of career readiness, and could need different levels of assistance. For example, some of our ENPP clients meet monthly with an Employment Navigator over the course of their last year of service. During these meetings, our Employment Navigators assist these individuals with developing a career plan; reviewing their resumes; and connecting them with apprenticeship and SkillBridge opportunities, hiring events, mentorship and networking opportunities, and/or additional support such as legal, health care, housing, or financial assistance in addition to searching for employment opportunities through our partners. As an individual's needs are identified, Employment Navigators facilitate their connection to an approved ENPP partner organization(s) that can assist them either where they are currently stationed or where they are looking to

transition. VETS believes all of the Employment Navigator and partner services encompass the suite of employment-related services that a TSM may require throughout their transition and believes this flexible and holistic model should continue. As explained in more detail below, there is clear evidence that ENPP is an innovative and effective program.

In addition, subsection (m) of Section 2 would require the Department of Defense (DoD), in coordination with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and DOL, to establish a three-year pilot program to provide counseling at military installations to military spouses of TSMs on the benefits and assistance available to military families and veterans from each Department. DOL supports this proposal and notes that our Transition Employment Assistance for Military Spouses (TEAMS) curriculum would form an excellent foundation for, and complement to, this pilot. The TEAMS workshops are designed to help military spouses plan and prepare for their job search in pursuit of their employment goals. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, VETS provided 398 TEAMS workshops to more than 2,075 military spouses and caregivers. We continue to work with DoD to schedule and promote TEAMS events.

Section 4 of the bill would amend the authorizing language for the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) program to add members of the Armed Forces eligible for TAP as persons eligible to receive priority for DOL's intensive services and the placement service program conducted by Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program specialists. DOL supports the goal of expanding JVSG eligibility, as it will allow TSMs to receive career services in American Job Centers from the staff who are well qualified to help them navigate the wide range of services available to them through the public workforce system.

We welcome the opportunity to provide detailed technical assistance on these aspects of the bill and to work with the Subcommittee on our shared goals, so that we can continue the success of the ENPP and JVSG programs and build on the TEAMS pilot effort.

The bill would make a variety of other changes to the portions of the TAP program administered by DoD and VA, and to other programs outside of the purview of DOL. On these matters, VETS defers to the respective Departments where their equities are impacted.

Other Bills Considered by the Subcommittee

As to the remaining bills under consideration for this hearing, DOL defers to other respective Departments where their equities are impacted. Of course, should these bills be amended in a way that raises DOL equities, we would be happy to further review them and provide technical assistance upon request.

TAP Overview

In considering this legislation, it may be helpful for the Subcommittee to review the current structure of TAP, DOL's role in the program, how we are working to transform employment opportunities during the transition process, recent program data, and related matters.

TAP provides training, resources, and assistance to separating and retiring service members on active duty, Guard, Reserve, and their spouses, as defined in 10 U.S.C. § 1144. TAP is a cooperative effort by VETS, DoD, the Department of Education (ED), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the VA, the Small Business Administration (SBA), and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

Congress originally established TAP in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY 1991 (P.L. 101-510). This enactment authorized the development of a voluntary program consisting of transition assistance counseling and employment assistance for separating service members and their spouses. In 2011, the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 (P.L. 112-56) mandated TAP participation for all TSMs – including pre-separation counseling and completion of courses provided by the newly established interagency partnerships – to start no later than 90 days prior to an anticipated date of transition. DOL, DoD, VA, and SBA collaborated to prepare new curricula and expand training, education, and transition activities to include Career Readiness Standards, a set of common and specified activities for service members to achieve.

The John S. McCain NDAA for FY 2019 (P.L. 115-232) requires TAP classes to occur no later than 365 days prior to an anticipated date of separation or release from active duty or 24 months prior to retirement. These requirements allowed TAP to evolve from a one-size-fits-all program where service members had to transition to civilian life in a condensed timeframe to an individualized program tailored specifically to the needs of each service member under a more suitable timeline.

VETS works with its interagency partners to provide program oversight. The NDAA for FY 2024 (P.L. 118-31, §1805) codified DOL as a Co-Chair with DoD and VA on the Joint Executive Committee. This enhanced DOL's preexisting collaboration with DoD and VA, with VETS co-chairing the Transition Executive Committee, Senior Transition Steering Group, Transition Working Group, and six functional working groups. Interagency members including DOL, DoD, VA, ED, DHS, SBA, OPM, and the military services meet and coordinate on a regular basis to ensure that the partners are supporting and advancing TAP, as well as to reduce redundancy, better serve unique populations, and improve coordination of services across program areas.

DOL TAP Employment Workshops

In FY 2023, TSMs and military spouses attended VETS' TAP employment workshops in significant numbers. TAP employment workshops provided instruction to 242,984 participants.⁵ There are three core VETS TAP employment workshops. First, VETS is responsible for the delivery of the Employment Fundamentals of Career Transition (EFCT) Workshop, which is a mandatory, one-day course for employment preparation.

- **One-Day EFCT Workshop**: The EFCT lays the foundation for transitioning from military to civilian life, introducing the essential tools and resources needed to evaluate career options, gain information for civilian employment, and understand the fundamentals of the employment process. In FY 2023, VETS provided EFCT workshops to 148,560 participants.

In addition, based on service members' individual needs, VETS offers two elective tracks to acquire additional skills through a two-day workshop: (1) the DOL Employment Workshop (DOLEW), and (2) the Career and Credential Exploration (C2E) Workshop. TSMs must elect one two-day track during their individual counseling; however, they are encouraged to attend any additional track(s) and attend the courses more than once (as their unit missions allow) to prepare them for their transition.

- **Two-Day DOLEW**: The DOLEW is intended for those pursuing the employment track and covers emerging best practices in career employment, including in-depth training to learn interview skills, build effective resumes, and use emerging technology to network and search for employment. In FY 2023, VETS provided DOLEW workshops to 78,473 participants.
- **Two-Day C2E Workshop**: For those on the vocational track, VETS implemented an updated C2E workshop on January 1, 2024, which provides guidance and assistance in conducting several self-assessments to determine a career path to align with interests, aptitudes, and work values. Further, this update includes guidance on tailoring a resume for apprenticeships. Attendees will complete a comparison of technical training institutions. In FY 2023, VETS provided C2E workshops to 15,951 participants.

VETS workshops are highly rated by attendees. FY 2023 Transition Assistance Participant Assessment results indicated that 96% would use what they learned in their own transition planning, and 96% reported that the EFCT enhanced their confidence in transition planning.

⁵ Note that an individual service member may attend more than one workshop. References to the total number of TAP workshop participants do not track unique participants.

Employment Navigator and Partnership Program

ENPP began at 13 military installations worldwide on April 1, 2021. ENPP leverages the Secretary's authority (10 U.S.C. § 1144) to assist TSMs and their spouses with identifying and connecting to employment and training opportunities. The pilot was designed in response to feedback from veterans who stated that, while their TAP classroom experience was educational, they desired a more personalized approach. ENPP provides one-on-one, tailored services for TSMs and their spouses. From April 1, 2021, to September 30, 2023, VETS successfully piloted ENPP as a proof of concept. VETS implemented the pilot in close coordination with the military services and initial partner organizations. Employment Navigators were able to provide value-added one-on-one career support services. VETS successfully incorporated partner organizations into the pilot and implemented a formal partner application process. Initial analysis of employment outcome data indicates a positive impact from ENPP engagement. Based on these factors, VETS established ENPP as a program on October 1, 2023. VETS is prepared to make ENPP part of the regular DOL TAP established under 10 U.S.C. § 1144. As funding allows, and in coordination with the TAP interagency governance and military services, VETS will continue to extend ENPP to serve as many TSMs and their spouses as possible.

Through our full-time contract Employment Navigator staff and our employment partners, ENPP clients receive assistance with their resumes and career direction, as well as referrals to vetted partner organizations and American Job Centers (AJCs), which provide additional personalized support. ENPP Partners are required to select a primary service from nine possible categories of services, which include: digital employment opportunity matching, training services, employment mentorship, hiring events, employment networking, Registered Apprenticeship opportunities, referrals to employment opportunities, placement services, and wrap-around services. A list of our current partners can be found on the VETS ENPP Partner Page,⁶ and organizations that are interested in partnership with us can submit an application.⁷ In FY 2023, 5,747 TSMs and 383 military spouses received services through ENPP.

Also, at ENPP sites, the lead Employment Navigators serve as the initial points of contact for TSMs receiving a "warm handover", a person-to-person connection between the TSM and an AJC. No later than 90 days prior to separating, TSMs will go through Capstone, a process by which the military service branch evaluates whether service members have met the Career Readiness Standards (CRS). To meet the employment track CRS for employment, a service member must have either a completed resume or confirmation of employment. If a service member fails to meet the CRS for employment, they are provided a warm handover, which connects them to designated services and follow-up resources as needed.

During a warm handover, at ENPP sites, Employment Navigators connect TSMs to a designated AJC point-of-contact who verifies with DOL that they have received the contact information and reached out to the client to offer assistance. In addition to being connected with the State AJC where they reside, many service members receiving a warm handover also receive services from our Employment Navigators and partners. VETS believes that providing TSMs with additional support from Employment Navigators will enable more service members to meet

⁶ <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/tap/employment-navigator-partnership/enpp-partnerships>

⁷ <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/VETS/files/tap/DOLVETSENPPPotentialPartnerApplicationForm.pdf>

the CRS and lead to a reduction in the number of TSMs who are required to receive a warm handover for employment.

According to participant surveys, ENPP has been a great success. As of February 1, 2024, 97% of ENPP survey respondents reported positive feelings after meeting with their Employment Navigators and would recommend ENPP to a friend or colleague. Additionally, 97% felt ENPP partners met or exceeded their employment-related expectations. As one ENPP survey respondent stated, “The value of the Employment Navigator is having a one-on-one conversation to go back over the plethora of information you received in TAP classes and give guidance and recommendations specific to your situation.”

VETS is very proud of the progress that has been made through ENPP and looks forward to continuing and expanding this initiative. To better understand its success and effectiveness, VETS has initiated a number of evaluations of the program. First, in December 2021, VETS launched the TAP Employment Navigator System (TENS), a case management system created for ENPP to be used by Employment Navigators (who are contracted staff), ENPP partners, and VETS staff to capture data, develop reports, and manage ENPP processes. TENS includes an integrated client request meeting scheduler, program reporting, policy/guidance storage, and client record management.

With DOL’s TAP Evaluation and Employment Navigator (TEEN) Study, VETS built a new one-of-a-kind dataset to better understand the role of ENPP on employment outcomes for TSMs and their spouses. What’s even more notable about this dataset is that we will be able to follow employment outcomes of TSMs longitudinally. This was a multi-year effort to combine wage and employment information from the Department of Health and Human Services-administered National Directory of New Hires (NDNH), Armed Forces’ administrative data through the Veteran Data Exchange Initiative with DoD, and ENPP program data through TENS from VETS. This effort included data-sharing agreements with the aforementioned Federal agencies, approval process with OMB, and upgrading IT systems required to receive, store, and analyze the merged data. VETS produced an initial NDNH-related analysis at the end of FY 2023 and identified employment outcomes, including wages, to track in FY 2024. VETS aims to establish a baseline year to fine-tune the measurement tools and ensure accuracy.

Based on preliminary findings from early analyses in the TEEN Study, we see that TSMs who received ENPP services have notably better outcomes than those service members who did not receive those services. For example, preliminary findings indicate an increase of 10% (to \$11,005) higher median quarterly wages earned for enlisted TSMs who participated in ENPP compared to their counterparts (\$9,993) who did not participate. VETS will continue analyzing the data and will be able to provide more nuanced information as data sets increase and analysis matures.

Additionally, VETS’ ENPP Evaluation is underway to understand how Employment Navigators provide support to service members to find employment faster and obtain higher wages. The key components of this study are: 1) a rigorous implementation and outcomes evaluation; 2) an evaluability assessment on the feasibility of an impact evaluation; 3) a study to understand the customer experience through the eyes of service members and military spouses;

and 4) collaboration with other DOL workforce navigator evaluations to synthesize findings on cross-cutting topic areas, such as equity to access of services. The evaluation is expected to be completed in FY 2027.

Expanding Off-Base Transition Training Pilot

On January 11, 2022, VETS announced the launch of a five-year Off-Base Transition Training (OBTT) pilot program, in accordance with section 4303 of the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-315), which was enacted on January 5, 2021. Section 4303, which amended section 301(a) of the Dignified Burial and Other Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-260), directed DOL to provide TAP to veterans and their spouses at locations other than active military installations for a period of five years to improve employment-related outcomes in areas with high veteran unemployment. The OBTT pilot launched in eight metropolitan areas across five States (California, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas) and, by December 2023, VETS expanded the pilot to 26 metropolitan areas in 10 States (adding Colorado, Illinois, Nevada, New York, and Oregon). OBTT features ten two-hour, instructor-led employment skills and workforce development workshops, provided in classrooms and virtually. In FY 2023, 6,293 veterans or their spouses were provided employment-related training through OBTT.

Conclusion

As the lead Federal agency on veteran employment, DOL VETS looks forward to working with this Subcommittee and our many partners and stakeholders to create opportunities to ensure that all veterans, service members, and their spouses, can have a good job and opportunity for advancement.

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my statement. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this hearing, and I welcome your questions.