

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

January 18, 2018

Introduction

Chairmen Wenstrup and Arrington, Ranking Members Brownley and O'Rourke, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to provide a statement for today's hearing on veterans' homelessness. I thank you all for your tireless efforts to ensure that America fulfills its obligations to our current service members, veterans, and their families. My name is Matt Miller and I am the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy at the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL, or Department) Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS). We work hard every day to ensure all veterans, especially those most in need, are prepared to meet their employment objectives.

Secretary Acosta stands firmly behind our country's service members and veterans. He has set several clear goals that will assist our veterans in finding and retaining good jobs: (1) creating clear career pathways; (2) eliminating barriers to employment; (3) enabling and promoting apprenticeship opportunities that lead to meaningful careers; and (4) increasing the portability of licensing and credentials for military service members and their spouses.

As the Department of Labor's representative on the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), I have the opportunity to see the federal coordination efforts first hand. The Council last met on December 12th to discuss success to-date, the work ahead, opportunities to strengthen the Federal Strategic Plan, and essential strategies driving the national progress on ending homelessness. Additionally, VETS participates in the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans.

Homelessness among veterans has dropped by 46 percent from January 2010 to January 2017. Yet, on a single night in January 2017, there were still 40,056 homeless veterans. For the Department, one homeless veteran is one too many. That is why we look forward to working with the Subcommittees in providing these brave men and women who served our nation with

the employment support, assistance, and opportunities they deserve to succeed in the civilian workforce.

We also note that our partnerships throughout DOL extend VETS' ability to achieve its mission, and bring all of DOL's resources to bear for America's veterans – including veterans experiencing homelessness, separating service members, and their families. VETS' mission is focused on four key areas: (1) preparing veterans for meaningful careers; (2) providing them with employment resources and expertise; (3) protecting their employment rights; and, (4) promoting the employment of veterans and related training opportunities to employers across the country.

Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP)

One important component of the VETS mission is the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP), which helps homeless veterans reenter the labor force. HVRP provides grants to state and local Workforce Development Boards, tribal governments and organizations, public agencies, for-profit/commercial entities, and non-profit and faith-based organizations to assist in reintegrating homeless veterans into meaningful employment, and to stimulate the development of effective service delivery systems to address the complex problems they face. This program succeeds not only because of the hard work and local connections of our grantees, but also because of the collaborative efforts of our Federal and State government partners, including VHA medical centers who provide referrals to grantees and supportive services to veterans served by HVRP. These efforts help ensure that homeless veterans have access to a robust, comprehensive support network.

HVRP's client-centric, hands-on approach has placed thousands of previously homeless veterans, some of whom were chronically homeless, on a path to self-sufficiency. Historically, the Department also has funded two additional types of grants designed to address difficult-to-serve subpopulations of homeless veterans: the Homeless Female Veterans and Veterans with Families Program (HFVWF) and the Incarcerated Veterans' Transition Program (IVTP). In addition, the Department supports "Stand Down" events (described below) and technical assistance grants.

Each HVRP participant receives customized employment and training services to address his or her specific barriers to employment. Services may include occupational, classroom, and on-the-job training, as well as job search, placement assistance, and post-placement follow-up services. Earlier this month, I had the pleasure of visiting one of our grantees in Los Angeles, CA where I met Mr. Jeremy White. Mr. White is an honorably discharged Marine Corps veteran. Prior to enrolling in our program, Mr. White had been incarcerated for seven years. He began working with our grantee, Volunteers of America in Los Angeles, this past October. When he arrived, Mr. White had no job and was experiencing homelessness. Jeremy's career developer worked with him to develop a career plan. This plan guided Mr. White to housing resources through the Department of Veterans Affairs' Supportive Services for Veteran Families program, job readiness training through a local American Job Center, and ultimately gainful employment at SoCal Construction all within four days of program enrollment.

Since his enrollment, Mr. White has been saving part of his income and is now seeking housing with the support of the SSVF program. Since beginning employment, his wages have increased from \$12 to \$14 an hour. Mr. White continues to be a role model for other veterans within the grant program and his success drives others to commit to their own career plans.

HVRP Program Performance

In FY 2016, DOL was appropriated \$38.1 million for HVRP. With these resources, DOL funded 64 new HVRP grants, 89 option-year HVRP grant extensions, 12 HFVVWF grants, IVTP grants, and 64 Stand Down grants. These grants enrolled 16,638 participants, placing 65 percent into employment, with a cost per participant of \$2,007.

In FY 2017, the HVRP program received an appropriation of \$45 million with which the Department awarded 74 new HVRP grants, 81 option year HVRP grants. These grantees will provide services to over 16,230 homeless veterans, with a placement rate of 67 percent, who earned an average hourly wage at placement of \$12.88 an hour.

Providing Services to Homeless Female Veterans and Veterans with Families

HVRP funds also target subpopulations of homeless female veterans and veterans with families who are experiencing homelessness. As noted in HUD's 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, homeless women veterans accounted for 11 percent of the overall homeless veteran population. The program provides direct services through a case management approach that leverages Federal, state, and local resources. Eligible veterans and their families are connected with appropriate employment and life skills support to ensure a successful integration into the workforce.

Providing Services to Incarcerated Veterans

HVRP funds also support incarcerated veterans who are at risk of homelessness by providing referral and career counseling services, job training, placement assistance and other services. Eligible participants include veterans who are incarcerated and are within 18 months of release, or are less than six months from release of a correctional institution or facility.

Stand Down and Technical Assistance

Through HVRP, the Department supports "Stand Down" events. These events, typically held over one to three days in local communities, provide an array of social services to homeless veterans. Stand Down organizers partner with Federal and state agencies, local businesses and social services providers to offer critical services, including temporary shelter, meals, clothing, hygiene care, medical examinations, immunizations, state identification cards, veteran benefit

counseling, training program information, employment services, and referral to other support services.

Additionally, to assist with the Hurricane Harvey relief effort, VETS awarded \$50,000 for three Stand Down events in Houston, Texas, which served a total of 756 local homeless veterans.

The HVRP grant also provides funding to the National Veterans Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC). The NVTAC provides a broad range of technical assistance on veterans' homelessness programs and grant applications to existing and potential grantees, interested employers, Veterans Service Organizations, and, Federal, state, and local agency partners.

Jobs for Veterans State Grants

VETS awards Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) to each state and territory to support two types of staff positions in the American Job Center (AJC) network: Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVER) staff. DVOP specialists and LVER staff support HVRP participants by helping veterans achieve employment through case management, direct employer contact, job development, and follow-up services.

DVOP specialists provide individualized career services targeted for meeting the employment needs of disabled veterans and other veterans with significant barriers to employment, including homeless veterans. In addition, DVOP specialists often refer veterans who experience homelessness to other AJC services, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adult and Dislocated Workers services and training. AJCs also engage in advocacy efforts with local businesses to increase employment opportunities for veterans, and encourage the hiring of veterans, including homeless veterans.

The transition from the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) to WIOA has provided an extraordinary opportunity to improve job and career options for our nation's jobseekers and workers, including veterans, through an integrated, job driven public workforce system that links diverse talent to businesses. While retaining the network of DVOP specialists at AJCs, WIOA strengthens accountability and transparency of outcomes for core programs, including establishing common performance indicators across these programs. The Department has adopted these new common performance indicators for JVSG and other VETS-administered programs to track the outcomes of veterans participating in employment and related programs. However, due to the WIOA metrics requiring several quarters to track and compute, VETS will continue to also measure the traditional HVRP measures in a more real-time environment.

Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Employment Workshop

VETS also administers a mandatory three-day TAP Employment Workshop and optional Career Technical Training Track courses to help prepare transitioning service members for a successful transition out of the military. All transitioning service members are evaluated throughout the

transition process and if an individual is evaluated as not meeting one or more Career Readiness Standards that are applicable to the Department of Labor during their transition, the individual's commander/designee facilitates a "warm handover" of the service member to the public workforce system for a review of the employment services available through AJCs and to facilitate access to individualized career services. A warm handover is also provided to Service members transitioning with an Other Than Honorable Discharge or without a viable post-transition housing plan or transportation plan. Such warm handovers can be accomplished by introducing the service member to a local AJC staff member (on or near the military base), connecting them to the AJC nearest their eventual destination, or through a facilitated call from the service member to the DOL Toll-Free Help Line (1-877-US2-JOBS or 1-877-872-5627), and/or to services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Programs such as TAP have been instrumental in working to ensure transitioning service members are in the best possible position to avoid the issues that the vulnerable population may face prior to their transition.

HIRE Vets Medallion Program

This past November, the Department announced the HIRE Vets Medallion Program to recognize organizations that have invested in employing and retaining veterans. The HIRE Vets Medallion Program is a powerful way that companies can signal their investment in veterans' careers. The Department believes encouraging employers to hire veterans—including veterans who are experiencing or who have recently exited homelessness—is essential for national success in preventing and ending homelessness among veterans. Secretary Acosta states, "through their military service, America's veterans have leadership skills, technical expertise, and proven problem-solving capabilities. These are attributes that any employer would want." All organizations with at least one employee are eligible to apply for a HIRE Vets Medallion. The Secretary of Labor will recognize applicants with an award and a virtual HIRE Vets Medallion that can be placed on websites, used in social media, and in printed materials.

Later this year, DOL will launch a demonstration for the HIRE Vets Medallion program to prepare for the full implementation of the program. This coming Veterans Day, the Department will recognize up to 300 organizations for their contributions to veteran recruitment, employment, and retention.

Studies and Legislative Proposal

DOL's Chief Evaluation Office recently sponsored two independent studies of the HVRP program. In 2016, a Formative Evaluation of HVRP was completed. This study documented the types of services and support offered by HVRP grantees. It identified potentially promising practices or models and provided recommendations for future program development and evaluation. Study findings were based on a combination of site visits, literature reviews, and

statistical analysis of HVRP administrative data. VETS has already acted on many recommendations and is using the results of the study to improve program operations.¹

Building on the learnings from the formative study, in September of 2017, DOL funded a long term Impact Evaluation Study of HVRP.² The goals for this study are to evaluate the effectiveness of HVRP on participants' employment outcomes, using the most rigorous design feasible (experimental or quasi-experimental methods); and to conduct an implementation evaluation to understand program models and variations, partnerships, and the homeless veterans served. For all of these individuals, the study design is expected to incorporate an extensive array of descriptive and outcome information. This project is expected to conclude in the fall of 2022 and will include detailed data on the long-term employment outcomes for HVRP program participants. VETS looks forward to sharing the findings of this study with the members of the Subcommittees.

In our most recent Annual Report to Congress, DOL recommended a technical amendment to the definition of homeless veteran at 38 U.S.C 2002(a)(1) so as to include persons who are considered "recently housed," defined as an individual who now has stable living conditions, but was considered to meet the definition of "homeless veteran" within the previous 60 days of requesting services. Studies have shown that barriers to employment still exist after immediate housing needs are met, and individuals still run a risk of becoming homeless again.³ This recommendation is especially critical now; as communities have become more successful at helping veterans to exit homelessness more quickly, the current definition creates an unintended barrier for those veterans to be able to access the employment services and opportunities that will help ensure that they do not experience homelessness again.

Conclusion

We at the Department of Labor are committed to working with our federal, state, and local partners to achieve the goal of ending veteran homelessness, and we look forward to working with the Committee to ensure the continued success of our efforts. Chairmen Wenstrup and Arrington, Ranking Members Brownley and O'Rourke, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittees, this concludes my statement. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time.

¹ Department of Labor. (2017, December 21) Formative Evaluation of the HVRP Report. Retrieved from [https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/completed-studies/Formative Evaluation of the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Report.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/completed-studies/Formative%20Evaluation%20of%20the%20Homeless%20Veterans%20Reintegration%20Program%20Report.pdf).

² Department of Labor. (2018, January 4) Chief Evaluation Office Current Study Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Impact Evaluation Description. Retrieved from: <https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/currentstudies/Homeless-Veterans-Reintegration-Program-Impact-Evaluation.htm>

³ Department of Labor. (2017, December 21) VETS 2016 Annual Report to Congress. Retrieved from https://www.dol.gov/vets/media/VETS_FY16_Annual_Report_to_Congress.pdf.