

**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

Good afternoon Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing to discuss the Department of Labor's (DOL) role in providing employment services to our Nation's veterans and transitioning service members in coordination with the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Program.

DOL takes very seriously its role in providing employment services to veterans and transitioning service members, including those in the VA's VR&E program. The VR&E program focuses on assisting veterans with service-connected disabilities and barriers to employment in preparing for, finding, and maintaining suitable employment. For those veterans with service-connected disabilities so severe that they cannot immediately consider employment, VR&E offers Independent Living services to improve their ability to live as independently as possible. While veterans bring talents and experience to the workplace, DOL recognizes that disabilities may present significant barriers to overall rehabilitation and meaningful employment for some veterans. Accordingly, DOL personnel around the country, as well as our state and local workforce agency partners, work hard with our VA counterparts to ensure that DOL's programs are made available to provide needed assistance to veterans with disabilities.

DOL-funded support for veterans with significant barriers to employment are delivered primarily by Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) staff located in American Job Centers (AJCs) throughout the country. These positions are funded through the Jobs for Veterans State Grant Program (JVSG) administered by DOL's Veterans' Employment Training Service (VETS) and aligned with the other employment services provided at AJCs, including the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and Wagner-Peyser Employment Services. By law, priority of service is provided to veterans in all employment and training programs funded by DOL.

DOL-funded employment services for disabled veterans complement the services provided by VR&E counselors, and this requires close coordination between VR&E and VETS. This coordination is managed under a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between DOL and VA, the most recent of which is dated February 27, 2015. This MOA describes the goals of our coordination, the roles and responsibilities of each party, and establishes a Joint Working Group comprised of staff members from both DOL and the VA to manage this arrangement. The current MOA has been included as part of our submission for the hearing record.

The recently signed MOA was designed to build on each partner's strengths and to reduce duplication between DOL and VA programs. For example, our experience has been that veterans enrolled in VR&E-funded training do not usually require additional job training funded by DOL programs during, or following, their participation in VR&E. However, DOL-funded intensive services can play an important role in placing VA's VR&E participants into employment. These intensive services can be provided by DVOP specialists or AJC staff funded under title I of WIOA. In this way, DOL efforts complement VA's work with veterans to attain their rehabilitation goals. DOL will continue to work closely with VA to ensure that veterans who receive VR&E services can transition seamlessly into suitable occupations by providing critical DOL employment services when needed.

JVSG and AJC Services for Veterans

In Program Year (PY) 2013, which ended June 30, 2014, DOL programs provided funding for employment and training services to over 1.1 million veterans at nearly 2,500 AJCs throughout the country. Some of these were disabled veterans and other veterans with significant barriers to employment who are or were enrolled in VA's VR&E. As I mentioned, services for veterans referred under VR&E are provided by DVOP specialists and LVER staff.

Funded at \$175 million in PY 2013, the JVSG program provided career and employment services to over 320,000 of the 1.1 million veterans and other eligible persons served by DOL-funded programs, including over 140,000 veterans who received intensive services from a DVOP or individualized career services particularly to address significant barriers to employment.

Table 1 provides the performance measures for DOL employment-related programs that serve disabled veterans and other eligible job-seeking veterans. We are pleased to note that our outcomes demonstrate improvement from PY 2012 through PY 2013.

Table 1. Common Measure Results, PYs 2012-2013, Combined Outcomes of Wagner-Peyser Employment Service and Jobs for Veterans State Grants

Measure	PY 2012 Result	PY 2013 Result	Variance
Percent of Veterans employed in the first quarter after exit (Entered Employment Rate (EER))	50.2%	52.9%	2.7%
Percent of Veterans employed in the first quarter after exit still employed in 2nd & 3rd quarters after exit (Employment Retention Rate (ERR))	79.6%	81.0%	1.4%
Average six month earnings of Veterans in the second and third quarter after exit (Average Earnings (AE))	\$16,870	\$17,228	2.1%
Percent of <i>disabled</i> Veterans employed in the first quarter after exit (EER)	47.3%	48.6%	1.3%
Percent of <i>disabled</i> Veterans employed in the first quarter after exit still employed in 2nd & 3rd quarters after exit (ERR)	78.4%	79.9%	1.5%
Average six month earnings of <i>disabled</i> Veterans in the second and third quarter after exit (AE)	\$17,134	\$18,422	7.5%

*Table 1: As reported in the Labor Exchange Reporting System, ETA-9002D and, for the states of Texas, Utah and Pennsylvania, ETA Form 9132. This information is not exclusive to VA's VR&E participants.

Team Approach

We see ourselves as a vital member of a three-party team – DOL through Federal, state, and local staff; VA's VR&E counselors; and those disabled veterans who benefit from our services. As such, our programs are complementary. VA's VR&E is a comprehensive rehabilitation program that assists servicemembers and veterans with service-connected disabilities and barriers to employment in preparing for, finding, and maintaining suitable employment. For those veterans with service-connected disabilities so severe that they cannot immediately consider employment, VR&E offers Independent Living services to improve their ability to live as independently as possible. Service-connected disabled veterans (other than those dishonorably discharged), including service members who expect to receive a service-connected disability determination upon their discharge from the military service, are eligible for VR&E. As the Federal Government's leader for veterans' employment, DOL is able to provide critical expertise to VR&E counselors, and provide critical employment and career services to veterans and transitioning service members.

DOL-funded intensive employment services offered by DVOP specialists are open to a wider variety of veterans identified as having significant barriers to employment, which may include a service-connected disability, homelessness, low income, lack of a high school diploma or equivalent, or other similar challenges.

Coordination

DOL and VA ensure close coordination between our VETS staff, JVSG staff, and VR&E counselors. DOL provides access to local labor market information through AJCs and electronic means to guide jobseekers in selecting training, credentialing, in-demand occupations and relevant employment opportunities. This information is particularly useful in helping veterans find suitable jobs upon completion of VR&E training or when they are determined by the VR&E counselor to be ready to more actively begin their job search. Through the coordinated DOL, VA, and State Workforce Agency system, we track outcomes for all veterans referred to DOL from the VA and provide these results to the Congress in our Annual Report. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2013, of the 8,689 veterans who VA reported as having successfully entered suitable employment, 4,877 had been referred by VR&E counselors to DOL for placement assistance or labor market information counseling.

DOL and VA are guided by the Administration's Job-Driven Training principles in our support for VR&E programs to assist disabled veterans with employment needs. Four of these elements are:

1. Employer Engagement – actively engaging employers to determine local and regional hiring needs, design and deliver training, and provide work-based training opportunities including apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and internships;
2. Labor Market/Career Information – using labor market information and information from State workforce investment boards and employers to guide jobseekers in selecting training, credentialing, and employment opportunities;
3. Helping those with barriers to employment access training and secure employment; and,
4. Job/Career Results – measuring and evaluating employment and earnings outcomes.

While VA is not required to refer VR&E participants to DOL for assistance, the new MOA strongly encourages such referrals. In practice, a veteran who is enrolled in the VR&E program and referred to DOL interacts with DOL-funded personnel at two distinct points. The first is during or following enrollment in the VR&E program, when our DVOP specialists provide labor market information and guidance to applicants, new enrollees, or their counselors about the types of jobs that are available in the geographical area in which they desire to work, an assessment of the veterans' skills (including translation of military service to civilian job skills), and the kinds of training or education that would be required to enter a particular industry. Any veteran who is enrolled in VR&E is eligible for DVOP services as a disabled veteran, regardless of other factors or barriers, because having a service-connected disability is itself considered a significant barrier to employment for DOL purposes.

The second point occurs when the veteran is nearing completion of the VR&E program, is beginning to look for work, and is referred to DOL for employment services. At that time, a DVOP specialist works with the VR&E client to prepare for and apply for job openings which match the abilities, education and training of the veteran, and are in the career field and geographic area identified within the Individual Written Rehabilitation Plan developed by VR&E. This process may take some time, and the DVOP specialist remains in regular contact with the VR&E veteran throughout their job search. In some cases, a DVOP specialist may be in touch with a veteran throughout his or her education or training using a case management approach (which DVOP specialists are taught by the National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI)). In other cases, the referral to the DVOP specialist may not occur until the VR&E veteran has completed VR&E-funded training and exhausted their own job search options.

Veterans may seek employment or training services directly at their local AJC. At AJCs, veterans are screened to determine whether they have explored vocational rehabilitation services and, if thought to be eligible, are referred to the VA for VR&E services. Additionally, the VA refers disabled veterans who are not found to be eligible for the program to their local AJC for employment services. Any veteran found ineligible for VR&E can still be served by a variety of DOL employment and training programs, including possible intensive services by a DVOP specialist, following an initial assessment at an AJC.

VR&E personnel are also able to participate in training classes and webinars hosted by the NVTI at the University of Colorado – Denver, where they can learn more about JVSG programs and how to best leverage DOL resources for their clients. This is made possible through the MOA between the VA and DOL. VA is responsible for associated costs.

Success Story

The story of Lori Mobbs provides one example of how this interagency coordination works. An Army veteran with more than 15 years of military service, she utilized the VR&E program to complete her B.S. degree in Geography in December, 2014. Through the effective collaboration between the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Alabama Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs, she met with a DVOP specialist who provided federal job search assistance during her initial visit to an AJC in Huntsville, AL. Because she was eligible for intensive services, and because of her strong desire to obtain employment with the National Park Service (NPS), the DVOP specialist assisted her in applying for several NPS positions. Lori had three interviews and two job offers. I am very pleased to report that she accepted a position at Olympic National Park in Washington State in April 2015 and reported to work last month. In support of her employment success, the VA provided Lori with the airfare necessary to get from Birmingham, AL to her new home in Seattle, WA. The Huntsville DVOP specialist contacted a DVOP specialist in Port Angeles, WA to create a network of support for Lori once she landed in Seattle, and to make sure she had someone to call in case she needed assistance.

Lori flew to Seattle on May 26th. Her new boss, a Lead Park Ranger, met Lori in town and transported her to her new duty station in the Hoh Rainforest. By June 10th, Lori was in training as a Park Ranger. She began performing the job as an Interpretive Park Ranger on June 15, 2015.

Conclusion

Creating opportunities for our veterans to thrive in the civilian economy through meaningful employment is a priority for DOL. We work closely with our partners at the Department of Veterans Affairs to properly execute our complementary employment services. DOL has well-established partnerships with Governor-appointed State workforce boards and State workforce agencies, as well as business-led local workforce boards that oversee the network of AJCs across the Nation. This AJC network facilitates veterans' employment with large national employers, as well as those small and medium-sized businesses that do most of the hiring. As part of DOL, VETS and its partner agencies work closely with the States to ensure that the AJC network enhances the job opportunities for VR&E participants.

DOL and VA coordinate to give veterans seamless services to achieve their employment goals. We are proud of the DOL programs that deliver positive employment outcomes for our disabled veterans, and look forward to continuing to work with our partners at VA and this Subcommittee.

Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my written statement. Thank you for the opportunity to take an active part in this hearing. I welcome any questions you may have.