

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD  
OF  
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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 Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, it is an honor for me to have a second opportunity to testify before you on matters of great importance to the veterans we serve. Thank you for the opportunity to provide a statement for today's hearing on legislation that you are considering. I thank you all for your tireless efforts to ensure that America fulfills its obligations to our service members, veterans, and their families. I am the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy at the Department of Labor's (DOL or Department) Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS). Our mission is to work with various stakeholders in a manner that allows veterans, reservists, and guardsmen to obtain and maintain meaningful careers.

The Department is the Federal government's focal point for training, employment services, and information related to the economic health of all workers. It has the expertise and a nationwide network to provide skills training and employment opportunities for anyone who needs them, and veterans receive priority of service. This integrated network and DOL programs are best suited to continue generating positive employment outcomes for the men and women who have served our country. I'm pleased to report the employment situation for veterans continues to improve. The unemployment rate for veterans was down to 3.5 percent for the month of February, and I continue to hear from employers who are hiring veterans because they provide the technical and leadership skills their businesses need.

Last year, the Department's programs provided services to over 662,000 veterans, transitioning service members, and members of our National Guard and Reserves. Approximately 400,000 veterans received services through the American Job Center (AJC) network; 16,096 homeless veterans were served through the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP); 172,847 transitioning service members and military spouses were served through the Transition Assistance Program's (TAP) employment-related services; 34,981 veterans were served through compliance based efforts; and, 38,262 veterans received services through active apprenticeships. We continue to work to strengthen our coordination and collaboration with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Defense, (DoD), and other federal agencies to ensure

smooth transitions to civilian employment for those serving in our military, and continuing employment assistance for veterans, military spouses, and caregivers.

While this hearing is focused on several bills under consideration by the Subcommittee, I will focus my remarks to the two pieces of proposed legislation that have a direct impact on the programs administered by DOL, specifically on H.R. 4451, the “Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Programs Reauthorization Act of 2017” and H.R. 4835, the “Job Training through Off-Base Opportunities and Local Support for Veterans Act,” or the “Job TOOLS for Veterans Act.” While we do not take a formal position on the draft bill which would establish the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration within VA, I will speak to DOL’s work in the areas of economic opportunity and transition.

### **H.R. 4451—“Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Programs Reauthorization Act of 2017”**

H.R. 4451, the “Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Program Reauthorization Act of 2017,” provides a four-year extension of the authorization of appropriations for the VETS’ Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Program and Homeless Female Veterans and Veterans with Families grants. Additionally, the bill would expand the population eligible for program services to include veterans participating in the Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program for which rental assistance is provided; Native American Veterans who receive assistance under the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act of 1996; veterans who are transitioning from being incarcerated; and, veterans participating in the VA rapid rehousing and prevention program.

The Department strongly supports the intent of H.R. 4451, and we believe enactment of the bill would enable DOL to provide more comprehensive workforce reintegration services to veterans who experience homelessness. HVRP is the only federal program focusing exclusively on helping homeless veterans to reintegrate into the workforce. The Department continues to support the funding of these employment services for veterans experiencing homelessness, as well as those at-risk of homelessness.

H.R. 4451 would extend HVRP’s authorization to 2022; the current authorization is set to expire at the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2018.<sup>1</sup> Grantees under this program are competitively selected through a rigorous application process and are measured based on their effectiveness in placing these veterans in employment. In Program Year 2016, the HVRP served over 16,000 veterans experiencing homelessness, and 67 percent of these individuals were placed in jobs.

In our appearance at the Subcommittee’s recent hearing on homeless veterans, DOL asked the Subcommittee to consider revising the definition of homelessness to include expanding the eligible populations to include homeless veterans who have been recently housed through rapid rehousing and prevention programs, which, in our view, will greatly improve homeless veterans’ chances of success. We appreciate the Subcommittee’s response to our request. Studies have shown that barriers to employment still exist after immediate housing needs are met, and

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<sup>1</sup> 38 U.S.C. §§ 2021(e)(1)(F) and 2021A(f)(1) were extended through FY 2018 by the Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act of 2017, Public Law 115-62.

individuals still run a risk of becoming homeless again.<sup>2</sup> This eligibility expansion is especially critical now; as communities have become more successful at helping veterans to exit homelessness more quickly, the current statutory definition of “homeless veteran” creates an unintended barrier for those veterans to be able to access the employment services and opportunities that will help ensure that they never experience homelessness again.

However, in addition to VA programs, there are many local programs that also provide housing services to the homeless veteran population, including many programs funded through HUD’s Continuum of Care Program and Emergency Solutions Grant Program and other federal funding sources. The proposed legislative change would not allow veterans participating in these faith- or community-based housing programs to be eligible for HVRP services. Accordingly, DOL recommends that section 2(c) of the bill be revised to further amend 38 U.S.C. §2021(a) to also 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 60 days prior to requesting services. This would allow the greatest number of recently housed veterans to benefit from HVRP services.

The Department supports the intent of H.R. 4451 recognizing that it will mean a substantial increase in the population eligible to receive HVRP services. To accommodate these changes with existing funding, VETS might need to establish service priorities, in order to reach those with the greatest needs and to avoid duplication of services. The Department would welcome the opportunity to work with the Subcommittee to discuss further amendments to H.R. 4451 that would help to ensure the goals of the bill are met.

### **H.R. 4835—“Job TOOLS for Veterans Act”**

H.R. 4835, the “Job TOOLS for Veterans Act,” tasks the Secretary of Labor to conduct off-base transition training (OBTT) for veterans and their spouses in no less than 50 locations in States, with at least 20 States being areas with high unemployment among veterans, for a five-year period. At these locations, the Secretary is to provide training that generally follows the content of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), under section 1144 of title 10 of the U.S. Code.

The Department supports the concept of providing flexible service delivery but disagrees with this approach to serving veterans in communities. The TAP model is designed for transitioning active service members and spouses who often do not have access to community resources. Veterans and their spouses in communities are better served through the vast array of services available through the DOL funded workforce system.

The Department attempted such a pilot a few years ago with mixed results. The Dignified Burial and Other Veterans’ Benefits Improvement Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-260), included a similar provision directing the Secretary of Labor to conduct a two-year pilot program to provide the TAP Employment Workshop to veterans and their spouses at locations other than military

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<sup>2</sup> 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](https://www.dol.gov/vets/media/VETS_FY16_Annual_Report_to_Congress.pdf).

installations. In January 2015, VETS completed the pilot program. In total, VETS conducted 21 pilot workshops in three States: Georgia, Washington, and West Virginia.

Out of 250 total participants, 63 percent were within the 25-44 age group. The average attendance was 12 participants per workshop (ranging from 2 to 37 participants per workshop) and one workshop had to be cancelled due to a lack of participation. While participants in the pilot program found it helpful, the components of the program that were rated most beneficial are the same components found in the workforce system. Fifty-six percent of respondents indicated the resume writing instruction was the most beneficial, while 32 percent indicated interview skills as the most helpful. In VETS' recent report to the Subcommittee on TAP, VETS concluded, "the employment needs of veterans and spouses are best met through the services offered by their local AJC. These services may be supplemented where appropriate through reference to the online DOL Employment Workshop curriculum. DOL updates this curriculum on an ongoing basis. We believe that the programs currently in place are sufficient to meet the employment needs of veterans and spouses and see no need to provide a DOL Employment Workshop to veterans and spouses beyond what is already available online."

From this pilot, VETS gained a better understanding of the broad spectrum of individual employment needs among the veteran population, and indicated limitations of a single program of instruction. Additionally, it was a challenge for many of the participants to remain in the workshop for the entire three days due to personal and professional commitments. DOL believes this was a contributing factor to the low participation rates.

Veterans and their spouses may not require the full spectrum of skills covered in the Department's Employment Workshop. Depending on when the veteran left the military, their work and life experiences could be much broader than that of transitioning service members entering the civilian workforce for the first time. Veterans may only need assistance with resume writing, military skills translation, interviewing techniques, or the federal hiring process; or, they may require assistance for local or personal issues not covered in the Employment Workshop.

DOL maintains that employment assistance for veterans in communities is most effective when provided as part of a comprehensive delivery model focused through the State Workforce system, where veterans get priority of service and are often eligible for individualized career services. The Department believes it would be more effective for veterans and their spouses to leverage the existing employment resources from our AJCs and implement a one-day model to best meet the individual employment needs of veterans and their spouses. If the idea of specific veteran workshops is of continuing interest to the Subcommittee, we would be pleased to work with you to consider mechanisms to make these available.

For example, with lessons learned from the previous pilot project, VETS and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) partnered with the Johnson County AJC in Overland Park, Kansas, to pilot a different model to provide personalized employment resources to veterans and their spouses by leveraging existing local Workforce System resources. The intention of this model was to educate the participants on the vast array of services and have them register for follow-on services that best meet their personal needs. The feedback provided by VETS, VFW, and the local AJC was very positive. The Department was able to implement this model under current

authority at no additional cost. DOL sees value in considering alternatives to hold events like these on the weekend in order to attract participants including guardsmen and reservists who may not be available on weekdays.

Finally, we note that H.R. 4835 provides no additional funding for this pilot. DOL's Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 request for TAP could not support the regular program and a pilot of this magnitude.

### **Conclusion**

We at the Department are committed to working with our federal, state, and local partners to help our veterans to obtain and maintain suitable employment, and we look forward to working with the Subcommittee to ensure the continued success of our efforts. Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, 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.