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WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT
STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ON

PENDING LEGISLATION

MARCH 10, 2020

Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Bilirakis, and distinguished members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity – thank you for the opportunity to present Wounded Warrior Project's positions and perspectives on key issues and legislation before the Subcommittee. For the purposes of this hearing, we will limit our comments to the bill that accomplishes one of our key legislative priorities, to modernize the name of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program (VR&E).

Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) is transforming the way America's injured veterans are empowered, employed, and engaged in our communities. Since our inception in 2003, we have grown from a small group of friends and volunteers to an organization of nearly 700 employees spread across the country and overseas, delivering over a dozen direct-service programs to warriors and families in need. As part of our mission to connect, serve, and empower wounded warriors and those who support them, we are continually engaging with those we serve and commit ourselves to capture an informed perspective on the challenges this community faces. We are pleased to share that perspective for this hearing.

H.R. ____, a draft bill to rename the Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation Program as the Vocational Readiness and Employment Program, and for other purposes

WWP supports this legislation which changes the name of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program to the Vocational Readiness and Employment program. In doing so, it would accomplish

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one of our WWP 2020 Legislative Priorities, to “*Change (the) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program Name to Align with 21st Century Terminology*”¹.”

Under Chapter 31 of Title 38, VR&E provides employment opportunities through job training and other employment-related services, to include education, job search services, and small business start-up funds. The program is designed to evaluate and improve a veteran’s ability to achieve his or her vocational goal; provide services to qualify for suitable employment; enable a veteran to achieve maximum independence in daily living, and enable the veteran to become employed in a suitable occupation and to maintain suitable employment. WWP supports using the VR&E program as a pathway to long-term employment for disabled veterans. To ensure that this program is operating at its highest potential and capacity, it is important that its name fully reflects its mission.

The VR&E program traces its roots back to the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1918, passed by Congress to assist a generation of disabled veterans returning from World War I find suitable employment. At that time, the word “rehabilitation” was defined as “the restoration of someone to a useful place in society”². Today, that same term is defined by the same dictionary as “the action, process, or result of rehabilitating or of being rehabilitated: such as [...] the process of restoring a person to a drug- or alcohol-free state”³.

While the word “rehabilitation” was appropriate in 1918, it is no longer widely used in the same fashion today. At the present time, the word “rehabilitation” or “rehab” is associated with programs for those seeking assistance for substance abuse. This outdated terminology creates potential confusion among those not familiar with the program, including prospective employers.

Alternatively, the word “readiness” is currently defined by the dictionary as “the quality or state of being ready: such as [...] a state of preparation [or] prompt willingness”⁴. We believe that this term more appropriately conveys the nature of the VR&E program to civilians in 2020 and beyond. Just as veterans achieved a state of military readiness in order to accomplish their assigned missions while in uniform, the VR&E program provides them with the tools they need to achieve professional readiness in the civilian workforce.

CLOSING

Wounded Warrior Project thanks the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, its distinguished members, and all who have contributed to the discussions surrounding today’s hearing. We share a sacred

¹ https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/media/183664/wounded-warrior-project-2020-legislative-priorities-testimony_feb-26-2020-joint-hearing.pdf

² WEBSTER’S (1913), available at <https://www.webster-dictionary.org/definition/Rehabilitation>.

³ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “rehabilitation,” accessed Feb. 18, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rehabilitation>.

⁴ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “readiness,” accessed Mar. 5, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/readiness>.



obligation to serve our nation's veterans, and WWP appreciates the Committee's effort to identify and address the issues that challenge our ability to carry out that obligation as effectively as possible. We are grateful for the opportunity to share our views and stand ready to assist when needed on these issues and any others that may arise.