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STATEMENT
OF
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BEFORE
THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE
ON
ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

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Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you for this oversight hearing on the Transition Assistance Program (TAP).

The Department is committed to supporting our Warfighters and their families as they navigate the transition from military to civilian life. Required for all Service members with 180 days or more of continuous active duty, TAP is the essential foundation of that support, setting the conditions for successful transition. Each year, TAP provides approximately 200,000 Service members with a common level of support—regardless of location, Service, or component—at over 200 locations around the globe. The over-arching result is that today’s TAP provides Service members and their spouses more comprehensive transition preparation, information, support, and services than at any time during our Nation’s history.

TAP provides broad-ranging information, training, resources, and support that effectively prepares Service members for success as they navigate through the challenges and opportunities presented during the transition from active duty to civilian life. This support enables and empowers Service members to leverage their skills, knowledge, and abilities to reach their full potential, achieve individual post-transition goals, and continue to serve our Nation as successful Veterans who strengthen their communities.

Since its inception in 1991, TAP has undergone sweeping changes. These changes have ensured that TAP is relevant, progressive, and ever-improving to meet the needs of the transitioning Service member population. TAP’s design ensures both flexibility and relevance. The flexibility afforded by the current TAP design, allowing tailoring of the transition process to individual needs and goals, ensures that Service members receive information and resources that best support individualized preparation for transition. The relevance of TAP, focused on

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preparation for civilian life, ensures Service member buy-in and active participation. The effectiveness of this programmatic flexibility and relevance makes the Department and the TAP Interagency Partnership confident in saying that TAP works.

TAP works in large part because of the dynamic TAP interagency Partnership, a best-in-class example of effective Federal agency collaboration and service delivery. Seven Federal agencies and the Military Services comprise the TAP Interagency Partnership. The Interagency Partnership is a formal collaborative body committed to supporting and facilitating success for transitioning Service members to civilian life by providing synergy, consistency, and synchronization in TAP design and delivery. TAP delivery is a collaborative effort between the Department of Defense and the Military Services, the Department of Labor, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Small Business Administration, each with a primary area of responsibility and focus. TAP succeeds due to a robust interagency collaboration among the four agencies and Military Services listed above, along with program development and oversight support from three additional agencies – the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Education, and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

TAP is an individualized, robust program with alternate pathways and multiple levels of assistance. Each step of the process is guided by trained counselors, allowing Service members to be in control of their transition and use programs, resources, and information that fit their specific needs and align with their post-transition goals.

TAP begins with an Initial Counseling (IC) session initiated no later than 365 days prior to separation, with retirees strongly encouraged to begin TAP 24 months prior to retirement. During the individualized counseling session with a trained TAP counselor, a Service member completes a personal self-assessment and begins development of an Individual Transition Plan

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(ITP). Based on the personal self-assessment and counseling, the TAP counselor assigns the Service member to a transition tier level. The assigned tier level -- one (minimal assistance), two (medium assistance), or three (most assistance) -- determines the transition assistance a Service member needs. Each individual Service member's tier alignment details which TAP components, courses, and Career Readiness Standards (CRS) are mandatory. While the required elements associated with each tier are standardized, each Service delivers a Service-specific self-assessment, allowing maximum flexibility and alignment with the individual Service culture.

Once the IC is complete, the Service member attends the Pre-Separation Counseling Brief (Pre-Sep). Pre-Sep informs the Service member of various services, benefits, and resources available during and after transition. The Pre-Sep also familiarizes the Service member with available resources and content within the TAP courses. This provides the Service member with the knowledge and flexibility to determine when to use services based on individual needs and timeline for transition. Regardless of tier level, five core courses are mandatory for all transitioning Service members: Managing Your Transition, Military Occupational Code Crosswalk, Financial Planning for Transition, VA Benefits and Services, and DOL Employment Fundamentals for Career Transition.

Along with the core curriculum, TAP includes four two-day courses (tracks) to provide focused information and resources that are aligned with specific post-transition goals. The four tracks are employment, vocational, education, and entrepreneurship. Regardless of tier, Service members must elect a track based on individual post-transition goals and are encouraged to attend the track-specific course. However, only those determined as Tier Level 3 are required to attend the elected track. Military Departments may exempt Service members determined as Tier Level 2 from track attendance based on the results of their self-assessment and IC. Service

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members determined as Tier Level 1 are exempt from track attendance, but are strongly encouraged to attend their elected track. While Service members must elect one track during IC, the Department strongly encourages attendance at any additional track(s) that would provide valuable information for their transition.

Conducted no later than 90 days before transition from active duty, Capstone is the final component of TAP. During Capstone, the Commander or Commander's Designee reviews the Service member's transition journey to determine completion of all applicable components. Not fulfilling one of the identified components requires a warm handover by the Commander or designee. A warm handover facilitates the Service members' transition to the appropriate interagency partner such as the Department of Veterans Affairs or the Department of Labor. It is designed to create a connection between the Service member and the appropriate partner or agency with the resources to assist in transition and beyond. Service members may also request a warm handover from the TAP counselor.

The Department uses the Transition Assistance Participant Assessment (TAPA) to capture Service member experiences and knowledge gained. TAPA, along with diverse assessments from both governmental and non-governmental entities, allows the TAP Interagency Partnership to evaluate TAP, the perception of TAP, and the quality of the counseling and instruction provided. The TAPA measures participants' knowledge of the information presented during training and compiles participant satisfaction on the quality of instruction, content, and facilities. The TAPA also captures basic demographics, such as gender. Participation in the TAPA is voluntary and anonymous. However, the Department encourages Service members to complete the TAPA after each TAP course.

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For an effective TAP, Service members must obtain training relevant to their individual post-transition goals. To assess the effectiveness of TAP, the Department examines whether Service members take the track associated with their post-transition goal and complete the associated CRS. For example, if a Service member indicates employment as a post-transition goal, the Service member may elect to attend the DOL Employment Track and provide a completed resume to meet the CRS. Attendance at the track aligned with the identified post-transition goal provides the necessary training for successful transition. To evaluate the effectiveness of the training, the Department analyzes the elected track, track attendance, alignment with post-transition goal, and the completed CRS data points.

Military-to-civilian transition is an ever-evolving, complex, and multi-faceted environment in which individual goals can be as unique as each transitioning Service member. TAP is, and must remain, adaptive while vigilantly maintaining programmatic focus on two foundational and complimentary tenets: effective counseling and Service member buy-in. Correspondingly, TAP will sustain emphasis on an individualized approach that best meets Service member's post-transition goals. To that end, TAP will remain innovative, responsive, transparent, and collaborative. The Department, working closely with the Service members, Military Services, interagency partners, and non-governmental entities, and Congress, will continuously improve transition services and support. Together, the TAP interagency partners will build on current successes and achieve ever-improving outcomes for TAP-eligible Service members from all Components. This will be achieved by providing agile, adaptive, and individualized support and services, and address barriers that inhibit a successful transition to civilian life.

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In closing, Mr. Chairman, I thank you, the Ranking Member, and the members of this Subcommittee for your outstanding and continuing support of the men and women who proudly wear the uniform in defense of our great Nation.