

**STATEMENT**

**OF**

**PHILIP A. BURDETTE**

**PRINCIPAL DIRECTOR**

**OFFICE OF WOUNDED WARRIOR CARE AND TRANSITION**  
**POLICY**

**BEFORE THE**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

**HEARING**

**ON THE**

**TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

**JUNE 2, 2011**

Chairman Stutzman, Ranking Member Braley, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the views of the Department of Defense (DoD) on the performance of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). TAP is a collaborative partnership between DoD, the Department of Labor (DOL), and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and is the primary platform used to deliver an extensive array of services and benefits information to separating Service members. The Department also focuses on providing separating and retiring Service members useful information and assistance in all aspects of the transition process, including preparation for post-military employment.

## **TAP OVERVIEW**

Service members are required by law to commence pre-separation counseling no later than 90 days prior to active duty separation but are strongly advised and encouraged to start the process 12 months before separation, or 24 months before retirement. In addition to the mandatory pre-separation counseling, DoD counselors make every effort to encourage transitioning Service members to participate in the voluntary TAP components, which are the VA's Benefits Briefing, Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP) and DOL's TAP Employment Workshop. Each Department is independently responsible for how to provide its portion of TAP to Service members. The decision of how to accomplish that, including the utilization of contract support, resides solely with the individual Departments. DoD wants every effort made to ensure quality instructional delivery of the material.

Taking full advantage of what TAP has to offer enables Service members to be strong competitors for career opportunities in the civilian workforce. During mandatory pre-separation counseling, Service members review and complete an extensive checklist with a counselor. After Service members complete the pre-separation counseling portion of TAP, they receive a copy of the checklist (DD Form 2648 for Active Duty and DD Form 2648-1 for the National Guard and Reserves) so they can refer back to it and look up websites and other information to reinforce what they received during the pre-separation counseling session. The checklists have all the topics required by statute that a counselor must address during the pre-separation counseling

session. The forms are used by separating Service members and their spouses to record that pre-separation counseling was conducted.

If the Service member desires more information on any topic on the pre-separation counseling checklist that exceeds the general knowledge of the counselor, then the member checks a “YES” block next to the item on the form, and the counselor refers the Service member to a subject matter expert who is able to assist the member with the desired information, or get the answers to questions which the transition counselor may not have been able to answer. The subject matter expert may be a family support transition or education counselor located at the installation, or it may be a DOL or VA representative who provides TAP support at the installation.

## **ENHANCED TAP FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

To strengthen our TAP and reinforce its value to Service members and their families, the Department, in collaboration with our partners at VA and DOL, is committed to moving TAP from a traditional event-driven approach to a modern, innovative lifecycle approach. We are shifting from an end of military service event to an outcome-based model, that will measure success not only on the number of Service members who use the TAP process, but also on the number of transitioning service members and their families who find the TAP process beneficial in assisting them with their life goals, military career progression, and/or new careers/meaningful employment outside of uniformed service. We will be implementing this strategic plan with focuses on information technology, strategic communications, resources and performance management. The end-state for the TAP overhaul will be a population of Service members who have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to empower themselves to make informed career decisions, be competitive in the global work force and become positive contributors to their community as they transition from military to civilian life.

As part of this effort, we launched the DoD Career Decision Toolkit in August 2010. Available both online and in CD format, the Toolkit was developed in collaboration with the Military Services and our TAP partners at VA and DOL to help simplify the learning curve for transitioning Service members with the information, tools, and resources they need to succeed in the next phase of their lives. The toolkit uses the latest technology to consolidate the very best

teaching materials from all the Service branches and provides thousands of on-demand resources to Service members. It is interactive, simple to use and portable. The toolkit includes:

- More than 3,000 on-demand information and planning resources
- Transition subjects such as career exploration, financial planning, resume creation, interviewing skills and compensation negotiation
- Tools that enable Service members to catalogue their military skills, training, and experience in ways that transfer to civilian sector
- Post-Service benefits and resources
- Resources that allow users to self-assess individual transition needs and plan personalized options

One of the great benefits of this toolkit is the ability for the Service member to access the information anytime, anywhere as they have concerns/questions/issues with their transition.

In addition to the Toolkit, we began offering a series of virtual learning opportunities to transitioning Service members and military spouses on March 1st of this year. The free online classes are available to any Service member and military spouse worldwide and provide them with an interactive educational forum to delve into employment and career related topics, such as “Building Better Resumes” and “Financial Planning for a Career Change.” The classes are highly encouraged for Service members looking to bolster their transition-related knowledge, especially geographically separated members of the National Guard and Reserves and recovering Wounded Warriors. To date, there have been more than 1,330 registrations for these weekly classes by Guard and Reserve members, Wounded Warriors, family members, and Service members stationed around the world, including registrations by military personnel stationed overseas in Diego Garcia, BIOT; Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; Honduras; Italy; Japan; Korea; Germany; and members deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq. Military spouses are also among the many participants who have enjoyed this new delivery methodology.

The TAP Virtual Learning Seminars have also been enthusiastically embraced by senior military leadership and prominent figures in business and academia, some of whom now participate in online seminars as “surprise celebrity guests”. Leaders such as Army Reserve Command Sergeant Major Michael D. Schultz; Navy Reserve Force Master Chief Ronney A. Wright; Philip Dana, Amazon’s Military Recruiting HR Manager; and Dr. Timothy Butler, Harvard Business

School's Director of Career Development Programs, have made guest appearances to motivate the attendees, stress the importance of proper transition planning, and also to participate in the online classes along with the Service members and families.

The Toolkit and the virtual classes are just the beginning of our effort to move TAP into the digital spectrum.

We are developing an “end-to-end” virtual TAP delivery platform that will provide the backbone of the transformed program, integrating the Guard and Reserve components, as well as expanding services available to family members.

DoD has also played a supporting role with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on the initiative to increase hiring veterans in all federal agencies. This is now recognized as President Obama's Veterans Employment Initiative that directs all Executive Agencies to increase veteran employment. TAP is one of the programs we will use to educate and inform Service members about federal service career opportunities.

Additionally, we established our presence on the social networks. Our Facebook page continues to help promote information that impacts transition and has helped several Service members who may have otherwise missed critical transition planning information. During this fiscal year, fans and non-fans have viewed our Facebook postings over 892,500 times. Our social network continues to expand as employers begin posting employment opportunities and provide mentoring advice for transitioning personnel.

### **Focus on Credentialing**

The Department continues to provide licensure and certification information in a range of ways and in different formats in order to appeal to individual learning styles and ensure the widest possible dissemination. It is important to note, DoD does not serve as a credentialing body. These bodies are typically well-defined for licensure requirements by governmental agencies—federal, state, or local—who grant licenses to individuals to practice a specific occupation, such

as a medical license for physicians. State or federal laws or regulations define the standards that individuals must meet to become licensed.

Non-governmental agencies, associations, and even private sector companies grant certifications to individuals who meet predetermined qualifications. These qualifications are generally set by professional associations (for example, National Commission for the Certification of Crane Operators) or by industry and product-related organizations (for example, Novell Certified Engineer). Certification is typically an optional credential; although some state licensure boards and some employers may require it. For many occupations, more than one organization may offer certifications.

### **Verification of Military Experience and Training**

The Verification of Military Experience and Training (VMET) document was established by Public Law in November 1990 to assist departing service members transitioning to civilian life by providing a verification of their military skills and training, and translating them into civilian terms. The Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), a DoD activity that supports the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness (OUSD/P&R), has the responsibility for producing the VMET documents and maintaining the VMET website.

The enhanced DD Form 2586, Verification of Military Experience and Training, is now available on demand directly from the DMDC website at [www.dmdc.osd.mil/vmet](http://www.dmdc.osd.mil/vmet). Access to the document is protected by secure login protocols.

The VMET is not an official transcript for purposes of granting college credit, but it can be used for verification of having met training and/or course requirements to qualify for civilian occupations, certificates, licenses, or programs of study. Credit recommendations from the American Council of Education (ACE) for occupations and/or courses are listed when they are available, though academic institutions determine which credits are applicable to a program of study.

## **A Lifecycle of Credentialing Education**

The Department realized that for licensure and certification programs to be effective, they must be introduced to Service members early in their careers, not at the time of separation. We are taking full advantage of the DOL's Career One Stop ([www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org)) online resource and promoting utilization throughout the entire military lifecycle to reinforce the value of military training and experience. In this application, Service members link to the *Credentials Center*, which they can use to locate State-specific occupational licensing requirements, agency contact information and information about industry-recognized certifications. There are also associated workforce education and examinations that test or enhance knowledge, experience and skills in related civilian occupations and professions.

Other resources such as the Army and Navy Credentialing Opportunities Online (COOL) websites are readily available. Army and Navy COOL sites explain how Soldiers and Sailors can meet civilian certification and licensure requirements related to their military occupational specialties or ratings. They also serve as a resource to identify what civilian credentials relate to a Service member's Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) or Rating and how to obtain them. The Air Force emphasis on licensure and certification is two-fold--career-related degrees and certification from civilian schools. The COOL search-tool equivalent for Airmen, known as the Credentialing and Research Tool (CERT), links the CCAF degree programs with nationally-recognized professional certifications relevant to specific career fields.

Additional resources include the DoD/DOL United Services Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP), the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES), and TurboTAP, DoD's official TAP website. All of the aforementioned resources were developed and designed to help Service members translate their skills and experience into opportunities for civilian employment.

## **DoD AND MILITARY SERVICES PROGRAMS AND TOOLS**

In recognition of the importance of the need for highly-qualified, experienced information assurance personnel, DoD has established a policy requiring certain individuals with privileged access to DoD information systems to obtain civilian credentials. DoD Manual 8570.1-M

requires any full- or part-time military Service member, contractor, or foreign employee with privileged access to a DoD information system, regardless of job or occupational series, to obtain a commercial information security credential accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) or equivalent authorized body under the ANSI/ISO/IEC 17024 Standard. The Manual also requires that those same employees maintain their certified status with a certain number of hours of continuing professional education each year. The number of people affected by this mandate is estimated to top 100,000, including any full- or part-time military Service member, contractor, or foreign employee with privileged access to a DoD information system, regardless of job or occupational series.

## **OTHER TRANSITION-RELATED EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES**

### **Operation Warfighter (OWF)**

OWF is a DoD-sponsored internship program that offers recuperating wounded, ill and injured Service members meaningful activity that positively impacts wellness and offers a process of transitioning back to duty or entering into the civilian workforce. The main objective of OWF is to place recuperating Service members in supportive work settings that positively benefit the recuperation process.

OWF represents a great opportunity for transitioning Service members to augment their employment readiness by building their resumes, exploring employment interests, developing job skills, benefiting from both formal and on-the-job training opportunities, and gaining valuable Federal government work experience that will help prepare them for the future. The program strives to demonstrate to participants that the skills they have obtained in the military are transferable into civilian employment. For Service members who will return to duty, the program enables these participants to maintain their skill sets and provides the opportunity for additional training and experience that can subsequently benefit the military. OWF simultaneously enables Federal employers to better familiarize themselves with the skill sets of wounded, ill and injured Service members as well as benefit from the considerable talent and dedication of these transitioning Service members.

To date, the program has placed approximately 1,800 Service members across more than 100 different Federal employers and sub-components. The program currently has 390 active internship placements.

#### The Veterans Employment Initiative (VEI)

The VEI, created by Executive Order 13518, aims to aggressively enhance recruitment strategies and promote employment opportunities, which will lead to an increase in the number of Veterans in the Federal government. DoD is a strategic partner on the Steering Committee for this initiative, along with the OPM, VA, DOL, and Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The Order also established an interagency Council on Veterans Employment that advises the President and the Director of OPM on the initiative. The Council serves as a national forum to promote Veterans' employment opportunities in the Executive Branch and develops performance measures to assess the effectiveness of the VEI. This led DoD implement an agency-specific DoD Veterans Strategic Plan, which includes performance measures and expected outcomes. Agencies covered by the VEI have established Veterans Employment Program Offices or designated a full-time staff person dedicated to providing employment services to Veterans. The DoD Veterans Employment Program Office assists Veterans with navigating the application process in their search for employment. Veterans and the public may also access the VEI's helpful website at [www.fedshirevets.gov](http://www.fedshirevets.gov).

#### Education and Employment Initiative (E2I)

Contributing factors to unemployment among wounded warriors include the lack of a focused employment, educational, and rehabilitation process that engages Service members as soon as they begin treatment at a medical treatment facility (MTF), as well as a lack of qualified career counselors who can administer career assessments and match Service members to careers. DoD, in collaboration with VA, DOL, and OPM, is developing E2I to address these shortfalls. E2I will leverage best practices and the good work already being done from existing employment and training initiatives in both the federal and private sectors. The first phase is a tiered pilot program that launched in May at two locations.

The goal of the E2I pilot is to engage Service members early in their recovery to identify the skills they have, the skills they need, and the employment opportunities where those skills can be matched and put to good use. The E2I process will begin within 30-90 days of a recovering Service member (RSM) arriving at a MTF, taking advantage of a recovery time that averages 311 days but can be as long as five years. Once they are ready to begin the E2I process, all applicants will be administered a comprehensive skills assessment to include understanding their current disability, current MOS experience, career desires, education and training background, and special accommodations that may be required for a particular type of position. A highly trained career and vocation counselor who has extensive knowledge of the issues facing wounded warriors will provide this assessment.

The E2I counselor will work with the RSM from the initial stages of creating an individual development plan goal setting, course selection or education requirements, through the completion of training/certification to return to duty or alternate job placement. A Mentor and Coach will be assigned to all E2I applicants at the beginning of the process to provide personalized assistance and guidance throughout the E2I process from recruitment at the MTF into the program, through placement in their new MOS or chosen career.

Our plan is to evaluate the E2I program over the next 12 to 18 months and refine the E2I process with new ideas and best practices. Once this evaluation is complete, our plan is to continue our E2I roll-out, which will include partnering with OPM, VA and DOL to ensure we have standardized practices and comprehensive handoffs as the RSM leaves the responsibility of the DoD.

## **CLOSING**

The measure of a successful transition does not focus solely on TAP, but rather is shared with military leadership at every level within the command structure and the degree of personal involvement by the Service member and his or her family. We must continue to find new ways to not only reach our Service members and provide useful information to them, but also strive to ensure they are armed and prepared to address all the various challenges and opportunities in

their transition to civilian life. It is through their success that we measure ours and continually look for better ways to provide the help they need.

In summary, the end-state for the enhanced TAP for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century by DoD, DOL, and the VA will consist of a population of Service members who have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to empower themselves to make informed career decisions, be competitive in the global workforce and become positive contributors to their community as they transition from the military to civilian life.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. On behalf of the men and women in the military today and their families, I thank you and the members of this Committee for your steadfast support.