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***STATEMENT OF
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OF THE
DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
JUNE 15, 2016***

Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of DAV (Disabled American Veterans) and our 1.3 million members, all of whom were wounded, injured or made ill in wartime military service, I am pleased to testify at this hearing concerning “Examining 21st Century Programs and Strategies for Veteran Job Seekers.” DAV is dedicated to a single purpose: empowering veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity.

DAV’s Employment Program

DAV recognizes that veterans, especially ill and injured veterans, continue to face challenges in obtaining employment. In 2014, DAV empowered America’s veterans by establishing a National Employment Program and committed more than \$800,000 to its startup so the program could begin work immediately.

The need for DAV’s Employment Program is overwhelming. According to the Department of Labor (DoL), the unemployment rate for male veterans is 4.5 percent compared to female veterans at 5.4 percent.¹ Tens of thousands are now making the transition from military to civilian life. About 250,000 service members transitioned in 2015, and by 2017, we expect that number to be close to one million.

That is why we partnered with RecruitMilitary® and Veteran Recruiting®. Through these partnerships, DAV has sponsored a total of 128 all veteran career fairs in cities nationwide as well as 3 virtual events, to connect veterans with employers who are committed to hiring them. Since the inception of DAV’s Employment Program, 54,347 attendees have connected with 7,373 exhibitors that resulted in 15,734 job offers. I invite you to see the All Veterans Career Fair schedule at jobs.dav.org.

¹ <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.nr0.htm> Obtained June 7, 2016.

Addressing veterans' unemployment head-on, DAV's employment program connects transitioning active duty, guard and reserve members, and veterans and their spouses with employers. DAV recognizes the value, talent, education and work ethic that veterans add to the workforce. We connect veterans with employers nationwide who are actively seeking the unique talents veterans bring to the workplace.

In order to give veterans every advantage in the transition process, we incorporated our VA benefits and claims experts into these career fairs. DAV's service officers are a professional team of advocates, all veterans themselves, who help veterans and their families access the full range of benefits available to them. DAV helps veterans and their families successfully file claims for VA disability compensation, rehabilitation and education programs, pensions, death benefits, employment and training programs.

The DAV Employment Program provides many resources outside of our sponsored All Veteran Career Fairs. At jobs.dav.org, visitors will find a job-search board with more than 800,000 employment opportunities. We average about 5,000 visits to our webpage every month.

Jobs.dav.org will soon expand and improve, to feature additional employment and educational resources, webinars, and will promote certain employers who have demonstrated that hiring veterans is part of their business strategy.

DAV encourages job seekers to visit jobs.dav.org to access the Employment Assistance Request Form, participants will receive updates on employment-related news, and their information is accessible to employers who are seeking their talents.

National Veterans Transition Services, Inc. REBOOT

Another program focused to reduce the unemployment rates for veterans is the National Veterans Transition Services, Inc. (NVTSI) REBOOT. NVTSI specializes in military to civilian reintegration through their signature REBOOT program. Since 2010, the mission of REBOOT has been "to assist veterans in making a successful transition from military service to civilian life through applied behavioral education." A non-profit, San Diego-based, veterans service organization, NVTSI asserts that in order to achieve a higher return on investment for veterans, there is a need to re-socialize them via a reverse boot camp (REBOOT) to address the gap in services.

REBOOT is an innovative, evidence-based, intensive three-week workshop that addresses the root causes of reintegration failure from a holistic perspective using cognitive structuring to help participants redefine their personal identity, purpose in life, and desired occupation – from the inside out. The REBOOT Workshops™ are conducted across the nation and the curriculum includes one week covering personal transition, one week on lifestyle transition, one week of career transition, and supportive follow-up services. NVTSI has become a national leader in veteran transition, achieving 95 to 97 percent employment/education success and a 93 percent retention rate one year after graduation. NVTSI has also proven it can decrease recidivism among incarcerated veterans by 28 percent.²

² Presentation by Maurice Wilson, MCPO, USN (Ret) Co-Founder/President/Executive Director National Veterans Transition Service, Inc. aka REBOOT. https://www.dropbox.com/s/c81hswb2kb0xecj/REBOOT_Evaluation_Report.pdf?dl=0

Over the past six years REBOOT has conducted 82 workshops and graduated over 1,450 service members and veterans and gained national recognition by the White House as a Champion of Change.³ Their model and system of delivery has been validated independently by the University of San Diego. REBOOT has also successfully piloted six all-female veteran workshops to focus their program on comprehensive reintegration services for women veterans.

Transition Assistance Program

For men and women alike, a key requirement for a successful transition away from military service is the ability to establish satisfying, stable employment as a civilian. Most military members make this transition successfully, but some struggle. With the United States facing a significant drawdown of about a million service members by 2020⁴, it is critically important that employment programs and services are effective at helping men and women in the military make this transition smoothly.

The challenge of making the transition from military service to civilian employment has been widely discussed.⁵ For many in the military, seeking civilian employment may be the first time they have developed a résumé or interviewed for a job. For most, it can be a challenge to translate the skills, knowledge, and experience gained in military assignments into language accessible to a civilian hiring audience. In particular, specialized training and certificates gained during service do not generally translate into certification or licensure requirements for an equivalent position in the civilian sector. Finally, military members who move frequently or have been absent on deployments may not have a local network of civilian contacts who can help identify employment opportunities where they live.

In recognition of the need to help service members to transition effectively to civilian life, Congress established the original Transition Assistance Program (TAP) in 1991.⁶ In 2013, TAP was redesigned to standardize the opportunities, services, and training that service members receive to prepare them to pursue their post-military career goals. The redesigned TAP includes an outcome-based curriculum known as Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success). Transition GPS covers all departing service members. It is intended to help service members identify their post-separation education, financial and employment goals. After participating in the structured program, service members are expected to have clear goals for employment or education and will know where and how to access the services that can help them achieve those goals.

DAV's unprecedented report, *Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home*, found there are no comprehensive studies that evaluate the effectiveness of the TAP program. The hallmark of adult learning is that adults seek out and absorb information when they perceive that they need it, not

³ White paper: Developing a System to Overcome Failure of Social Reintegration for Military Veterans – NVTSI 2016. Adapted from Helping Veterans Successfully Transition from the Battlefield to the Homefront! By Brianna Bendotti, Grey Hoff, Samantha Kahoe, and Victoria Schaefer-Ramirez Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology Fall 2015.

⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office (2014). *Transitioning Veterans: Improved Oversight Needed to Enhance Implementation of Transition Assistance Program*. Washington, DC. GAO-14-144

⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, Defense Business Board (2013). *Employing our Veterans Part II: Service Member Transition*. Washington, DC.

⁶ Transition Assistance Program 1991 (P. L. 101-510) S 502 (a)(1)

necessarily when it is presented. Some transitioning service members may not be primed to absorb TAP training pre-separation but would be more receptive once they are actively seeking help and assistance 6-12 months later.⁷

The DoL has conducted research on how to best serve the employment needs of women veterans and provide them with many customized programs, communications and supports; however, despite these targeted efforts, the unemployment and under-employment rates for women veterans are slightly higher than their male counterparts.⁸ While DoL found no employment challenges that are exclusive to women veterans, it indicated that the demographics of this group make it more likely they are in subpopulations that have higher unemployment rates.⁹ Innovative outreach efforts to ensure women are aware of these services are necessary. Additionally, employment assistance will become even more pressing as the Department of Defense (DoD) executes its current downsizing plan. Some service members who may have expected to complete full military careers will be thrust, with little preparation, into civilian communities and job markets.

According to a recent review of the program by the Government Accountability Office (GAO),¹⁰ comprehensive data on participation rates and information on the effectiveness of the training is not readily available and post-transition outcome data is limited. The data that is gathered has not been publicly released with an analysis of outcomes and satisfaction by gender. It is estimated that 200,000 women are expected to leave the military over the next four to five years, therefore, it is imperative that we improve our efforts and support for women veterans' employment.

While there is no direct evidence that this transition is any different for women than it is for men, women veterans' unemployment rate remains stubbornly high and women have voiced frustration with the transition process. For instance, women veterans were less likely than men (32 percent compared to 47 percent) to believe the military was doing enough to ease transitions to civilian life, and more women (18 percent) than men (7 percent) doubt their military skills will be useful in the civilian job market.¹¹ Other studies found that women felt they had been led to believe that military training would be more valuable than it is in their search for employment.^{12,13}

Delegates to our more recent National Convention adopted Resolution No. 136 urging Congress to monitor the review of the Transition GPS program, its workshops, training methodology and delivery of services, and the collection and analysis of course critiques; and to ensure the inclusion of DAV and other veterans service organizations in workshops, in order to confirm the program is meeting its objective, and follow up with participants to determine if they have found gainful employment.

⁷ <https://www.dav.org/wp-content/uploads/women-veterans-study.pdf>. Obtained June 11, 2016.

⁸ U.S. Dept. of Labor, Economic News Release, "Employment Situation of Veterans – 2014." Mar. 18, 2015

⁹ U.S. Dept. of Labor, Fact Sheet, "Women Veterans: Equally Valued. Equally Qualified. Equally Served." Retrieved Apr. 2015.

¹⁰ U.S. Government Accountability Office (2014). Transitioning Veterans: Improved Oversight Needed to Enhance Implementation of Transition Assistance Program. Washington, DC. GAO-14-144

¹¹ DiJulio, B., Deane, C., Firth, J., Craighill, P., Clement, S., Brodie, M. (2014) After the Wars: Survey of Iraq & Afghanistan active duty soldiers and veterans. Kaiser Family Foundation. Personal communications DiJulio, B.

¹² Business and Professional Womens Foundation.(2007).Women Veterans inTransition. Washington, DC.

¹³ Thom, K. B., E (2011). Chicagoland female veterans; a qualitative study of attachment to the labor force. American Institute for Research National Center on Family Homelessness.

Moreover, DAV Resolution No. 138 calls on Congress to support licensure and certification of active-duty service personnel, which would eliminate employment barriers that impede the transfer of military job skills to the civilian labor market. The DAV calls on Congress to engage in a national dialogue, working closely with the Administration generally, and DoD, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and DoL specifically, as well as state governments, employers, trade unions, and licensure and credentialing entities to establish a clear process so military training meets civilian certification and licensure requirements for the states in which veterans choose to live once they leave the military.

This resolution was reaffirmed in *Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home* report, which recommends that the DoL should work closely with state certification organizations to translate military training and certification to private sector equivalents. Furthermore, DAV recommended that VA and DoD establish a grant program to accelerate these efforts.

Women Veterans Population and Women Veterans Unemployment

DAV's *Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home* provides a roadmap to support women veterans on their transition from military service to veteran status. Women veterans have remained invisible for far too long to the federal, state and local programs that have a mission to support them. The need will become even more pressing as the DoD executes its downsizing plan and those who expected full military careers are suddenly thrust, with little warning, into the ill-prepared civilian community. The time has come to push for change in reintegration and readjustment support for women as they transition to post-military life. This report and the ongoing advocacy of DAV aims to trigger urgent actions from VA, DoD and other stakeholders, for an integrated approach to address the transition needs of women veterans, and an overhaul of the culture, values, and services of the federal system.¹⁴

Until 1973, women remained a very small minority of the Armed Forces population due to legislation that imposed a two percent cap on women's participation in the military. When those gender caps were lifted, women entered military service at unprecedented rates. Today women constitute approximately 20 percent of new recruits, 14.5 percent of the 1.4 million active duty component and 18 percent of the 850,000 reserve component. Almost 280,000 women served Post-9/11 during the Global War on Terrorism in Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn in Afghanistan and Iraq.¹⁵

Current transition programs and treatments for relationship building, family reintegration, prevention of intimate partner violence and support for family functioning are based on civilian programs and lack evidence of effectiveness in military and veteran populations. Transition support programs that are designed for prevention, treatment and support for women and their families are needed.¹⁶

The report findings and recommendations cover the broad range of transition needs of women veterans in culture change, health care, military sexual trauma, disability compensation, justice,

¹⁴ Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home, page 3.

¹⁵ Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home, page 8.

¹⁶ Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home, page 6.

family and community, education, transition assistance, employment, and housing. The DAV report provides the 27 key recommendations in these areas to drive immediate action and change.

The reasons underlying this persistently higher rate of unemployment among women veterans are not definitively known. However, characteristics such as a younger age, being unmarried or divorced, lower educational attainment and having children at home are associated with a higher rate of unemployment and are also prevalent among women veterans.

Even when these factors are controlled, Post-9/11 women veterans and National Guard women veterans have higher rates of unemployment than other groups. Given this constellation of factors working against employment success for some women veterans and their demonstrated higher rates of unemployment, it is important for all of the partners working on veteran transition challenges to identify the specific and unique needs of women and institute specialized programs and outreach for them.

Operation Reinvent

Operation Reinvent founder Julie Lewit-Nirenberg commented that the DAV report, *Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home*, was a valuable resource in determining what she could do to help women veterans' transition from service.¹⁷

A program focused to reduce women veteran unemployment is the New York City based, Operation Reinvent; a non-profit organization, founded in 2013, dedicated to providing expert guidance and resources to help transitioning military women identify career paths that suit their skills, education, goals and interests; Thus, unleashing the power of women veterans.

The Operation Reinvent Career Transition and Empowerment Program incorporates hands-on professional image development, stress management, year-long mentoring and real-time job search opportunities.¹⁸ The program occurs in-service prior to discharge and focuses on transitioning women service members, because women are known to not identify as veterans upon discharge from service.¹⁹ Workshops connect women directly with experts in human resources, workforce initiatives and job interviewing.²⁰

An Operation Reinvent workshop occurred June 8-9, 2016 at the Soldier Support Centers in Fort Bragg, North Carolina and Fort Campbell, Kentucky with 50 women soldier attendees at each location. The first day of the Workshop was webcast to both locations in real-time from CBS Studios in New York City. Nationwide webcasts in each time zone are being planned.

Mr. Chairman, DAV appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony for this hearing to outline just a few innovative and effective employment transition programs. We look forward to working with this Subcommittee to ensure that the men and women who stood up for America have the tools, resources and opportunities they need to competitively enter the job market and secure

¹⁷ Julie Lewit-Nirenberg, founder of Operation Reinvent, phone interview June 10, 2016.

¹⁸ <http://operationreinvent.org/mission/our-plan/> obtained June 11, 2016.

¹⁹ Julie Lewit-Nirenberg, founder of Operation Reinvent, phone interview June 10, 2016.

²⁰ Amanda Dolasinski Staff writer. http://www.fayobserver.com/military/workshop-helps-female-veterans-transition-into-civilian-careers/article_4e74aa7c-bc26-53be-a7ee-30fd265677c7.html obtained June 11, 2016.

meaningful employment. I would be pleased to address any questions you, or members of the Subcommittee may have on the topics covered in my testimony.