



ISSUE BRIEF: EXPAND AND STRENGTHEN SERVICE MEMBER TRANSITION, EMPLOYMENT, AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR VETERANS

The Situation

- Roughly 250,000 service members per year leave military service and need transition assistance, along with employment and education opportunities. These services are fragmented between the Departments of Veterans Affairs (VA), Defense (DOD), Homeland Security (DHS), and Labor (DOL), resulting in some veterans receiving discordant or no services. Fragmentation of these services reduces access and awareness of existing employment opportunities and education services, as well as other vital information they may need.
- The DOL Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in November 2020, the veteran unemployment rate was 6.3 percent, almost doubling from the 3.3 percent the previous year. This is undoubtedly the result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting economic shutdowns. While the impact to service-disabled veterans' unemployment numbers is still unknown, we can be assured that it would have increased similarly as service-disabled veterans have traditionally had higher unemployment rates than their non-disabled veteran counterparts.
- The Transition Goals, Plans and Success (GPS) Program prepares service members transitioning to civilian life to pursue their post-service career goals. The information provided in Transition GPS is becoming more consistent among military service branches through diligent advocacy by DAV and other veterans service organizations (VSO). Transition GPS, which the DOD launched in 2012, utilizes briefings that emphasize the service members' potential entitlement to benefits such as health care, disability compensation, education, employment, and other services and support provided by VSOs.

The Challenge

- Veterans' unemployment, especially rates among service-disabled veterans, remains a matter of concern. While services such as health care, education and housing matters are administered by the VA, veterans' employment assistance is administered by the DOL.
- The need for VA Veteran Readiness & Employment (VR&E) services is escalating with the increase of separating service members returning from deployment in Southwest Asia. In addition, stagnant funding for VR&E has adversely impacted the congressionally recommended 1:125 counselor-to-client ratio, which is crucial to providing one-on-one counseling. Also of concern is the significant number of veterans who do not complete their VR&E plan and veterans who are considered successfully rehabilitated after only 60 days of employment despite many employment probationary periods exceeding a 60 day-period.
- Furthermore, while participation in the Transition Assistance Program is mandatory, not all discharging service members attend Transition GPS. A November 2017 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report noted that the DOD met its attendance goal of 85% of active duty members in 2016; however, GAO asserted that the DOD lacked data for 48% of National Guard and Reserve members and 12% of active duty members, which resulted in DOD potentially misstating the performance of the TAP program. Transition GPS must remain a focal

point for separating service members, with the ability to adjust to the changing needs of this transitioning population.

The Solution

- Congress must provide the resources necessary to meet the mandated VR&E counselor-to-client ratio of 1:125 to allow for better one-on-one counseling. In addition, VR&E should ensure that each counselor's main duty should be on helping veterans and not on administrative tasks.
- VR&E should be required to follow-up after one year of employment to determine successful rehabilitation.
- DOD, VA, DOL, DHS must take whatever actions are necessary, including requesting additional funding, to ensure that 100 percent of transitioning service members participate in and complete Transition GPS.