

## **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. Providing these services is 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 December 2017, the veteran unemployment rate was 3.8 percent, down from 4.1 percent last year and the lowest December rate in over a decade. The unemployment rate for veterans who served after September 11, 2001 fell from 5.7 percent to 3.3 percent. While these numbers are encouraging there are still areas to focus on such as the overall female veteran unemployment rate, which rose in December 2017 from 3.0 to 3.6 percent from the previous December.
- 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).

### **The Challenge**

- Veterans' unemployment, especially 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 Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E) services is escalating with the increase of separating service members returning from deployment in Southwest Asia. In addition, funding for VR&E has adversely impacted the counselor-to-client ratio to more than the congressionally recommended 1:125, which is crucial to providing one-on-one counseling. The success of this program is also affected by a significant number of veterans who do not complete their VR&E plan, and those who do are considered successfully rehabilitated after only 60 days of employment despite many employment probationary periods exceeding 60 days.
- While participation in the Transition Assistance Program is mandatory, not all discharging service members attend Transition GPS. A March 2014, Government Accountability Office report noted the DOD attendance goal as 85 percent. 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 VR&E counselor-to-client ratio of 1:125 to allow for better one-on-one counseling and for follow-up after one year of employment to determine successful rehabilitation.
- With Congressional oversight, DOD, VA, DOL, DHS and all service branches must ensure all transitioning service members participate in Transition GPS. Transition GPS, which the DOD launched in 2012, utilizes briefings that emphasizes the service members' potential entitlement to benefits such as health care, disability compensation, education, employment, and other services and support provided by VSOs.