

**TESTIMONY OF
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR**

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

MARCH 31, 2011

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

Thank you for the opportunity to appear as a witness before the Subcommittee and speak to you on the Department's interagency cooperation with the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E), and our joint efforts to serve our nation's disabled veterans in need of VR&E services that lead to employment.

The Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) proudly serves Veterans and transitioning Service Members by providing resources and expertise to assist and prepare them to obtain meaningful careers, maximize their employment opportunities and protect their employment rights. We do that through four major programs that are an integral part of Secretary Solis's vision of "*Good Jobs for Everyone.*"

- The Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG), which provide Federal funds to support State-employed Local Veterans' Employment Representatives

(LVERS) and Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPs);

- The Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshops (TAP);
- The Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP); and
- The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA).

Much of VETS' interaction with the VR&E program is through the Workforce Investment System and the outstationing of Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program specialists (DVOPs) at VR&E offices. Accordingly, VETS continues to work in partnership with its JVSG recipients on behalf of VR&E job-ready veterans who are referred to and registered with State Workforce Agencies (SWA) for intensive employment services.

The Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) is a State grant program started in 1977 and authorized by Section 4103(A) of Title 38, United States Code. DVOP specialists provide intensive employment assistance to meet the employment needs of eligible Veterans. DVOP specialists provide intensive services at the One-Stop Career Centers and at the VR&E offices. They also provide recovery and employment assistance to wounded and injured Service Members receiving care at Department of Defense military treatment facilities and Warrior Transition Units through the Recovery & Employment Assistance Lifelines (REALifelines) program, working closely with the VR&E rehabilitation counselors also at these facilities. DVOPs focus their services to disabled Veterans. DVOPs also provide services through the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program, Veterans' Workforce Investment Program, Transition Assistance Program, and Incarcerated Veterans' Transition Program.

Background of Collaboration

In 2005, senior leadership from VETS and VR&E, including the then Assistant Secretary for VETS and Director for VR&E, met with the Subcommittee staff to discuss how the two agencies could better collaborate. As a result of that meeting, a new Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Department of Labor (DOL) and VA was executed and

three work groups were established. These three work groups subsequently were combined into a Joint Working Group (JWG).

The VA/DOL Joint Working Group (JWG)

The goal of the JWG is to improve the quality of employment services and job placements for veterans enrolled in VR&E programs.

DOL and VA leadership have taken an active role with the JWG. I have taken a personal interest in this issue and was involved in the three work groups and in the creation of the JWG. I take this cooperative effort very seriously.

The three work groups were established to execute the requirements of the MOA. VETS' participants have included one individual from each of our six regions and at least three individuals from the national office. The three work groups dealt with the following subjects:

- Performance Measures for Assessment of Partnership Program Results;
- Curriculum Design; and
- Joint Data Collection, Analysis, and Reports.

These groups made significant accomplishments; they:

- Facilitated a pilot program to identify and catalogue best practices from existing sites. This one-year pilot involved eight locations nationwide.
- Developed roles and responsibilities for the major agencies involved in the VR&E process.
- Identified the major issues to providing shared data between the VA and DOL.
- Identified the joint training requirements for both DOL/VETS and VR&E employees involved in employment assistance at the VR&E locations.
- Developed a technical assistance guidance document that specified the roles and responsibilities and reporting requirements for both DOL/VETS and VR&E staff.

Both DOL and the VA subsequently published this technical assistance guidance document in December 2008.

As a result of the initiative to clearly identify roles and responsibilities, we have designated the outstationed DVOP position at the VR&E offices as an Intensive Service Coordinator (ISC). This designation, with new duty requirements, clearly differentiates the work required at VR&E sites from the roles of the DVOP at a One Stop Career Center. The ISC provides employment information to VR&E participants during their rehabilitation program, and refers them at the end of the program to DVOPs at One Stop Career Centers. The DVOPs at One Stop Career Centers then provide intensive services to referred participants to assist them in obtaining employment.

Besides working with Job-Ready Veterans, the JWG also planned to involve DVOPs at the front end of VR&E process to help Veterans determine local labor market information. This interaction was intended to facilitate the rehabilitation planning process by providing the Veteran and the VR&E counselor with current data on salary and job outlook as well as increasing understanding of working conditions for specific occupations.

In December 2008, the end of the pilot program was marked by a webcast to all VR&E locations that initiated the implementation phase of this project.

In support of the technical assistance guidance, in 2009 VETS issued guidance that each state's JVSG Five Year Strategic Plan (FY 2010-2015) would include the outstationing of a DVOP specialist at each VR&E Regional Office. All states subsequently incorporated the ISC into their FY 2010 state plans.

Following this first year of implementation in 2010, VA and DOL will evaluate the program under the new guidance, and determine if changes are required to either the MOA or the technical assistance guidance.

Current Status of DOL Support to the VR&E Program

VETS continues to work to ensure that a DVOP is outstationed at each of the 57 VR&E Regional Offices. In some instances, the states, due to staffing allowances or traditional roles, still have assigned at a VR&E office a Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER), fulfilling the role of an ISC. There is currently either a DVOP specialist or LVER outstationed at least half-time in 48 of the VA Regional Offices and in 19 satellite offices. This equates to 51.0 FTE DVOP and 4.0 FTE LVER for a total FTE of 55.0.

In FY 2010, 4,989 disabled Veterans who completed VR&E were referred to the State Workforce Agencies for intensive employment services. Of these, 1,764 were placed into employment for a placement rate of 35 percent. This was at an average annual wage of \$37,800.

During the first quarter of FY 2011, 1,323 referrals were made to the State Workforce Agencies. We do not have final information on their outcomes at this point.

The VETS focus on serving disabled veterans who participate in the VE&E program remains of utmost importance to us. The ultimate goal in this VA/DOL partnership is successful job placement and adjustment to employment for disabled veterans without duplication, fragmentation, or delay in the services provided.

We are proud of our collaboration with the VA to increase employment opportunities for service-disabled veterans. That positive working relationship has also carried over into other initiatives and strengthened cooperation and coordination between VETS and our state workforce partners.

This concludes my statement and I would be happy to respond to any questions.