

**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 9, 2006

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss the collaborative efforts of the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service to work with the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Service and our joint efforts to implement our latest Memorandum of Agreement (MOA).

The current MOA was signed on October 3, 2005. The new MOA updates and replaces the MOA signed by our two agencies in 1995. However, expanded collaboration between VETS and VR&E started well before the signing of the new MOA. A signed copy of the MOA and our implementing instructions are attached.

VR&E and VETS work in partnership, along with State Workforce Agencies (SWAs), on behalf of VR&E job ready veterans who are referred to, and registered with, the SWAs for intensive employment services. During FY 2005, 4,524 service-connected disabled and special disabled veterans who were referred to, and registered with, the workforce investment system became gainfully employed. This is up from previous years. (See chart below.)

Comparison of VR&E Activity (Quarter 4, FY 2003 through Quarter 4, FY 2005)

	FY 2004	FY 2005	# Difference	% Difference
# Referred from VA to SWA	5,526	6,980	+1,454	+26%
# Registered by SWA	5,056	6,092	+1,036	+20%
# Entered Employment	3,619	4,524	+905	+25%
*Average Entry Wage	\$12.35	\$13.78	+\$1.43	+12%

*Average entry wage is an optional entry for all states. On average, 48 states report entry wage data.

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.

Participation on Joint Committees and Task Forces

In addition to implementing the MOA, VETS works with VR&E and VA in other ways:

- A VETS staff person is a member of the Veterans Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation. This committee reviews and makes recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on all rehabilitation issues including those affecting policies and programs administered by VR&E.
- A staff member represents VETS on the VA Advisory Committee on Women Veterans. This committee reviews and makes recommendations on issues specifically related to women veterans.
- VETS works closely with VR&E, as well as the Department of Defense, on issues involving transition of active duty service members. VETS chairs a Transition Assistance Program Steering Committee with the Department of Defense, on which VR&E and other VA interests are represented.
- VETS also participated on the VR&E Task Force on Vocational Rehabilitation. This group developed the Five Track System currently being implemented at four VA Regional Offices. The Five-Track process consists of five tracks or options that are available to a VR&E (Chapter 31) eligible disabled veteran. The VA advises the disabled veteran of these tracks and the benefits of each and the veteran is able to make an informed choice of which one best fits his or her career plans. The veteran may switch between tracks if circumstances warrant. The Five Tracks are:
 1. Re-employment
 2. Rapid Access to Employment
 3. Self-Employment
 4. Employment through Long-Term Services
 5. Independent Living

Other collaborative efforts

VETS senior staff participated in VR&E's last two national training conferences. VR&E staff also frequently participates in Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER) and Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) state training conferences. I have met with the VA's Under Secretary for Benefits, and can tell you that we share a commitment to improving employment outcomes for VR&E participants. In addition, VETS senior

staff now schedules regular meetings (every four to six weeks) with the VR&E to discuss current issues of mutual concern.

In 2004, VETS and VR&E coordinated a teleconference with all VR&E offices and VETS field staff on the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA). Subsequently, VETS staff and VR&E staff participated in a similar broadcast for the Disabled Veterans Hiring Initiative (DVHI). DVHI is a VETS initiated effort to educate Federal employers and others about special appointing authorities available to hire certain veterans in the Federal workforce noncompetitively. This information can be very beneficial to VR&E staff working with clients who are interested in Federal employment.

Recently, VETS initiated a study to evaluate vocational rehabilitation referrals to DVOP specialists in local SWAs, and subsequent registration for employment services by job ready VR&E clients. The study will help determine the impact of the delivery system on this category of disabled veterans.

One objective of this study is to assist in determining future service delivery strategies for this targeted population. This project will provide valuable information, which will improve collaboration between VR&E staff and SWAs, as required by statute (P.L.107-288). The results of this study should be available in May 2006.

Our collaborative efforts have also extended to veterans-related publications. For instance, VETS' National Veterans Training Institute (NVTI) publishes a quarterly e-newsletter know as *VETS NET*. Judy Caden, the Director of VR&E, contributed an article on the "National Deployment of the Five Track Employment Process" for our January 2006 issue. That same issue contained a link to our Veterans Program Letter (VPL) transmitting the new MOA. This NVTI newsletter is distributed to over 3,400 individuals who are involved in veterans employment and training nation-wide.

Finally, since the MOA was signed, VR&E has also conducted two training programs at the NVTI. VETS' national, regional and state staff participated in this training. In fact, our national office staff made presentations at both sessions.

VR&E MOA Workgroups

We have established three work groups identified in the new MOA. Both sides have identified the individuals who will participate in those work groups.

The goal of each work group is to improve the quality of employment services and job placements for veterans with disabilities. Each work group will have an established list of roles and responsibilities that will direct their efforts. The work groups are:

- Performance Measures for Assessment of Partnership Program Results
- National Veterans' Training Institute: Curriculum Design
- Joint Data Collection, Analysis, and Reports

Two VETS representatives from the national office and two VETS regional representatives will participate on all three workgroups. VETS will also furnish VR&E our quarterly data on the referrals received from VR&E who registered for employment services and entered employments.

VETS and VR&E know the importance of our mission. We have a lot to accomplish and we believe we are on the right track. In fact, the relationship and collaboration between VETS and VR&E is the best it has ever been.

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