



Statement of Vadim Panasyuk
Sr. Veteran Transition Manager, VA Benefits Lead
of
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Of America
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Chairman DenDekker and distinguished members of the Committee, on behalf of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and our more than 425,000 members, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. I am a New Yorker, a Ukrainian expatriate, and naturalized citizen, and a US Army veteran having served two tours of duty with the 3rd Infantry Division in Iraq. At IAVA, I am a masters-level social worker serving as a Senior Veteran Transition Manager (VTM), VA Benefits Lead, with our Rapid Response Referral Program - or "RRRP" for short.

RRRP is a high-tech, high-touch referral service for veterans and their families with a comprehensive case management component. We assist veterans of all eras, regardless of discharge status, worldwide in confronting significant challenges like unemployment, financial or legal struggles, homelessness, and mental health related issues. To date, RRRP has served over 9,000 veterans and family members nationwide, and over 1,000 in New York alone, providing critical support and resources to ensure that this City's veterans' needs are effectively met.

After fourteen years, IAVA has become the preferred empowerment organization for post-9/11 veterans. While our members are spread throughout the nation, we are proud to say that our national headquarters is located here in New York. Since its beginning, IAVA has fought for and has been successful in advocating for policies that are able to meet the needs of our newest generation of veterans on local, state, and federal levels. For example, our advocacy towards the creation, proper funding, and oversight of the Department of Veterans Services (DVS) in New York City.

In 2011, Congress passed the IAVA-led *Vow to Hire Heroes Act*, a landmark piece of legislation to help reduce veteran unemployment, and as a result of efforts like these the veteran unemployment rate continues to drop. As of November 2018, the veteran unemployment across all eras of veterans is at 3.1%, below the national average of 3.7%. However, the post-9/11 veteran unemployment rate remains higher than their peers at 3.4%. While veteran



unemployment has declined, there are still rising concerns about long-term career success and underemployment in the veteran population.

There are multiple tracks to veteran employment and matching veterans to the right career. Unfortunately, finding the right job can be difficult when employers don't have the context to understand a veteran's skills and experience. This continues to be a contributing factor for recently discharged veterans unemployment and underemployment. According to IAVA's last member survey, 37% of respondents felt underemployed. Being able to translate military skills for civilian use is their third most important job factor, behind salary and finding meaning in their work our members look at when looking for work. It's in everyone's best interest to get the fit right. Veterans who have jobs in their preferred career field do better work and remain in those jobs for longer.

One of the largest and most significant barriers to veteran employment is not only pairing military skills to relevant civilian careers, but also reside in the realm of licensure and formal accreditation. While closing that gap was a focus on the *Vow to Hire Heroes Act*, many veterans report that business leaders and various institutions simply do not understand the value they bring to their companies and organizations. There are some dedicated companies that have done meaningful work towards translating military professions into their civilian equivalent, there remains no universal understanding of the crossover.

As an example, take Navy Corpsmen or Army Medics. They are trained to provide medical assistance in combat situations and can do trauma care that's beyond the scope of civilian Emergency Medical Services (EMS) or Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) training. However, these highly skilled medics have no way to seamlessly transition into their civilian equivalent upon separating from the military because of required civilian licenses and certificates they do not have. Colleges and licensing bodies are not sure how to interpret their training and experience from military transcripts, there is no mechanism to test out of certain course work, and thus former servicemen and women must repeat years of training costing them time and money. This also ends up having a larger compounding effect on their lives further complicating the transition process. Similarly, there are many other examples such as these across all branches of the military.

State and local governments should continue to make it easier for veterans to obtain the certificate required for their civilian careers when licensing and certification is required. While some states have made headway in allowing military service to qualify veterans for some licenses, governments must continue to do so on a certificate by certificate basis. Making this a priority will pay dividends by positively impacting local economies and the lives of today's and future veterans who reside there.



Additionally, the expansion of public and private sector efforts to hire veterans must continue. In 2012 the Center for New American Security reported that companies struggle to overcome concerns about negative stereotypes of veterans when considering whether to hire veterans. Since the report came out, more and more companies have launched hiring initiatives to invest in veterans, and more and more companies are seeing a return on that investment. Programs to incentivize and educate employers on the value of hiring veterans will help expand the opportunities for veterans to contribute in the workforce. State and local governments should use their resources and relationships to spur the hiring of veterans.

Post-9/11 veterans are the key to America's economic future. We are not a charity, but an investment. The time to invest is now.

Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to share IAVA's views on these issues today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have and working with the Committee in the future.