STATEMENT OF
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SUBMITTED TO THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS
UNITYED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND
THE DISABLED TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, The American Legion appreciates the opportunity to submit its views on the services offered through the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP).

The Department of Defense's (DoD's) TAP and DTAP programs are designed to help prepare separating servicemembers and their families for a smooth and successful transition to civilian life. Public Law (P.L.) 101-510 (Chapter 58, Section 1142) mandates pre-separation counseling for transitioning servicemembers. These programs consist of specific components: pre-separation counseling; employment assistance; relocation assistance; education training, health and life insurance counseling; finance counseling; reserve affiliation; disabled veterans and transition assistance seminars. DTAP is designed to educate and facilitate disabled veterans to overcome potential barriers to meaningful employment. Currently, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Labor (DoL), and DoD operate 207 transition offices:

- 80 Air Force Transition Assistance Program Offices;
- 65 Navy Transition Assistance Program Offices (TAMP);
- 44 Army Career Alumni Program Offices (ACAP) and;
- 18 Marine Personnel Service Centers.

While the TAP program assists transitioning service members leaving the military under their own accord, the DTAP program focuses on the specialized needs of the service members who are separating for medical reasons. The DTAP workshop is a half-day seminar sponsored jointly by DoL, DoD and VA. The workshop provides specialized information on VA's many disability benefits:

- Medical Care
- CHAMPVA
- Disability Compensation
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Disabled Veterans Insurance

In the current era of an all-volunteer military, the importance of attracting and retaining well-qualified individuals to execute the fundamental functions of a strong and viable national defense is paramount. Without providing proper incentives, the military of the 21st Century will be hard pressed to effectively accomplish this task. The strength of national security is directly effected by the ability of the Armed Services to engage in successful recruitment and retention.

Historically, The American Legion has encouraged the development of essential benefits to help attract and retain service members into the Armed Services, as well as to assist, them in making the best possible transition back to the civilian community. Since many servicemembers enter the armed forces straight out of high school, they have very little job search experience in the private sector. However, today's separating servicemembers possess many transferable job skills needed by employers. Newly separated servicemembers are team players, mission oriented, certifiably drug-free, and possess strong leadership qualities. These programs are an effective means of providing the counsel and training needed for service members to successfully transition into the civilian workforce.

Many of the benefits and services provided to service members currently leaving active duty are rooted in the programs and services that were established in the closing days of World War II. On June 22, 1944, then-President Franklin D Roosevelt signed the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, or what would later be known as the GI Bill of Rights. This historic piece of legislation, authored by the leadership of The American Legion, enabled veterans to purchase their first homes, attend college, and start private businesses. The emergence of the American middle-class, the suburbs, civil rights, and finally a worldwide economic boom can be attributed to this important legislation.

Additionally, the benefits of the GI Bill were afforded to all veterans who had served honorably, regardless of race, sex, or religion. The benefits of a college education, home loan assistance, and private business ownership preceded Civil Rights legislation by 2 decades. This ground breaking legislation ignored the social stigma of race based opportunities and blindly granted benefits to all eligible veterans who earned these opportunities through service to this country.

The American Legion believes that successful transition to civilian life is ultimately the responsibility of the individual servicemember. However, The American Legion also believes that these same servicemembers must be provided with the tools and services needed to take advantage of the opportunities they have served to protect. The national workforce, the economy and the veteran are all beneficiaries of improved benefits and services for transitioning servicemembers.

Increase TAP funding

Unfortunately, the discretionary funding for TAP/DTAP remains flatlined at its FY 1997 levels. Inflation and salary increases continue to consume the current operating

budgets. Increases in funding are urgently needed to provide at least eight hours of individualized transition assistance services per separating or retiring servicemember. The American Legion continues to strongly support the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) and Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER) program that exists within DoL's Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS). These programs, when incorporated with the TAP program, provide valuable technical expertise and services to veterans actively seeking employment. In order to achieve their mission of assisting job-seeking veterans, DVOPs and LVERs must be adequately funded.

Currently, ACAP and TAMP offer two to five-day workshops followed by a non-fixed amount of individualized transition assistance counseling. Both services report substantial positive benefits when counselors are able to work one on one with servicemembers and their spouses. Some of the positive benefits include enhancement of personal readiness, speeding the attainment of career development and returning "ambassadors" to the civilian community who support recruiting efforts.

Make TAP/DTAP a mandatory program

DoD estimates that 68 percent of all separating service members attend the full TAP seminars. The American Legion believes this low attendance number is a disservice to all transitioning servicemembers. Many servicemembers are unaware of the assistance offered through the TAP and return to the civilian workforce less equipped than his or her counterpart who took advantage of the information provided through the TAP program. The American Legion recognizes the value of this program and recommends that it become a mandatory requirement for all transitioning service members. Additionally, each servicemember must be given the opportunity to participate in training not less than 180 days prior to their separation or retirement from the military.

Require DoL to establish and maintain transition assistance offices on military installation overseas.

Part of the legislative mandate for DoL is to provide a 3-day TAP seminar along with a transitional assistance and retention manual for all separating servicemembers. However, DoL currently is not providing separating servicemembers from overseas bases these services required by P. L. 101-510 (Chapter 58 Section 1144). Therefore, The American Legion supports amending section 7723 of title 38, United States Code to mandate that the Secretary of Labor provide outreach services to overseas members of the armed forces as part of the transition program. Presently, thousands of veterans are released from service while stationed overseas without the opportunity to take part in the full TAP/DTAP programs. Without DoL's presence, those servicemembers are at a profound disadvantage when compared to their stateside compatriots. DoL's only provides stateside servicemembers with copies of the transitional assistance manual. Presently, DoD only copies and distributes the transitional assistance manual for servicemembers separating overseas. For example, the Navy spent an estimated

$20,000 in FY 2001 on printing costs for those copies. The American Legion supports full involvement by DoL in the overseas TAP/DTAP program.

Identify Licensure and Credentialing Barriers and Opportunities

DoD and DoL should do more in keeping servicemembers informed of licensure, certification, and apprenticeship requirements in addition to expanding licensure and certification opportunities. Currently, DoD uses DD Form 2586 to reflect activities relevant to certification, licensure, and apprenticeship. However, The American Legion believes that more needs to be accomplished to ensure that military education and training is recognized by civilian licensing and credentialing agencies. Millions of dollars are invested in quality military education and training each year. Servicemembers are receiving the most advanced training in highly technical military specialties that go unrecognized in the civilian workforce. Given the advanced level of training and education offered in the military, servicemembers should not be forced to undergo the same training once they have left the military. National standards should be developed for licensure and certification of certain military occupations that can be transferred to the private sector. Various states have different requirements for certifications and licenses and it would be impossible for the DoD and DoL to train servicemembers for every individual state requirement. A servicemember that was trained and worked as an emergency medical technician on the West Coast should be able to work as one on the East Coast without having to spend additional time and money retraining.

Assessing services rendered

The American Legion recommends that Congress mandate federal agencies, that deliver TAP/DTAP services, to develop a management monitoring program to better assess how well services are being delivered to transitioning service members. Presently, the effectiveness of services provided by TAP agencies is unknown because adequate performance goals and benchmarking measures have never been instituted. Consequently, there is a lack of any verifiable outcome data. Performance measures should be instituted to hold all federal agencies involved in TAP/DTAP accountable for services rendered.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony and I welcome any questions from the Subcommittee on this important transition program.