

**STATEMENT OF CHARLES S. CICCOLELLA
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VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR**

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR,
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION AND RELATED AGENCIES
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS**

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 19, 2007

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Walsh, Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss the fiscal year 2008 Department of Labor budget request for veterans' employment and training programs.

The Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) was established in 1980. We are an agency with 240 federal staff -- the majority of them are veterans themselves, and they are deployed in the 52 states and territories and the District of Columbia. The agency's mission is to provide veterans and transitioning service members with the resources and services to succeed in the 21st Century Workforce. We do this in three ways: 1) by ensuring that veterans receive priority of service for Department of Labor funded employment and training services provided through One-Stop Career Centers nationally as part of America's workforce investment system; 2) by protecting and enforcing service members' employment and reemployment rights; and 3) by providing

employment assistance to service members before they leave the military so their transition to civilian jobs is smoother.

VETS also operates a highly successful homeless veteran employment program, a special workforce investment program for veterans with barriers to employment, and since 2004, a new initiative called REALifelines, which provides person-to-person employment assistance for those returning veterans from the Global War on Terror who are wounded or injured.

We are particularly proud of our work with REALifelines, which was jointly established in 2004 by VETS and the Department's Office of Disability Employment Policy.

REALifelines provides severely wounded and injured service members and their families with personal, one-on-one employment assistance while they are recovering at military medical treatment facilities. REALifelines staff operate at the Military Severely Injured Center (MSIC) and are forward positioned at Walter Reed Army Medical Center; National Naval Medical Center (Bethesda); Brooke Army Medical Center; Fort Carson, Colorado; Madigan Army Medical Center, Fort Lewis Washington; Naval Medical Center at Balboa; and Tripler Army Hospital, Hawaii. We are exploring additional forward positioning of REALifelines representatives located with the Army and the Marine Corps. Thus far, the REALifelines program has provided employment related assistance to over 2,700 severely injured service members. Over 150 service members have been employed through the program. We also posted useful information regarding the REALifelines program on the Department's Web site on "Employment Laws

Assistance for Workers and Small Businesses” (elaws), which can be found at www.dol.gov/elaws/realifelines.htm.

Our charter is a direct reflection of the nation’s commitment to meet the employment, training and job security needs of those who serve in military uniform.

Fiscal Year 2008 Budget Request

Our FY 2008 request of \$228 million, an increase of approximately \$5 million over funding provided in FY 2007, is designed:

- 1) to promote the maximum employment and training opportunities for veterans, especially disabled veterans, and to continue to help states fully implement the Jobs for Veterans Act;
- 2) to maintain a regular contact and a visible presence among National Guard and Reserve units and assist their members in returning to their civilian employment;
- and
- 3) to improve and continue to expand the cost-effective Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Employment Workshops for returning active unit service members.

VETS’ actively supports Departmental and our own agency outcome-based performance goals. Attainment of these FY 2008 goals will be measured using the following performance indicators:

- * An entered employment rate of 66.5% for veterans and 56.5% for disabled veteran job seekers. This would be followed by an employment retention rate

- after six months of employment of 82.5% for veterans and 80.5% for disabled veterans.
- * An entered employment rate of 69% for homeless veterans enrolled in the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP), and an employment retention rate of 60% after six months of employment.
 - * A total of 4,390 veterans with barriers to employment will receive Veterans' Workforce Investment Program (VWIP) services.
 - * Improved quality of services to veterans' and Reservists' needs provided under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) and Veteran's Preference through more and better investigator training and employer outreach efforts.
 - * Increased capacity to provide TAP Employment Workshops to 170,000 participants, including those who are separating from military service at overseas bases.

STATE GRANTS

Jobs for Veterans (JV) grants are provided to State Workforce Agencies (SWA) to support employment staff dedicated to meeting the needs of veterans. These staff, called Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVER) and Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists, provide direct employment and training assistance to veterans.

LVERs help veterans find employment, conduct employer outreach, facilitate employment, training and placement services to veterans and facilitate TAP Employment Workshops.

DVOPs provide intensive employment services to meet the needs of disabled veterans and veterans with barriers to employment.

The FY 2008 request for State Grants is \$161,894,000. This level is expected to support 2,100 DVOP and LVER positions. The JV state grants are formula based using the ratio of the number of veterans seeking employment in a State to the number of veterans seeking employment in all states.

Jobs for Veterans Act funds also support the TAP Employment Workshops. The workshops are two and one-half day employment-focused sessions provided to transitioning service members at most military installations in the United States as well as in eight nations overseas. The TAP workshops are led by Department of Labor facilitators (they may be state staff, contract staff, or federal staff) and are conducted in partnership with the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs. These workshops help service members prepare their plan for obtaining meaningful civilian employment when they leave the military. They focus on skills assessment, resume writing, job counseling and assistance, interviewing and networking skills, labor market information, and familiarizing service members with America's workforce investment system. Studies have shown that service members who participate in TAP

Employment Workshops find their first civilian jobs three weeks earlier than veterans who do not participate in TAP.

The State Grants budget activity will enable a combined 861,000 veterans to be served at the One-Stop Career Centers and at the TAP Employment Workshops.

HOMELESS VETERANS' REINTEGRATION PROGRAM (HVRP)

HVRP grants are competitive awards to states or other public entities, or non-profits including faith-based organizations, to operate employment programs that reach out to homeless veterans and help them become gainfully employed. Job retention is also measured in the HVRP program. We are projecting a 73.6% entered employment rate and a 62% employment retention rate for FY 2008.

VETS' is requesting a total of \$23,620,000 for this activity, an increase of \$1.8 million over FY 2007. This request will enable 15,095 homeless veterans to participate in HVRP programs around the nation, and approximately 10,415 homeless veterans to find employment.

VETERANS' WORKFORCE INVESTMENT PROGRAM (VWIP)

VWIP grants are competitive awards that support efforts to ensure veterans' lifelong learning and skills development in programs designed to serve "at-risk" veterans,

especially those with service-connected disabilities, those with significant barriers to employment and recently separated veterans. The goal is to provide an intervention that includes training, retraining, and support services leading to long term, higher wage, career potential jobs.

VWIP participants also receive intensive services and case management by DVOP and LVER staff. VETS promotes initiatives with VWIP grantees that focus on high demand occupational areas, such as health care. VETS requests \$7,351,000 to serve 4,390 veterans.

NATIONAL VETERANS' TRAINING INSTITUTE (NVTI)

The NVTI is operated by the University of Colorado at Denver, through a competitively-awarded contractual arrangement. The NVTI provides specialized training and professional skills enhancement of state and federal employment service providers through competency-based training courses. The primary objective of the NVTI is to increase service providers' productivity and knowledge. The NVTI effort helps ensure high standards in training services for veterans as well as a higher level of professionalism among the veteran employment staff and their programs. The total request for the NVTI is for \$1,949,000. The request addresses our requirement to train 1,985 veteran service providers.

FEDERAL ADMINISTRATION

In addition to paying the salaries of our federal staffers, VETS runs USERRA, REALifelines, and the Hire Vets First Campaign out of the Federal Administration part of the budget. VETS ensures that state and federal performance standards are set and met, and VETS' staff ensures that legislative mandates are accomplished for providing services to veterans, Reservists, and National Guard members. VETS monitors and assists state workforce agency employment and training staff in the execution of their veteran programs, and we oversee and help administer the HVRP and VWIP competitive grant programs. VETS federal staff monitors TAP Employment Workshops and ensures that workshop standards and deliverables are met. They also deliver services directly to veterans by conducting education and outreach, as well as conducting investigative activities in conjunction with USERRA and Veterans' Preference enforcement.

In particular, USERRA is a major mission of VETS today. This law protects the civilian job rights and benefits of veterans and members of the armed forces, including National Guard and Reserve members by prohibiting employer discrimination due to military obligations and by providing reemployment rights to returning service members. VETS is responsible for administering USERRA, conducting outreach and education for employers and service members, and investigating and resolving complaints by service members. VETS also works closely with the Department of Defense, the Department of Justice, and the Office of Special Counsel to ensure compliance with the law.

Since September 11, 2001, nearly 600,000 National Guard and Reserve members have been activated for military duty. During this same period, VETS has provided USERRA compliance assistance and information to over 410,000 employers and service members. Since most complaints result from a misunderstanding of the USERRA obligations and rights, we have made the law easier to understand through clear regulations and an interactive USERRA Advisor that includes an online complaint filing capability. The Advisor is available any time at www.dol.gov/elaws/userra.htm. We conduct continuous USERRA outreach and education. We aggressively investigate when employers do not comply with the law and we make every effort to bring them into compliance. We are constantly improving our USERRA investigative program. Despite the larger mobilization in the War on Terror than during Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm, the rate of USERRA complaints, has been dramatically reduced.

A total of \$33,282,000 is requested for Federal Administration, an increase of about \$2.1 million over funding for this activity in FY 2007. This request enables us to respond to an increased level of USERRA activity we have seen since 9/11/2001 as well as conducting extensive outreach to employers to ensure they understand their obligations under the law. The request will also allow us to provide briefings and assistance to Reserve and National Guard members both before and after their activations.

Conclusion:

The Department of Labor's veterans' employment and training programs are part of a larger effort to provide a smooth transition process for assisting veterans and transitioning service members as they seek to identify and secure productive civilian opportunities. The Department is proud to assist our heroes who have served our nation well.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our FY 2008 budget request. I would be pleased to respond to any questions.