

TESTIMONY OF

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BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Chairwoman Herseth Sandlin, Ranking Member Boozman, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to appear before you today on the subject of the role of the State Approving Agencies (SAAs) in assisting the Department of Labor (DOL) and other issues related to apprenticeships and on-the-job-training (OJT) programs.

DOL has a separate responsibility from that of the SAAs. Under the National Apprenticeship Act of 1937, DOL is the only federal agency authorized to register apprenticeship programs for federal purposes. "Federal purposes" includes any federal contract, grant, agreement or arrangement dealing with apprenticeship; and any federal financial or other assistance, benefit, privilege, contribution, allowance, exemption, preference or right. DOL's role is to safeguard the

welfare of apprentices, ensure equality of access to apprenticeship programs, and provide integrated employment and training information to sponsors and the local employment and training community.

Title 38, Section 3687(a)(1) indicates that an eligible veteran may be paid a training allowance while pursuing a full time “program of apprenticeship **approved by a State approving agency as meeting the standards of apprenticeship published by the Secretary of Labor**”

(Emphasis added).

Therefore, for an apprenticeship program to be approved for veterans’ benefits, it first must meet the standards of apprenticeship published by the Secretary of Labor. These standards require that the program be registered by either DOL or a DOL-recognized State Apprenticeship Agency. These State Apprenticeship Agencies are separate from the State Approving Agencies being discussed at today’s hearing.

State Apprenticeship Agencies and DOL use basically the same assessment and approval criteria. State Apprenticeship Agencies’ regulations conform to federal regulations for the registration of apprenticeship programs. There are, however, variations in the operational procedures between State Apprenticeship Agencies and the Office of Apprenticeship (OA) in DOL’s Employment and Training Administration.

Registration of an apprenticeship program by DOL or a DOL- recognized State Apprenticeship Agency must comply with the requirements set in 29 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) parts

29 and 30, the Department's regulations for registered apprenticeship. Apprenticeship program sponsors prepare and submit Standards of Apprenticeship for review and approval by DOL or a DOL-recognized State Apprenticeship Agency. Standards must state the term of the apprenticeship (not less than 2,000 hours); the work processes in which the apprentice will receive supervised work experience and training on the job; provision for related technical instruction (a minimum of 144 hours per year of apprenticeship is recommended); the progressively increasing schedule of wages to be paid to the apprentice consistent with the skill acquired; and other requirements pertaining to program administration. When DOL or a DOL-recognized State Apprenticeship Agency has determined that the standards comply with 29 CFR parts 29 and 30, DOL or the DOL-recognized State Apprenticeship Agency issues the program a Certificate of Registration, which recognizes the program as a registered apprenticeship program for federal purposes. DOL or DOL-recognized State Apprenticeship Agency staff provides technical assistance to current and potential program sponsors for the preparation or modification of apprenticeship standards and to promote compliance with the apprenticeship regulations.

DOL has not yet determined what, if any, overlap currently exists between reviews by the Registered Apprenticeship System (State Apprenticeship Agencies and DOL's Office of Apprenticeship in the Employment and Training Administration) and State Approving Agencies. We believe there may be overlap in the review of program sponsors' performance. As provided by the regulations for registered apprenticeship (29 CFR parts 29 and 30), DOL and DOL-recognized State Apprenticeship Agency staff conduct periodic reviews and evaluations of registered apprenticeship programs, including Quality Assurance Assessment reviews. These reviews may overlap with monitoring and assessments conducted by State Approving Agencies.

Registered apprenticeship programs must maintain compliance with the standards for registered apprenticeship, whether they are registered with DOL or a DOL-recognized State Apprenticeship Agency. DOL and DOL-recognized State Apprenticeship Agencies currently register over 29,000 apprenticeship programs nationally with approximately 250,000 participating employers. Veterans comprise more than 8% of the currently 449,000 registered apprentices.

DOL supports working with the VA and the Department of Education to assess both the similarities and the differences between the assessment components of the VA and DOL regulations and to determine how to further collaborate. In fact, the first such meeting between DOL and VA occurred on March 20, 2007, to discuss possible cooperative efforts. We look forward to continued collaboration with partners at VA and the Department of Education.

DOL does not have any responsibility for, nor do we participate in, OJT programs for veterans in relation to the national apprenticeship system. Our enabling legislation, the National Apprenticeship Act of 1937, deals specifically with registered apprenticeship. However, OJT is an allowable use of funds through other DOL authorizing statutes, such as the Workforce Investment Act of 1998.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important issue. I would be pleased to respond to any questions.