

Testimony of

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Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Veterans' Benefits Subcommittee, and thank you for your invitation to testify on H.R. 4015, the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002.

I am statewide chair of the labor-management committee in the New York State Department of Labor, representing the New York State Public Employees Federation, which is affiliated with the Service Employees International Union and the American Federation of Teachers. We are very pleased with the contents of this legislation and wish to commend the chair and the committee for drafting this document. We feel that it will ensure that our veterans are afforded better job-finding services. The concerns we had with previous legislative initiatives on this topic in recent years are for the most part favorably changed.

We applaud priority of service to veterans as provided in § 4215. This corrects omissions in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

Especially comforting is the retention of veterans' employment and training services in the public employment service and one-stop centers where assets are concentrated to provide a labor exchange.

We strongly support the listing of jobs with the local employment service, one-stop centers and America's Job Bank in federally funded contracts to accomplish affirmative action on behalf of our nation's veterans.

The redefinition of "covered veteran" to be more inclusive of the modern veteran population was needed. We need to provide priority of service to those who have more recently participated in military operations and campaigns.

Regarding the institution of performance incentive awards, we generally support the concept if there are objective criteria.

The performance accountability system established in this bill will alleviate some concerns voiced in previous reports, and we as a union, expect our members who deliver services to be accountable. Our only concern is that the criteria be objective, and that local economic conditions be taken into account.

We oppose the appointment of part-time LVERs and DVOPs to such positions. We have found from past experience that their activities can be more easily diverted to other activities when they are working on veterans' service on a part-time basis. We also strongly prefer the appointment of veterans to these positions, as veterans understand the unique problems and requirements of other veterans. In summary, veterans are better suited for helping other veterans, and must be full time to concentrate their efforts in this direction.

We support the modernization of services to veterans by using the Internet and other instant means of communication with our overseas military personnel about to transition to civilian employment.

In general, we in the New York State Public Employees Federation and our international unions, SEIU and AFT, applaud the work of the committee and support this very important legislative initiative. The legislation generally meets the objectives of furnishing quality services to our veterans and eligible population, while ensuring accountability by the service providers we represent in our unions. Our only remaining concerns, once again, are the issues of part-time positions, objective criteria for both performance incentives and the performance accountability program, and the veteran status of the appointees.

Thank you again for affording me the opportunity of appearing before your committee. We all appreciate your efforts at giving our veteran population the best and most efficient service through this important legislation.