

**TESTIMONY FOR U.S. HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS**

**T. P. O'MAHONEY
COMMISSIONER REPRESENTING LABOR
TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, my name is T.P. O'Mahoney, Commissioner Representing Labor, for the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), the agency responsible for workforce employment and training in Texas. I am pleased and honored to be with you again, and to support several of the enhancements for employment and training services to veterans contained in the Jobs for Veterans Act.

As a former United States Marine Corps Major and Naval aviator, I admire and respect the sacrifices that members of our armed forces everywhere have made in serving our country. We all owe these individuals a debt of gratitude. Keeping veterans issues in the forefront is as important today as it was in the past and I commend this committee for its efforts on behalf of all veterans nationwide.

As you know, since enactment of the Workforce Investment Act, the employment and training system has dramatically changed to better meet the needs of both employers and job seekers. The cornerstone of this new system is local control accompanied by flexibility and integration of programs to deliver high quality services to a universal population. Also key in this system is the handoff of program operations from the Federal level to the State and Local level. Many of the changes embodied in the Jobs for

Veterans Act advance concepts that will enhance services, improve outcomes, and allow a more effective and efficient operation – while maintaining accountability.

Technology has influenced nearly every aspect of today's services, and necessitates evolution toward a modern workforce delivery system. Electronic enhancements and computerized operations have opened access far beyond what was thought possible even a decade ago. Customers are now able to access services seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Job orders, applications, job matching and job referral can be done over the Internet.

For several years Texas has been a leader in providing services to veterans and our record of accomplishments is well documented. Just this past year, Texas accounted for over 11 percent of all veterans entering jobs in the nation. It is upon this level of excellence we want to build and improve so that our accomplishments are not records of the past but goals for the future.

I would like to address a few of the major components of the Jobs for Veterans Act.

1. The move from prescriptive, detailed functions for the Federal staff, the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) staff, and Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER) staff, is a much needed and welcome change. However, some duties are still present for LVER staff and, from my view, it would be best to specify these in the grant process instead of law. The grant process offers the ability

to adjust to changing economic situations. The authorization for half-time DVOP staff will certainly improve total operations and allow more flexibility.

2. I am concerned that the bill contains language granting Federal control over state staff. Specifically, calling all individuals delivering services to veterans under this Title, including state employees, “Veterans Employment and Training Staff” and allowing the State Director of U.S. Department of Labor Veterans’ Employment and Training Services (DOL-VETS) to submit comments on individual DVOP and LVER performance appears to strengthen the Federal hold instead of moving toward State operations and control. Let me stress, the DVOP/LVER program is a vital part of the One-Stop service delivery system. If the State is the operator of these programs, then our Federal partners should provide oversight and technical assistance to the state – not manage day-to-day operations.

If we are the operators, give us the mission and let us do our job. We willingly accept the responsibility and welcome the accountability. As veterans, we all know that an effective chain of command is essential for good performance. In public service, as well as the military, there must be only one chain of command and for state staff, and that must be the state entity. I think it is important to point out here that none of the other Department of Labor programs retain the state level presence of Federal staff as it is mandated for the VETS programs.

3. I applaud the committee's stance on rewarding success. Performance incentives do work, and I am pleased that an incentive package is included in the legislation. It is very important that States fully participate in the development of any incentive methodology as well as development of any criteria to be used in measuring performance. The inclusion of a national benchmark for performance is also an important and vital step. There are several reports that clearly identified the disparity in performance among the states. To ensure we do not fall back into the trap of measuring a state against itself, I believe establishing a national baseline makes good sense.

4. The proposed legislation expands veterans' priority to any qualified employment and training programs under the Department of Labor. I support the intent to prioritize veterans in the current system. However, with the variety of training programs available today, each with its own respective client focus, this will surely lead to confusion in service delivery. Currently, under WIA, State and Local Workforce Boards are given the authority and responsibility to establish priorities and determine how services are to be delivered and training dollars spent based on individual needs and local labor market information.

Additionally, within WIA, Section 168 provides a veteran-only training program. Unfortunately, the level of funding for this program has been meager in comparison to the other training programs. I would suggest additional funding of Section 168 programs could provide the proper emphasis on training for veterans.

5. While not addressed by this legislation, I believe it is important to again stress the need for making the DVOP and LVER grant funding cycle consistent with that of other employment and training programs. I know you are already working on this, and I want to thank you for writing the Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee and the Office of Management and Budget. This change is vital, and I do not want to miss an opportunity to highlight the need for continued effort.

This concludes my specific comments on the proposed legislation. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my appreciation to the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) and its Veterans' Affairs Committee for its outstanding efforts in working with the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, DOL-VETS, the Veteran Organizations, and other states.

In closing let me add, efforts to provide employment and training programs to veterans were borne out of a sincere desire to ensure our nations' guardians receive the support and service they so richly deserve. As we have vividly experienced, we can not look back but must look forward. I welcome the opportunity to work with you, and all our partners, to develop a structure that enhances and improves services to veterans not only for today, but for the future as well. I will be happy to answer any questions.

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