

October 4, 2019

The Hon. Richard Shelby
Chairman
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Hon. Nita Lowey
Chairperson
Appropriations Committee
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Hon. Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Hon. Kay Granger
Ranking Member
Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman, Madame Chair, Senator Leahy and Representative Granger:

The undersigned veterans and military service organizations are writing to ask you to ensure the retention of funding for a Disabled Veterans Program staff position within the Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) in the final appropriations bill for the Department of Labor (DOL). Our organizations represent millions of service members and veterans, many of whom live with significant disabilities.

Despite the drop in overall veterans' unemployment, many veterans with significant disabilities continue to struggle to find jobs or are no longer participating in the labor force, according to DOL's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). In every age category, veterans with service-connected disabilities are less likely to participate in the labor force than veterans without disabilities¹. Veterans with non-service-connected disabilities experience similar challenges, with only 37 percent employed compared to over three quarters of veterans without disabilities.² Numerous reports by agencies such as DOL's Advisory Committee on Veterans' Employment, Training, and Employer Outreach (ACVETEO) and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) have recommended that VETS expand its supports for veterans with disabilities and improve coordination and technical assistance to state-based employment specialists who assist veterans with disabilities in finding employment.

Earlier this year, the House of Representatives included in its Labor-HHS-Education appropriations the sum of \$300,000 within DOL's Federal Administration to establish a Disabled Veteran Program (DVP) to address the high unemployment and low labor force participation rate of veterans with service-connected and nonservice-connected disabilities. Modeled after VETS successful women's program, the DVP is intended to promote employment and advancement opportunities for veterans with disabilities by working with federal, state, and private partners to promote the hiring of veterans with disabilities, improve coordination of available employment services and supports, and to identify and share employment best practices for hiring, retaining, and advancing

1 Employment Situation of Veterans, Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/vet.pdf>

2 Employment Data for Veterans with Disabilities, <https://adata.org/factsheet/employment-data-veterans-disabilities>

veterans with disabilities in the workforce.

We believe that this Disabled Veterans Program position within DOL VETS will ensure a stronger focus on the employment challenges faced by veterans with disabilities and urge you to include the House-passed provisions in the final appropriations agreement.

Air Force Sergeants Association
AMVETS
Blinded Veterans Association
(DAV) Disabled American Veterans
Military Order of the Purple Heart
National Military Family Association
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Student Veterans of America
The Retired Enlisted Association
Veterans Education Success
Vietnam Veterans of America
VetsFirst