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Committee on Appropriations  
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Good morning Chairman Rehberg, Ranking Member DeLauro and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to testify about Veterans Employment and Training Programs. My name is Joseph Carbone, and I am CEO of The WorkPlace, a 30-year-old, Fairfield County, Connecticut nonprofit. The WorkPlace acts as the Workforce Investment Board for southwestern Connecticut and is responsible for the operation of three One Stop Centers in our region, serving an average of 30,000 individuals each year, including over 2000 Veterans. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the array of employment-related services available to our returning veterans through America's workforce development system.

The One Stop system and its network of partners is the foundation of the American workforce development structure. This system is designed to deliver and provide access to a host of services to help people gain employment. The WorkPlace works closely with a vast number of provider partners and employers as well as the Connecticut Department of Labor's Office for Veterans Workforce Development and its Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER), and its Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) to ensure the delivery of an array of veteran-specific services through the One Stop delivery system. Through the One Stops in southwestern Connecticut, veterans can receive access to a variety of employment readiness workshops, skills training, technology classes, job search, education refreshers and language skills as well as case management and job placement support.

At the WorkPlace, we understand that the needs of the unemployed and the underemployed in today's economy require us to seek ways to enhance the traditional One Stop services to help support individuals as they seek employment. In an effort to provide value added services in the One Stops we conceptualized, designed, created and sought private funding for a Community Resource Center (CRC). The center is the hub of supportive services in the One Stop and is supported by corporate and foundation support. With these private dollars, veterans receive financial assistance to help with food, utility bills and security deposits as well as purchase special equipment or tools, immunizations, licenses, and car repairs to obtain or retain employment. The CRC also houses partner agency staff to help veterans obtain energy assistance, rental assistance, and foreclosure prevention services in addition to financial counseling, literacy, as well as help with non-custodial parenting and child support modification assistance.

Our One Stop is a VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) site in addition to being an Employment Network to serve people with disabilities. Our Disability Services unit provides specialized employment services for those with disabilities, specifically veterans. Our One Stop has all the adaptive technology that one with a disability would need to seek work, in addition to trained staff who participate in case conferencing with staff from the Vocational Rehab agencies to ensure coordinated services. Our telework website was designed specifically to help people with disabilities explore and prepare for telework opportunities.

We have been fortunate to leverage the infrastructure of the One Stop to obtain competitive grants to provide specific services to veterans. These grants include three, 3 year Homeless Veterans Reintegration grants over the past decade, a three-year Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program grant, and a three-year grant providing green sector-based training and employment services to recently separated veterans. Each of these grants has “filled a gap” by providing additional opportunities to help veterans and their families regain their footing.

Our **Homeless Veterans Reintegration** program (HVRP) provides homeless veterans services to assist their reintegration into meaningful employment. The HVRP is important because it is an initial step in providing employment solutions to the ever increasing number of homeless servicemen and women. Through the HVRP program, we have cultivated partnerships with the Veterans Administration, transitional housing programs (Homes for the Brave and Columbus House) and organizations that provide mental health and addiction services. Veterans in this program receive intensive case management and classroom training, as well as supported job placement and retention services. The employment statistics and retention outcomes for this grant have been stellar, with over 60 homeless veterans entering employment each year and a nearly 70% retaining employment after 180 days.

The **Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program** (IVTP) is a statewide program which provides incarcerated veterans at risk of homelessness with options for stable housing, as well as employment services (which begin prior to release). IVTP program staff work with veterans to develop transition plans which include housing, employment and other work supports. Our goal is to reduce the likelihood of recidivism by fostering a stable situation for our veterans. The WorkPlace collaborates with veteran-serving organizations through IVTP and work closely with the State of Connecticut’s Department of Corrections, along with its Division of Parole and Office of Probation to coordinate activities following release. We have been successful in securing housing for formerly incarcerated veterans and employment in a variety of industry sectors. We have an 86% retention rate in employment for these vets and an average wage at placement of \$12.00 per hour.

Our **Sector-Based Veterans Program** provides green classroom and on-the-job training to recently separated veterans. Through this program we offer training which provides stackable credentials in the green and renewable energy sector. By working with veteran-friendly employers, The WorkPlace has been able to secure several on-the-job training opportunities that have led to permanent employment for veterans. This grant serves 200 veterans per year and has provided veterans with sustainable careers in green.

Funding for all three of the programs discussed above was competitively awarded by the United States Department of Labor, Office of Veterans Employment Services.

The success of these programs is due to the combination of grant-funded services with additional services leveraged through the One Stop infrastructure. Effectively meeting the unique needs of veterans requires an array of flexible programming. Neither element by itself is sufficient to ensure that all of our veterans receive the necessary assistance to return to employment. A combined effort is required for two reasons.

First, the current workforce development system was created by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 and was designed against a background of a 4.5% national unemployment rate and projections of labor shortages. Its focus was on short-term, pre-vocational workshops and training. Under WIA, veterans receive priority for services through the One Stop system—services ranging from pre-employment workshops to career management counseling to skills training to enhanced educational opportunities. These services are available to all populations, including veterans as well as low-income adults, TANF recipients, dislocated workers, at-risk youth, and persons with disabilities. They must be delivered in the context of local unemployment which is nearly double the rate at the system's creation, in the face of dramatically increasing employer demand for skills, and while serving multiple populations.

Second, veterans also present a host of challenges similar to those facing the long-term unemployed—challenges which extend beyond employment, into emotional, behavioral, and financial issues. Veterans have spent years outside the civilian workforce, and the effects of years of service and the transition back to civilian life are often similar to being out of work for a significant period of time. Self-confidence falters, concerns (legitimate or not) grow that employment skills have atrophied, and basics such as housing and food hinder progress. Many veterans can achieve long-term success returning to employment only after these fundamental needs have been addressed.

In southwestern Connecticut, we have successfully addressed many challenges interfering with veterans and/or their family members as they prepare to re-enter the workforce. The WorkPlace leverages WIA dollars to support additional training required by employers and bring in partners to

provide access to other support services. We have built a solid network of partners and employers that support male and female veterans and their families, so veterans coming to our One Stops are not looking for work in isolation of other issues they experience. These are critical wraparound services that support a veteran through the search for employment.

Unfortunately, it is common for programs outside the employment system to deal with some of these issues, only to refer veterans to the unemployment system much later. Similarly, many veterans get pure employment assistance without the other services necessary to provide the stability that enables them to hold a job over the long term.

There are two key steps that will significantly enhance the workforce development system's capacity to offer coordinated services to veterans. First, any resources for veteran's employment and training should be allocated through the One Stop system. One Stops are already designed to provide multiple services, with capacity for case management, assessment of needs and coordination of programming. With more resources focused on veterans' needs, One Stops can enhance the services offered directly, or through local partners, to address challenges beyond the existing scope of workforce development.

Second, to increase employer engagement and raise the profile of employers who are committed to the employment of veterans, Workforce Investment Boards should be required to have a minimum of 10% of the business members of the Board of Directors come from employers who have an established culture of hiring and promoting the hiring of veterans. These veteran employer champions could educate their peers on the benefits of hiring veterans and serve as model community leaders. They would also serve a key role in engaging partners to provide more comprehensive services through the One Stop delivery system and raising awareness of veterans' employment challenges.

The American workforce system is uniquely positioned to adapt and align its programming to meet the needs of veterans. Providing a more comprehensive array of programming through the nationwide One Stop infrastructure will create a more streamlined, comprehensive and effective approach to serving our veterans, as we honor their service.