**Opening Statement for Veteran Employment**

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Chairman Josh Newman, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss veteran employment issues within the context of transition. We are grateful for and acknowledge your concern for the men and women who have served our country in the past.

As we know, when our service members leave the military, they enter into our world, the civilian world, where they begin to relearn what it means to be a civilian. One of the things we are finding in our research is that when they navigate their way into our workplaces, schools, housing market, healthcare system, and our communities, they come to an awareness that they are different, which to an extent, is due to how they are treated by civilians, by us. For example, in a recent study we conducted at the Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans & Military Families, we asked a sample of 262 post-9/11 veterans living in Los Angeles County on workplace discrimination owing to their veteran status. When asked about feeling discriminated against by their supervisors or bosses, 68% reported this experience ever since they became a veteran, and another 60% reported this experience in the past year. In terms of feeling discriminated against by their co-workers, 71% reported this experience ever since they became a veteran, and another 57% reported this experience in the past year. When asked what their supervisors thought about veterans, participants in our study reported both positive and negative words. Examples of positive words include reliable, trustworthy, hardworking, and disciplined; while examples of negative words include prone to violence, has mental illness, has PTSD, and no experience. We then asked them what their co-workers thought about veterans. Again, we found both positive words such as hardworking, team-oriented, able to work under stress, and strong work ethic, as well as negative words such as has PTSD, violent, scary, short fuse. Finally, we asked how employers can make the workplace veteran-friendly. Here are some of our veterans’ recommendations, “Don’t assume the employee is violent or is a person with PTSD”, “Learn how to translate military skills to the civilian industry”, “Not just thank us for our service, but allow us to perform in a leadership role that we were trained to do”, and “Have veterans connect with other veterans with similar experience”.

For the most part, we should consider these findings as troubling because the results suggest that a majority of our veterans feel discriminated against by their supervisors and co-workers. But, in providing recommendations, veterans are also providing general directives on what needs to be done. The question that we, as a civilian community, must ask ourselves is how can we assist or ensure that veterans feel welcomed in the civilian workplace which, in turn, is the building block for a successful civilian employment transition?

We believe we need to strengthen the different social networks that surround veterans. What do we mean by social networks? Social networks are formal or informal groups of people that provide different types of support to the veteran. Typically, these are the people veterans can run or should be able to when they need assistance. When we talk about veteran employment, these are people from the military network, the veteran network, the family network, and the civilian network. For example, when service members are getting ready to transition out of the military, they are required to complete the Transition Assistance Program. As part of the TAP, service members participate in a Department of Labor Employment Workshop that educates them on the logistics of obtaining employment in the civilian workplace. This means that the *military is a source of instrumental support* for service members transitioning into the civilian work environment. In this capacity, the military can exercise its influence by creating a more realistic picture of civilian employment, one that is perhaps more closely aligned with the expectations of civilian employers (e.g., salary range for a particular occupational role). The second network pertains to the veteran networks. These are the formal and informal infrastructures that have been created and maintained to serve veterans. Formal social networks are embedded within institutions such as the VA, whereas informal social networks are typically community based and grassroots oriented, or could simply be a casual gathering of veterans. *Formal social networks provide instrumental support* to veterans. For example, the VA is charged with implementing several employment training and programs such as On-the Job Training and Apprenticeship. This particular program offers veterans the opportunity to simultaneously learn a trade or skill and receive a salary. At the end of the program, veterans receive a job certification and could potentially be hired by the company where they received their training or did their apprenticeship. On the other hand, *informal social networks predominantly provide emotional support* to veterans. For example, one study found that veterans strongly prefer to connect with other veterans, primarily because other veterans are perceived to know more about the experiences of reintegrating back into civilian life. The third network is the family network and is perhaps the most important one that will provide almost all the support needed by veterans. Overall, *veterans’ families have been shown to provide both instrumental and emotional supports.* Within the family unit, each member is dependent on the others for advice as well as safety and security (emotional support), and finances (instrumental support). Veterans’ families play a critical role in buffering the stresses related to seeking and maintaining employment in the civilian workplace. The greater the family support, the more veterans are able to withstand the pressures arising from transitioning into the civilian workplace. Finally, there is the civilian network or civilian community. At this broader level, communities can define who is or is not part of their community. What this means for veteran employment is that *civilian communities can provide normative support* by creating an inclusive environment that honors military service and takes a proactive (instead of reactive) stance in alleviating the unique challenges faced by veterans.

The point here is that veteran employment is more than an issue between the veteran employee and the civilian supervisor or co-worker. It is an issue for every person situated within the military network, the veteran network, the family network, and the civilian community network. The work to be done now is two-fold: First is to identify and strengthen the various networks that provide a protective circle around veterans. Second is to connect veterans to each network that will provide a web of support. Transition is not an easy process. But, we can take measures now to ease veterans transition in the civilian workplace.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share our opinion on this topic.