

PRIORITY IN EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE
FOR
UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES VETERANS

Senate Bill 936
G.S. 165-44

**REPORT TO THE NORTH
CAROLINA JOINT COMMISSION
ON GOVERNMENTAL
OPERATIONS**

September 30, 2021
North Carolina Department of Commerce
Division of Workforce Solutions

Background

On June 3, 1997, the General Assembly Ratified Senate Bill 936, G.S. 165-44, a statute that requires eligible veterans to be given Priority of Service in employment and training programs. The bill indicated that veterans' priority shall apply to any State agency, department or institution, any county, city or other political subdivision of the State, any board or commission and any other public or private recipient that receives federal or State job training funds and provides employment and training assistance including, but not limited to, employability assessments, support services referrals, and vocational and educational counseling. The bill further indicated that Priority of Service is defined as providing all eligible veterans who register or otherwise apply and qualify for services the opportunity to participate in or otherwise receive the services provided before that opportunity is extended to other registered applicants.

The bill directs the North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development (NCWorks Commission) to submit a compliance report to the Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations annually.

Introduction

The North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions, acting on behalf of the Governor, is the recipient of funds granted through the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 (P.L. 113-128), Wagner-Peyser Act (29 U.S.C. 49, *et seq.*), and Trade Adjustment Assistance Extension Act of 2011 (P.L. 112-40), and Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) Program. The division is the administrative and oversight agency for these funds which are used to provide employability, training and re-training activities to eligible persons in the state. The resources flow to the division through the U.S. Department of Labor which has regulatory power and policy-making responsibility for activities provided with these funds. WIOA resources are required to be allocated to the 23 local Workforce Development Boards in the state who oversee the delivery of local services to eligible individuals. Services are provided through a series of NCWorks Career Centers (95) around the state that house employment and training programs to serve the state's citizens.

The U.S. Department of Labor has provided guidance and policy oversight to states on the implementation of the Jobs for Veterans' Act (P.L. 107-288). This law also establishes a Priority of Service for veterans and eligible spouses for services funded through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

Implementation

North Carolina's NCWorks Career Centers ensure that services are broadly available and address the employability and support needs of the persons and businesses in the state. Staff offer core employment activities including self-service and staff-assisted services, more intensive services, which may include in-depth assessments and career counseling, and resources for occupational skills training.

While NCWorks Career Center staff serve many special populations, the federal Jobs for Veterans' Act dictates that each state has dedicated Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVERs), Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPS) and Hybrid or Consolidated (LVER/DVOPS) representatives strategically assigned to service delivery points throughout the NCWorks Career Center system to ensure accessibility to all veterans with employment or training needs. In addition, program staff offer information and

employment services to service members who are transitioning out of the military at the six military installations in North Carolina. To support the state's veterans, North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions employs 12 LVER positions, 43 DVOP Specialist positions and 20 Hybrid positions; all of which themselves are qualified veterans, thus conforming to the guidelines in the law.

Priority of Service to veterans and others who meet eligibility requirements has been honored in North Carolina for decades. Throughout the workforce delivery system, Priority of Service is enhanced by the State's electronic job matching system, NCWorks Online (NCWorks.gov), which matches registered veterans to new job orders on the day they are listed - 24 hours ahead of non-veterans. LVERs monitor Priority of Service to veterans to ensure that all staff complies with policies which stipulate that qualified veterans are given an opportunity to apply for jobs ahead of non-veterans.

A major role and responsibility of the dedicated veterans' services staff is the capacity building of other service providers to enhance their knowledge of veterans' Priority of Service in employment and training programs. LVER/DVOPS/Hybrid staff have frequent contact with other NCWorks Career Center partners to keep them informed of current veterans' employment and training issues and to assist in providing direct services to veterans. LVER/DVOPS/Hybrid personnel attend staff meetings to provide updates on veteran services, to answer questions from staff and to discuss needed services. LVER staff are also available to provide training to other center staff. DVOP Specialist staff members also collaborate with the management and staff of these career centers to provide outreach services for veterans, including homeless veterans, and other veterans with Significant Barriers to Employment. LVER staff conduct employer outreach, and plan job fairs and other activities to promote the employment of veteran customers with the state's businesses. The Hybrid position staff focus on the rural areas of the state and provide a service to both employers and to the most in need veterans. This allows one position to fill both roles to ensure veteran services are being provided in all areas of the state. Federal guidelines establish that states will have a maximum 10% of their Jobs for Veterans State Grant positions classified as "Hybrid". North Carolina has repeatedly demonstrated the success and value of these positions that the Department of labor has now authorized the state to have over 25% Hybrid positions. Once a veteran's employment and training needs have been identified, the NCWorks Career Center staff ensures that appropriate services are provided.

Strategies to address individual needs include literacy and basic skills programs, resources for occupational skills training, job accommodations, assistive technologies, disability awareness training and other activities that may address barriers and support achievement of positive employment outcomes. North Carolina has established, closely monitors and continues to adhere to a Priority of Service to veterans.

Outreach and Information for Veterans

In addition to veterans served through the U.S. Department of Labor funded programs referenced above, JVSG supports, through Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Vocational Readiness & Employment Service (VR&E) program. This ensures a seamless employment transition that eliminates duplication, fragmentation or delay in delivery of employment services which leads to the ultimate goal of successful career selection, placement, and rehabilitation for veterans enrolled in the VA Chapter 31 program. VR&E staff refer 100 percent of all Veterans who have been found entitled to services for labor market information (LMI) and all veterans in Job Ready status to JVSG staff. In FY20, this equated to 1,077 veterans that transitioned from VA support to JVSG support.

The Division of Workforce Solutions offers information services to veterans through links on the Department of Commerce main website and NCWorks Online at www.NCWorks.gov, the state's comprehensive job search/matching career exploration and labor market analysis portal for jobseekers and employers and we have the veterans portal at veterans.ncworks.gov. Veterans' services also have a presence on social media, including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

The division also continues to work closely with the state's two Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (HVRP) grantees currently operating four USDOL funded grants to assist homeless veterans. Our DVOP Specialists enroll these veterans in the NCWorks.gov veterans' program as they are simultaneously enrolled in the Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program. The HVRP grantees provide services to 80 of North Carolina's 100 counties. In FY20, JVSG provided aid and support to 439 homeless veterans.

We have initiated a unique program for female veterans, Female Veterans Table Talk (FVTT). The main goal for FVTT is to provide resources, information and support for this unique group of women, who represent part of the fastest-growing demographic among veterans nationwide. Attendees learn about programs and services available to female veterans, along with upcoming hiring events, trainings, and opportunities. Events are facilitated by female Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) staff. FVTT events were conducted using Microsoft Teams. This allowed for FVTT to continue serving local female veterans with a unique opportunity for fellowship and learning about resources, in a way that was safe and convenient for people over a wider geographical area. The FVTT format is straightforward but requires significant coordination by staff. Each event features one or more female guest speakers that are relevant to the female veteran community, as well as time for the attending veterans to share their stories and their life experiences.

There are 5 Veteran Treatment Courts (VTC) throughout North Carolina in Buncombe, Catawba, Harnett, Forsyth and Cumberland counties. VTC is a program offered by the North Carolina Judicial Branch. VTC helps veterans involved in the justice system due to mental health disorders, trauma, and substance use. The structure of the VTC is like that of drug treatment and mental health courts in that they involve cooperation and collaboration with court officials, community partners, and law enforcement. The goal is to connect eligible veterans with benefits and treatment earned through military service. NCWorks Veteran Services has assigned one staff person who is a veteran to each of our courts that facilitate employment services and access to community resources.

The U.S. Department of Labor has created a new federal program, the HIRE Vets Medallion Program, which encourages employers' commitment to veteran careers, including hiring, retention, and long-term development. Employers must demonstrate a sustained commitment to veterans and only 300 are selected, nationwide, each year. Through the efforts of the DWS veterans' staff, North Carolina had 24 of the 300 employers recognized in 2020. DWS also upgraded the NCWorks.gov Veterans Portal to highlight the businesses that received this distinction.

The U.S. Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service has tasked the State Workforce Agency (SWA) to assist in a pilot program to enhance its ability to provide transitioning service members and their spouses with the assistance needed to be successful in the civilian workforce. The program is called Employment Navigator Partnership Pilot (ENPP). Cherry Point Air Force Base in Goldsboro, NC was selected as 1 of 13 worldwide sites for the ENPP. Employment Navigators (ENs) will be available to provide direct one-on-one career assistance to interested transitioning service members and their spouses (TSM/S) from any of the 13 locations, by conducting an email introduction of the TSM/S to the selected state

workforce agency (NCWorks Veterans Service) point of contact that will navigate the TSM/S to the career center closest to where they will reside.

Department of Commerce Veterans Program was able to place a DVOP in the Lumbee Tribe to assist the veterans of the Lumbee Tribe. This is the only program of its type in the nation and we are looking at doing the same in the Cherokee Nation.

In partnership with the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the Military Alliance, the North Carolina for Military Employment (NC4ME) initiative focuses on Veterans and military spouses from across the state as well as Transitioning Service Members, Guard/Reserve members from the states six major military installations and the reserve components. The initiative educates business leaders on the benefits of hiring veterans, trains HR professionals on attracting, hiring and retaining veterans, and conducts hiring events to match veterans with employer needs. NC4ME conducted 10 virtual hiring events, with on-site interviews, in support of close to 1,100 veterans and 250 employers annually.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a temporary shift in roles and responsibilities for JVSG staff. Two thirds of JVSG staff were approved by DOL Veteran Employment Training Service (VETS) to shift our primary focus to supporting the Division Employment Security (DES), full-time call center's Unemployment Insurance operations. We are encouraging people to use virtual/remote services as much as possible – calling or emailing the JVSG and NCWorks Career Center staff rather than coming in – even if their local center is open to the public again.

Veteran Services State Performance Snapshot

Uniform National Threshold Entered Employment Rate

NORTH CAROLINA Rate:	60.5%
National Threshold:	48.4%
State Ranking:	10

JVSG Individual Career Service Rate

NORTH CAROLINA Rate:	97.3%
National Average:	79.6%
State Ranking:	8

Compliance

A priority measure of compliance is the comparison of the ratio of service between veterans and non-veterans. To establish that veterans are given Priority of Service, the ratio of number of veterans that applied for services, and were determined eligible, compared to the number of veterans served should not be substantially less than the ratio of non-veterans that applied for services, and were determined eligible, compared to the number of non-veterans served.

The table below includes data for Division of Workforce Solutions' programs for the July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021 program year.

Program	#Vets Eligible	#Vets Served	Vets Service Ratio	#Non-Vets Eligible	#Non-Vets Served	Non-Vet Service Ratio
WIA Title I-B Adult	286	141	49.3	5168	2599	50.3

WIA Title I-B Dislocated Workers	255	254	99.6%	2227	2163	97.1%
WIA Title I-B Youth	23	17	73.9%	1634	1510	92.4%
Wagner- Peyser Employment Services	11393	7605	66.8%	181722	110337	60.7%
Trade Adjustment Act	10	9	90%	179	171	95.5%