

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, 2023
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 20 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 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 career 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 offers 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, the North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions employs 8 LVER positions supporting businesses, 25 DVOP Specialist positions supporting veterans with barriers and 21 Hybrid positions supporting both businesses and veterans; 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. Leadership monitors Priority of Service to veterans to ensure that all staff comply 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. The veterans staff has 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. They also attend staff meetings to provide updates on veteran services, answer questions from staff, and discuss needed services.

Veterans leadership staff are also available to provide training to other center staff and veterans front line 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. Veterans leadership staff conduct employer outreach and plan job fairs and other activities to promote the employment of veteran customers with the state's businesses. The consolidated positions staff focus on the rural areas of the state and provides services 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 of 10% of their Jobs for Veterans State Grant positions classified as "Consolidated/Hybrid". North Carolina has repeatedly demonstrated the success and value of these positions so the Department of Labor has now authorized the state to have over 38% consolidated positions. This increased capacity allows DWS much more flexibility in meeting the operational needs of businesses and veterans across the state. 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 the achievement of positive employment outcomes. North Carolina has established, closely monitors and continues to adhere to a Priority of Service to veterans. Our veteran staff have been trained and certified in Mental Health First Aide, Peer Support Specialist and 22 (over 30%) are certified Veteran Support Specialist (Mental illness, Post Traumatic Stress, Military Sexual Trauma, Substance Abuse). This makes North Carolina's NCWorks veteran staff much better prepared to assist those veterans with barriers to employment.

Outreach and Information for Veterans

In addition to veterans served through the U.S. Department of Labor funded programs referenced above, we support the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Veteran 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 goal of successful career selection, placement, and rehabilitation for veterans enrolled in the VA Chapter 31 program. VR&E staff refers all veterans who have been found entitled to services and in Job Ready status to JVSG staff. In FY23, this equated to 518 veterans who 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 job seekers 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.

Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program

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 73 of North Carolina's 100 counties. In PY22-23, JVSG provided aid and support to 488 homeless veterans.

Female Veterans Table Talk

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, training, and opportunities. Events are facilitated by female Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) staff. This past year, FVTT events were conducted using Microsoft Teams which allowed 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.

Off-Base Transition Training

US Department of Labor selected North Carolina and 4 other states (MA, PA, CA, TX) to participate and support a new program titled Off-Base Transition Training (OBTT). The FY22 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) created this new five-year pilot program which is intended to make the curriculum and services currently offered to active duty transitioning service members on military installations, available to Reservist, National Guard, veterans and military spouses. Cumberland County and Wake County were part of the initial selection by USDOL but, based on the significant success of North Carolina's OBTT pilot program, USDOL has approved North Carolina to conduct OBTT in Mecklenburg, Union, Gaston, Cabarrus, Forsyth, Guilford, and Durham Counties for FY23.

Hire Vets Medallion Program

NC continues to excel in the USDOL program, HIRE Vets Medallion Program (HVMP), which encourages employers' commitment to veteran careers, including hiring, retention, and long-term development. Employers must demonstrate a sustained commitment to hiring veterans. Through the efforts of the DWS veterans' staff, 27 NC employers were recognized with the HVMP award in 2022. DWS was also nationally recognized for upgrading the NCWorks.gov Veterans Portal to highlight the businesses that received this distinction. Veteran job seekers now see the medallion on any of the awardee's job postings.

Employment Navigator Partnership Pilot

The U.S. Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service has selected DWS 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). Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point Havelock 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.

Lumbee Tribe Veterans Services

The DWS Veterans Program was able to place veterans staff member in the Lumbee Tribe specifically to assist the tribal veterans with employment readiness and placement. This is the only program of its type in the nation and we are looking at doing the same in the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Tribe headquartered in Cherokee, NC. Additionally, our recent Lumbee Tribe stand down was held June 2023. 127 registered attendees, 50+ community resources, which included 85 free haircuts and 37 blood donations.

Veterans Treatment Courts (VTC)

The Veterans Treatment Courts, pre-entry solutions, engage with veterans before they enter the justice system. Unlike traditional criminal courts, the primary purpose of a VTC is not to determine whether a defendant is guilty of an offense but to ensure that he or she receives treatment to address unmet clinical needs. As a best practice, DVOP specialists collaborate with other veteran service providers on pre-entry, in-reach and outreach strategies that can help communities plan to meet the needs of justice-involved veterans using approaches that best fit their local circumstances.

There are 8 VTCs throughout North Carolina in Buncombe, Catawba, Harnett, Forsyth, Gaston, Onslow, New Hanover and Cumberland Counties. 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 the VTCs to facilitate employment services and access to community resources.

North Carolina for Military Employment (NC4ME)

North Carolina for Military Employment (NC4ME) is a comprehensive public-private partnership designed to make North Carolina the number one state for military employment. In partnership with the DWS, the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the Military Affairs Commission, NC4ME focuses on veterans, Transitioning Service Members, Guard/Reserve members, and military spouses across North Carolina from the six major military installations in addition to the reserve components. NC4ME leverages existing workforce development resources and technology to implement a unique strategy to connect military talent to business needs. This approach complements existing veteran support efforts and provides a much-needed boost to military job seekers in NC. To accomplish this mission, NC4ME has centered its programming around three primary goals:

- Educating strategic business leaders on the value of hiring high performing military talent.
- Providing accredited human resource training on how to recruit, select, and retain high performing military talent.
- Connecting employers with high performing military talent to drive business results.

NC4ME has been the conduit for arranging over 10,500 interviews for over 12,000 veterans and military spouses - with over 50% receiving a job offer or a second interview.

Military Spouse Transition Network

To support the needs of our current and future military families, the State of North Carolina is a member of the National Association of State Personnel Executives (NASPE) Military Spouse Transition Network (MSTN). As a partner to the MSTN, DWS veterans staff ensures that the program is available to all identified military spouses working for state government agencies. This program is designed to help military spouses moving to or leaving North Carolina identify career resources. The program connects military spouses with career services resources to help aid in resume building, skills translation, and informal contacts to support military spouse re-employment. The program activates when a military spouse receives notification of a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) for their spouse and notifies the North Carolina Office of State Human Resources (OSHR) Talent Acquisition Division of their desire to participate in the program.

Veteran & National Guard Preference Policy

On March 3, 2022 State law required that employment preference be given for having served in the Armed Forces of the United States on active duty (for reasons other than training) during periods of war or any other campaign, expedition, or engagement for which a campaign badge or medal is authorized by the United States Department of Defense. The preference to be accorded eligible veterans shall apply in initial employment, subsequent employment, promotions, reassignments, horizontal transfers and reduction in-force situations.

Hilton Honors Military Program

The Hilton Honors Military Program provides up to 100,000 hotel points to eligible Transitioning Service Members, Veterans and Military Spouses to support needed travel for verifiable employment-related activities, such as a job search, training for a new job, or finding housing near a new job by contacting a local NCWorks Career Center and ask to speak to someone who works with Veterans. Once approved, the jobseeker can redeem the points to help pay for accommodations at any Hilton property. So far we have received over 150 referrals for the calendar year of 2023.

NLX (National Labor Exchange)

National Labor Exchange is an electronic labor-exchange network that was created in 2007 and provides a public-private partnership that leverages private non-profit-owned technology with existing state workforce agency resources. NLX allows state job banks to seamlessly receive and share job openings and is offered at no cost to state workforce agency customers (jobseekers and employers) as well as to workforce agencies and federal partners. It connects nonprofit and Veteran organizations as well as disability and diversity partners. North Carolina's state workforce agency chose NLX services based on our service needs.

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, 2022 - June 30, 2023 program year.

Program	Vets Eligible	Vets Served	Vet Exits	Vet Service Ratio	Non-Vets Eligible	Non-Vets Served	Non-Vets Exit	Non-Vet Service Ratio
Adult	147	91	83	61.9	3,602	2,081	1,982	57.8
Dislocated Worker	150	149	87	99.3	1,443	1,387	633	96.1
Youth	16	15	9	93.8	1,594	1,499	657	94
Wagner-Peyser	7,172	4,810	3,332	67.1	90,128	67,675	46,491	75.1
Trade Adjustment Assistance	1	1	0	100	31	30	18	96.8