

VETERANS TASK FORCE REPORT: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Illinois Workforce Investment Board
Veterans Task Force
Stephen Konya, DCEO, Chair

Executive Summary

The Illinois Workforce Investment Board (IWIB) established the Veterans Task Force to develop recommendations for improving education and training and employment opportunities for Illinois veterans and improving their access to veterans benefits and services. This report summarizes the major challenges and issues facing Illinois veterans and recommendations for addressing them.

The Task Force defined a veteran as a person who has served in the Armed Forces of the United States and received a discharge form. The Veterans Task Force found that many Illinois veterans face serious problems in making the transition to civilian life—a transition process that may take months or even years. In making this transition, many veterans do not effectively access employment and education opportunities and fully utilize veterans benefits and services.

During a period of declining federal and state funding and tight labor markets, Illinois can best address these challenges and issues by leveraging and improving the coordination and effectiveness of existing public and private resources and strengthening connections to Illinois employers in key sectors who are committed to expanding opportunities for Illinois veterans. To do this, the Task Force has focused on the following recommendations:

- improving transitions to employment
- improving the capacity of employers
- expanding access and success in postsecondary education and training
- improving access and utilization of veterans benefits and services.

It is also the recommendation of the Task Force that a statewide Illinois Veterans Transition Team be formed to take responsibility and accountability for implementing the task force recommendations. Further, it is the recommendation of the Task Force that this state team would first develop a plan for implementing these recommendations and present this plan to a joint meeting of the IWIB and the Veterans Task Force and other stakeholder groups for review and approval no later than September 2011. The state team would then begin the implementation of this action plan in cooperation with a statewide network of veterans specialists at the regional and local levels.

Introduction

The Illinois Workforce Investment Board (IWIB) established the Veterans Task Force in December 2009 to develop recommendations for improving education and training and employment opportunities for Illinois veterans. The IWIB established this task force because many Illinois veterans are facing serious challenges and barriers in making transitions to civilian life, especially in accessing education, training, and employment opportunities and related veterans services. In addition, many Illinois veterans are not able to fully utilize and build on their current skills and training in the military to fill critical jobs in key sectors of the Illinois economy.

The IWIB asked the Veterans Task Force to identify the major challenges and barriers now facing Illinois veterans and propose strategies and actions to address these problems. It requested that the task force present findings and recommendations at their March 2011 meeting.

This report summarizes the major findings and recommendations of the Veterans Task Force. The first section provides background information on the formation of the task force, task force meetings, and the major issues addressed. The second section provides a general description of Illinois veterans making the transition from military service between 2001 and 2010 based on an ongoing study by the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES). The final section summarizes the task force findings and recommendations and proposed next steps.

Background

The Veterans Task Force was chaired by Stephen Konya, Chief of Staff at the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. The Task Force included representatives from employers and labor unions, universities and community colleges, veterans organizations and programs, non-profit service providers, and state veterans, human services, education, workforce development and economic development agencies. The Task Force members are listed in Appendix A.

The Task Force met seven times between March 2010 and February 2011 as a full Task Force. It also held meetings and conference calls as four subgroups in June and July 2010. The first meeting in March 2010 focused on providing an overview of the IWIB charge to the task force and identified the major challenges and barriers facing Illinois veterans in making successful transitions to education, training, employment and their communities. The Task Force also established a definition of veterans and identified the key characteristics that should be used to describe Illinois veterans and analyze differences among veterans in making successful transitions.

The second meeting in May 2010 involved in-depth discussions of the major challenges and issues facing veterans and the identification of those challenges that should be the focus of the Task Force work. The Task Force identified the most important challenges and potential actions for three major areas—employment transition and retention, education and benefits and support services. In addition, Task Force members proposed that the Task Force take immediate steps to find jobs for veterans through one or more jump start projects.

The Task Force formed four sub-groups to address these issues and launch a jump start project. These subgroups met in June and July 2010 to further explore these challenges and possible actions as well as plan and implement a jump start project. These sub-groups identified the following high-priority challenges and issues:

- Employment Transition and Retention Sub-Group: (1) employer understanding of key skills veterans bring because of their training and experience, (2) Improving translation of military skills and training to civilian employment, (3) job readiness skills to get and retain employment, and (4) improving capacity of employers to recruit, hire and retain. In addition, sub-group members wanted to explore legal issues in giving veterans hiring priority in the private sector.
- Access and Success in Education and Training Sub-Group: (1) Translating military training and experience to critical workplace skills needed by employers (e.g., in resumes and job interviews), (2) Transferring military training skills/experience into credentials (e.g., licenses, certifications, degrees) for future employment, (3) transferring military/other education toward credits or advanced placement in education and training programs, and (4) transferring and correcting prior educational credits and credentials. In addition, the subgroup focused on the problem of lack of basic academic skills (needing remediation) blocking access to education and training and employment. Finally, the sub-group wanted to address the lack of career and education planning including the lack of: (1) defined career and education plans for accessing local, regional and state employment opportunities in high-demand sectors and (2) early intervention in education and career coaching and planning before enlistment, during deployment, and then again before discharge.
- Access and Utilization of Benefits and Support Services Sub-Group: (1) awareness and understanding of veteran's benefits and related education, employment, and support services, (2) family obligations including required income support and family benefits and services and (3) lack of access (including distance) to on-going supportive services such as mental health and substance abuse counseling.
- Jump Start Project Sub-Group: Better utilizing information technology, including social media tools, to improve ongoing connections between Illinois employers and veterans in combination with networking meetings. The group proposed two pilot meetings supported through Illinois workNet with the first held in Chicago and the second in downstate Illinois.

The August 2010 meeting focused on addressing the challenges and issues in employment transition and retention and learning from leading national, state and local programs including the national Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and transition assistance provided to the National Guard and Reserves. The October 2010 meeting addressed education issues including veterans education benefits and programs and leading models of veterans assistance provided by universities and community colleges and the role of veteran student organizations. This meeting also involved a review of preliminary findings from a study by Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) on Illinois veterans (see study summary below). The first Chicago jump start pilot project was conducted November 2010. The December 2010 meeting addressed access and utilization of benefits and services provided by veterans and human service agencies, national programs, and non-profit providers as well as an update on the IDES study. The January 2011 meeting focused on reviewing the draft findings and recommendations derived from previous meetings and reviewing preliminary findings from the IDES study. The February meeting was dedicated to reviewing revised findings and recommendations and proposed next steps. The Veterans Task Force held a conference call in March 2011 to review and approve final changes to the report.

Illinois Veterans Transitioning Between 2001 and 2010

The Illinois Veterans Task Force was established to address the needs of all Illinois veterans. The task force defined a veteran as a person who has served in the Armed Forces of the United States and received a discharge form (DD-214, DD-215, or for World War II veterans, a WD form).

To better understand the number and characteristics of veterans currently transitioning into Illinois, the task force reviewed findings from an ongoing study by the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) addressing veterans identified by the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) who were discharged between 2001 and early August, 2010. During this period, Illinois had approximately 109,000 total discharges involving about 89,000 veterans (some veterans were discharged more than once) from both the National Guard and Reserves and active duty military service from all major military branches. About 34,347 of the total discharges occurred in the three-year period of 2007 through 2009 with 50.8% discharged from National Guard and Reserve units and 49.2% from active duty military service. About 26.7% of the active duty discharges in 2007-2009 completed at least their second tour of duty in the 2001-2009 time span. About 92.0% of the repeat discharges were from National Guard and Reserve units.

Additional information on this study and the characteristics of Illinois veterans can be found in Appendix B.

Findings and Recommendations

Coordinating and Improving the Veterans Transition Process

Background. Federal law requires that veterans and their families receive transition services to improve their transition to civilian life. For active duty veterans, this is done mainly through the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) provided through a partnership between Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs and the Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS). These veterans are able to start this process up to one year in advance of discharge (two years in advance for retirees) through an individualized pre-separation counseling process designed to develop an individual transition plan based on a pre-separation checklist and guide containing information on careers and employment, education and training, relocation assistance, health care and insurance and other benefits and services.

These active duty veterans then have access to 3-4-day group workshops at military facilities that provide not only direct job-search assistance including career planning, resume-writing, job-search counseling and coaching, resume-writing and interviewing skills, and access to job listings and labor market information but also information on veterans benefits and services. Veterans and their families also can receive transition assistance from family support centers and Veterans Administration benefit counseling and information meetings. In addition, they can receive transition assistance from Disabled Transitional Assistance Program (DTAP) if they are being discharged because of a disability or believe they have a disability that qualifies them for vocational rehabilitation and employment-related services.

The TAP transition process is supported by TurboTAP.org—a Department of Defense website that provides a wide variety of resources including access job boards and job search information, transition planning resources, and connections to other veterans networks and provides a way for veterans to remain connected through an account where veterans can receive updated information and other services. The TAP process is also supported by a Department of Labor website for veterans that provide similar job search assistance and connections to the public workforce development system. In addition, the TAP process is supported by separate websites for each branch of service.

To address the unique needs of the National Guard and Reserve, the Department of Defense and its partners developed limited Transition Assistance Program (TAP) services for demobilizing Guard and Reserve. These veterans and non-demobilizing military members are not eligible to receive the 3-4 day group workshops which are only available to active duty veterans.

This federally-coordinated transition process has worked well for many veterans especially those seeking employment immediately upon discharge. The TAP has been

shown to be effective in reducing the time of many veterans in finding their first post-military job. However, more still needs to be done to improve the transition process, especially for those seeking improved access to education and training services as well as support services. Many states such as Minnesota are now taking aggressive steps to build on and expand this process by improving outreach to veterans at all stages of the transition process, improving connections to employers and state and local programs and services, and filling gaps in services for those veterans facing the most serious barriers to successful transition.

Major Challenges and Issues. The Illinois Veterans Task Force found that many Illinois veterans are not effectively accessing employment, education, and support service opportunities during their transition from military to civilian life starting before discharge and ending years later. This will require a more coordinated state and local outreach and service integration effort that builds on existing federal and state efforts. The task force identified a number of challenges and issues that Illinois should address through the following measures:

- Improve connections with Illinois employers and provide additional assistance in translating the skills and training of veterans to civilian employment.
- Ensure that all demobilizing National Guard and Reserve veterans have access to TAP or similar transition services.
- Provide all Illinois veterans with better transition services for making connections to education and support services.
- Provide more comprehensive and long-term transition services to Illinois veterans because most veterans are not prepared or ready to receive transition assistance before or during the discharge process when TAP services are provided and need to be engaged in outreach efforts months and even years later. There are many promising models and approaches such as some of the services provided by the National Guard that involve multiple meetings and services provided over multiple years.
- Provide more comprehensive benefit counseling and support services that address the needs of the entire family. These needs include income support and benefits and services for other family members including children.
- Develop a more comprehensive approach to providing behavioral health services that starts with early screening and diagnostic services before and during discharge followed by coordinated services throughout the transition process.

These challenges and issues must be addressed during a period when most federal, state, and local employment, education, human services and veterans programs are facing funding reductions. They also must be addressed during a time of high unemployment when many Illinois workers, including veterans, are finding it more difficult to find employment. As a result, Illinois should address these challenges by improving the coordination and effectiveness of existing public and private resources

and strengthening connections to Illinois employers in key sectors who are committed to expanding opportunities for Illinois veterans.

Recommended Actions. Illinois should take the following actions:

1. Statewide Illinois Veterans Transition Team. Establish an Illinois Veterans Transition Team to coordinate and improve the transition of Illinois veterans to civilian life starting before and during discharge over multiple years in cooperation with regional and local partners and a statewide network of veterans specialists. The focus should be on improving transitions to education and training and employment and accessing veterans benefits and services. This team should be a public-private team with representation from federal and state agencies, employers, labor, veterans organizations and other organizations critical to improving the veterans transition process. The team would be responsible for the following:
 - Comprehensive Family-based Approach. Develop and implement a comprehensive family-based approach to transition services that builds on the federal TAP process and includes a strong behavioral health component and provides coordinated outreach to veterans at defined points throughout the transition process and that is customized for different targeted veteran populations.
 - Improved Connections to Illinois Employers. Establish partnerships with Illinois employers and industry and professional associations to directly connect veterans to Illinois employers and help improve the translation of skills to improve matching through web-based resources provided by Illinois workNet and networking events similar to those being piloted by the Veterans Task Force jump start pilot projects.
 - Improved Coordination with Federal Agencies. Establish stronger partnerships with the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs and the VETS program to get advanced notice of veterans being discharged and get contact information for veterans transitioning to civilian life in Illinois.
 - Continuous Outreach and Connection. Utilize regular mailings and other forms of individual outreach including social network tools (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) to all Illinois veterans every few months in the first year and annually thereafter. In addition, Illinois should utilize regular veterans meetings and veterans' recognition events to continue outreach efforts and remind them of the benefits and services available to them.
 - Connecting to Statewide Veterans Specialist Network. Establish and leverage a statewide network of veterans' specialists in education, workforce development, and human services agencies as well as veteran organizations. This should build on existing networks including veterans program networks and broader workforce development networks supported by Workforce Investment Act Title I and other funding sources.

It also should build from the current network of specialists at universities and community colleges and expanding the use of student work-study interns and volunteer veteran peers to provide expanded peer-to-peer assistance. These veterans specialists should be existing front-line professionals designated by their organizations to serve this role.

- Supporting Veteran Specialist Network at Regional and Local Levels. Provide these veterans' specialists with on-line resources and tools and specialized training and certification. This should be based on the model developed by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to use WIA Title I funding to promote a virtual one-stop system through Illinois workNet that provides training and certification services to workforce development professionals in a wide variety of public and private organizations providing education, workforce development, and human services. The team should promote ongoing meetings between veterans specialists at the regional and local levels to address regional and local issues and provide input into improving the statewide effort.
- Connecting to Key Sectors. Focus statewide efforts in critical sectors including healthcare, manufacturing, transportation and logistics, information technology and other critical sectors.
- Connecting to Entrepreneurship Opportunities. Connect Illinois veterans to opportunities to start or expand their own businesses through resources provided through the Illinois entrepreneurship and small business development network and other public and private partners.
- Evaluating and Improving Performance of Transition Process. Maintain information on which veterans are accessing what services in order to evaluate the success of the efforts in transitioning veterans to education and employment while using the data infrastructure being developed by the Illinois Department of Employment Security in cooperation with other state agencies as referenced earlier.

Improving Transition to Employment

Background. As described above, the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) as well as a wide variety of other state and local employment programs provide assistance to veterans in making the transition to employment including how to make the connections between military training and skills and civilian employment and how to manage the employment process including preparing resumes and job interviews. There are many public and private tools and resources to support these efforts including TurboTAP.org—a Department of Defense website, the U.S. Department of Labor website, the Illinois Department of Employment Security, Illinois workNet, and leading national programs such as Helmets to Hardhats. There are also many promising

models for improving the transition to employment by improving the job readiness of veterans.

Major Challenges and Issues. The Veterans Task Force still found major problems in employment transitions for Illinois veterans. Illinois employers reported problems in translating military skills and training into their own job requirements and many employers and service providers reported problems in preparing some veterans for civilian employment. The task force identified two major problems that must be addressed to improve the transition to employment:

- Improving the translation of military skills and training into civilian employment, and
- Improving the overall job readiness of veterans and their skills in finding and retaining employment.

Recommended Actions. The Illinois Veterans Transition Team should take the following actions:

1. **Improved Access to Tools to Translate Military Skills and Training.** Identify the leading tools for translating military skills and training to civilian employment opportunities and use it effectively to assist both Illinois veterans and employers and make improved connections through the transition process. This team should then improve connections to these online resources through a centralized Illinois veteran's portal supported by Illinois workNet that provides employers and veterans and service providers with access to leading tools in translating military skills and training and conveying these skills through resumes and job applications and interviews as well as assistance in receiving credits for entry into postsecondary education and qualifying for licensing and certifications. In addition, Illinois should provide training and support to veterans specialists to assist veterans in using these tools to develop resumes and both veterans and employers in making connections to employment opportunities. These tools should also be used to improve career and educational planning and transitions described later in the report.
2. **Job Readiness Training for Illinois Veterans.** Identify and promote leading models for providing job readiness training for Illinois veterans including job search, transition, and retention. The veterans specialists network should be given training and information on these leading practices.

Improving Capacity of Illinois Employers

Background. As described above, future efforts of the Illinois Veterans Transition Team should focus on improving connections to Illinois employers. There are many examples of Illinois employers that have the commitment and capacity to employ Illinois veterans. There are also many examples of promising public-private partnerships including state and regional networking and job fair events and more targeted employment programs.

Current efforts to assist human resources managers and recruiters to build an understanding of what a Veteran can bring to a civilian job, such as the Easter Seals Operation Employ Veterans program, have found it challenging to engage human resource managers and recruiters in face-to-face outreach and training sessions. In response, Easter Seals recently completed the production of three one-hour online training modules. Training consists of: Employment Barriers for Veterans; Benefits of Employing Veterans; and Integrating Veterans into Your Company. Employers can access this training from their own desk and then request further information, if needed.

Major Challenges and Issues. The Illinois Veterans Task Force found that Illinois should address the following issues:

- Many Illinois employers do not have the capacity to effectively recruit, hire and retain qualified Illinois veterans. In particular, Illinois has launched some promising programs to expand employer capacity but needs to do more.
- Illinois employers that want to hire more veterans have questions and concerns about how to hire veterans through processes that are consistent with existing federal and state employment laws and regulations. Federal and state government agencies give priorities to veterans, but it is unclear what private employers can do to recruit and hire more veterans. Illinois should explore ways to clarify what private employers can and should do in attempting to hire more veterans and provide examples of leading practices and models.
- Many employers do not have the experience and capacity to work with veterans to fully access and utilize their benefits and connect them with services that will improve their transition and retention in employment. Illinois should encourage employers to provide this information to their veteran employees during employee orientation sessions and other opportunities.

Recommended Actions. The Illinois Veterans Transition Team should take the following actions:

1. Information Resources for Illinois Employers. Work with leading programs such as Easter Seals to develop on-line resources and materials for Illinois employers through Illinois workNet. This effort should include access to tools in translating military skills and training to civilian jobs.
2. Access and Utilization of Benefits by Employees. Conduct outreach to Illinois employers through state, regional and local business and industry associations and professional human resource associations and veterans meetings and events to encourage employers to provide information to veterans on veterans' benefits and services during employee orientation and other opportunities using materials and resources on Illinois workNet. These efforts also should encourage employers to implement leading business practices in working with all employees to identify barriers in improving with job performance that could be used to work with veterans to identify problems and develop training and support service solutions in cooperation with veterans specialist networks in their communities.
3. Guidance in Hiring Illinois Veterans. Provide guidance to Illinois employers on how to hire more veterans consistent with federal and state employment laws and regulations including examples of leading practices and models.

Improving Access and Success in Postsecondary Education and Training

Background. The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs and state education agencies have worked in recent years to improve the capacity of all community colleges and universities to serve veterans and recognize and build on leading models throughout the state. Most Illinois universities and community colleges now have veterans coordinators that direct veterans to veterans services on their campuses. Many college and universities have done much more. For example, Southern Illinois University recently received a statewide award for veterans services. The Illinois Community College Board is working with community colleges to standardize their web sites for veterans services, expand credit transfer opportunities and share best practices. Illinois also is working with veteran student organizations throughout the state to build stronger peer-to-peer student networks to support veterans including use of work-study programs to expand the number of veteran students providing peer-to-peer support. Finally, the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs is conducting outreach efforts to expand awareness of new job training benefits that can support veterans training in non college degree programs and on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs.

Major Challenges and Issues. The Veterans Task Force identified the following challenges and issues to be addressed:

- Despite current efforts many veterans have military training and educational credits and credentials that should be more easily transferred and leveraged to allow them to complete postsecondary education and training programs and attain credentials and certifications in less time during their transition to civilian employment. Some of these problems are general barriers faced by all students transferring between postsecondary education and training programs and are being addressed through the Illinois Articulation Initiative and related efforts. However, veterans face some specific problems in transferring credits and credentials that may require more focused and specialized national or state efforts that provide guidance and assistance to veterans and educational institutions in credit transfer.
- Similar efforts should address problems in transferring military training and experience in qualifying for professional licenses and certifications in Illinois, especially in key sectors such as healthcare and transportation.
- More needs to be done in building the capacity of universities and colleges to serve veterans including leveraging veterans student organizations and peer-delivered services and getting more information out on access to new veterans job training benefits.
- In addition, many veterans do not have the basic academic skills to enter postsecondary education without remediation. This substantially reduces the likelihood that they will successfully enter and complete postsecondary education and fully utilize their veteran's educational benefits to attain employment consistent with their career interests.

Recommended Actions: The Illinois Veterans Transition Team should take the following actions:

1. Improve Access to Tools to Translate Skills and Training to Education and Professional Credentials. As recommended earlier, the Illinois Transition Team should establish a centralized Illinois veteran's portal supported by Illinois workNet that provides employers and veterans access to leading tools in translating military skills and training and conveying these skills through resumes and job applications and interviews. This portal should also support tools in translating skills and training into educational credits and professional licensing and certifications. In addition, this portal should provide improved career and educational planning resources for veterans including improved information to veterans on how to translate military training and educational credits into postsecondary credit and what Illinois colleges and universities can provide the best program for them given their current skills and credits. In addition, the team should undertake focused projects to improve translation of military training and credentials into professional credentials and licenses starting with healthcare and transportation.

2. Improve Capacity of Illinois College and Universities. Work with Illinois colleges and universities to identify veterans coordinators and provide at least a basic level of veterans services and share best practices that improve access and success. This should include stronger statewide and campus-level peer to peer student veteran networks enabled through technology, work-study supports, and training. This should be done as part of training for the full network of veterans specialists to use online tools and other resources supported by Illinois workNet in cooperation with Illinois workforce development professionals that provide assistance to veterans in accessing education opportunities.
3. Expand Job Training Opportunities. Work with the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs to expand utilization of non-traditional postsecondary education and training in cooperation with Illinois employers and education and workforce development professionals.
4. Expand Efforts to Address Basic Skill Barriers. Develop strategies to include basic skill assessment early in the veteran's transition process as part of comprehensive career and educational counseling to provide better guidance on addressing basic skills barriers to postsecondary education and employment. In addition, the team should work with education partners to develop strategies to expand access for veterans to bridge programs and related remediation programs through Veterans education benefits and other funding sources that are effective in successful transition to postsecondary education and training programs, especially in key sectors of the economy.

Improving Access and Utilization of Veterans Benefits and Services

Background. As described above, federal and state veterans programs are designed primarily for transition to employment with less focus on providing comprehensive access to support services throughout the transition process, except for veterans transitioning directly from veterans hospitals and other medical facilities. As recommended earlier, Illinois needs a more comprehensive family-based approach to transition services that includes a stronger behavioral health component and provides coordinated outreach to veterans at defined points throughout the transition process and that is customized for different targeted veteran populations. Mental health service providers should be full partners in the state team and in the statewide and regional networks of veterans specialists so that all veterans specialists have some understanding of behavioral health issues and related benefits and services and can get veterans to the right place. This would also allow mental health specialists serving veterans can get veterans access to related services as needed.

Major Challenges and Issues. The Illinois Veterans Task force identified some major challenges that should be the focus of these efforts.

- Illinois should focus more attention on the early screening and education of Illinois veterans on mental health issues and eliminating the stigma of mental health problems that many times prevents veterans from accessing and utilizing services. This effort must start with a strong behavioral health component to TAP and related transition programs and ongoing efforts to reach out to veterans during the entire transition process that may take months or years.
- Illinois should address barriers to employment faced by Illinois veterans who have criminal records. Some Illinois veterans, including those with mental health and substance abuse problems, face a difficult time in accessing employment opportunities because they have non-violent felony and misdemeanor convictions that bar them from employment in many key sectors of the Illinois economy. Some state circuit court systems are now addressing this problem by putting in place diversionary court programs for veterans, similar to the mental health and drug courts that have existed for years. The key to these courts is they provide necessary therapy and counseling to individuals and reward successful completion of the full diversionary program with the removal of the original arrest, thus keeping the criminal record clear for those particular violations. Illinois should take immediate actions to formalize these veterans diversionary court programs and expand their implementation throughout the state and build better connections to employment, education and support services available to all veterans. In addition, the state team should have representation from Illinois court programs. These programs also should be full partners in the statewide and regional networks of veterans specialists to improve service coordination and delivery.
- Illinois should address barriers associated with transportation access to services. Illinois should build on efforts of the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) Human Services Transportation Planning (HSTP) initiative as well as the work of the Interagency Coordinating Committee on Transportation (ICCT) to ensure that the needs of veterans are being addressed.

As stated above, these challenges and issues must be addressed during a period when most federal, state and local employment, education, human services, transportation and veterans programs are facing funding reductions, especially mental health and substance abuse programs.

Recommended Actions. The Illinois Veterans Transition Team should take the following actions:

1. Access and Utilization of Mental Health Services. Work with partners to build a stronger mental health component into transition services and launch efforts to address the stigma associated with mental health services in ways that can

promote early interventions. The team also should include mental health providers in the statewide network of veterans specialists.

2. Veterans Courts and Related Programs. Work with leading state and federal court representatives and criminal justice experts to formalize and expand veterans courts and related programs throughout the state and improve their coordination with other veterans services.
3. Expand Access to Transportation Services. Work with the state agencies and regional and local partners to build on current efforts to improve transportation access to critical transition services including mental health services.

Call to Action

"We must do everything we can to support our Veterans and service members. It is our duty to honor the men and women in uniform who have selflessly served our state and country." -*Governor Quinn*

The Task Force recommendations are made with the clear understanding that these challenges and issues must be addressed during a period when most federal, state, and local employment, education, human services and veterans programs are facing funding reductions and many Illinois workers, including veterans, are finding it more difficult to find employment. Based on the collective knowledge of the Task Force members and recognition of current financial constraints, it was determined that many of these challenges be addressed by leveraging and improving the coordination and effectiveness of existing public and private resources and strengthening connections to Illinois employers in key sectors who are committed to expanding opportunities for Illinois veterans.

The recommendations of this Task Force, if acted upon, will ensure that our veterans are provided with every possible opportunity to be successful outside of the military. For their bravery, their duty and their sacrifice, we owe it to them to take action now.

Appendix A: Veterans Task Force Members

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Jason Tyszko	Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
Sheryl von Westernhagen	Office Max
Simon J. Wlodarski	Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

Appendix B: Veterans Study

The study by the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) separated the veterans into four categories of rank: Officers [OFF], and three levels of enlisted, pay grades E1 to E3 [E1E3], E4 to E6 (NCOs) [E4E6], and E7 to E9 (Senior NCOs) [E7E9]; two types of service: Reserve/Guard [R/G] and Regular Services [REG]; and eight age groups.

Statistical Profile for Illinois Discharges (2007 – 2009)

34,347 of the total discharges occurred in the three-year period of 2007 through 2009. 50.8% of these discharges were R/G and 49.2% were REG. 26.7% of the total discharges in 2007-2009 completed at least their second tour of duty in the 2001-2009 time span. 92.0% of the repeat discharges were R/G.

Reserve/Guard Discharges (2007 – 2009)

	% of R/G Discharges	% of Discharges Under Age 25	Average Age of Discharges	Average Months Served in Last Tour
OFF	12.5%	5.4%	38.6	16.6
E7E9	8.7%	0.1%	43.3	31.6
E4E6	42.1%	35.9%	29.2	13.4
E1E3	36.7%	85.5%	21.8	6.0

% of R/G discharges (2007 - 2009) by age group (age at time of discharge): 18-19 (16.1%), 20-24 (31.1%), 25-29 (17.9%), 30-34 (9.4%), 35-44 (17.0%), 45-54 (7.2%), 55-64 (1.3%), 65 and over (0.0%)

Regular Services Discharges (2007 – 2009)

	% of REG Discharges	% of Discharges Under Age 25	Average Age of Discharges	Average Months Served in Last Tour
OFF	7.4%	1.2%	37.2	130.8
E7E9	7.1%	0.3%	42.6	252.0
E4E6	54.0%	45.2%	27.0	71.0
E1E3	31.4%	82.2%	22.6	22.4

The percentage of REG discharges (2007 - 2009) by age group (age at time of discharge) are as follows: 18-19 (7.2%), 20-24 (43.2%), 25-29 (26.0%), 30-34 (8.0%), 35-44 (11.2%), 45-54 (4.1%), 55-64 (0.3%), 65 and over (0.0%)

Data and Continuing Research

This research project on veterans would not be possible without the cooperation of IDVA. That agency supplied a list of Illinois discharges for 2001 – 2010 to research staff at IDES along with information about each of the discharges. This allowed researchers to identify the age at discharge, rank category, type of service, months of tour of duty, gender, etc. The IDVA identifying information was also matched to other state agency databases to integrate data on 1) wages for those discharges that worked for Illinois employers; 2) unemployment claims; 3) enrollment and degrees/certificates earned in Illinois educational institutions and training programs; 4) and other government program information. Data from outside of the state government was also included through the use of a national education database commercial vendor, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the FEDES program. This data was an important resource used to inform the Task Force's analysis and recommendations.

The monitoring of the transition of veterans from the military to stable civilian employment could be continued based on the model used for the current research study. IDVA data could be acquired every quarter and used to match against IDES data files for wages and unemployment claims. Education and training data should also be included in any continuing study. Some of this data will not be available for several months after the actual date of the data record. Acquiring access to the Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS) should be considered in order to include wage records for those discharges who work for employers outside of Illinois (non-federal government). It appears that summary data results only would be available from WRIS after an initial inquiry. This would certainly be better than no data at all for these individuals. Acquiring access to the Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS) should be investigated in order to include wage records for those discharges who work for employers outside of Illinois (non-federal government). It should remain an objective of the research on veterans to account for as many individuals on the IDVA list as possible. Some data costs will be incurred but part of that issue could be addressed by a larger effort to provide access to all state workforce development agencies for the national education database.