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Statement of

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Acting Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness)

before the

Senate Armed Services Committee

and

Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee

“Military to Civilian Transition: Ensuring Success After Service”

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Chairmans Tester and Reed, Ranking Members Moran and Wicker, and other distinguished Members of the Committees, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the collaborative relationship between the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Labor (DOL), and our other federal agency partners. DoD and our partners are working closely to improve the effectiveness, quality, timeliness, and efficiency of the delivery of benefits and health care services, while enhancing interoperability and efficiency in our joint operations, particularly in the area of military-to-civilian transition. We advance these goals primarily through the Joint Executive Committee (JEC), a VA-DoD interagency collaborative body co-chaired by VA Deputy Secretary Tanya Bradsher and me. We are uniquely situated, not just because of our positions, but because we are also statutorily charged as the “chief collaborators” on behalf of each department. As such, we are the standard-bearers leading nearly all joint efforts between VA and DoD.

As a result of the JEC, we moved past the historically bifurcated view that DoD’s role ends when the Service member separates from military service, to embrace a new appreciation of overlapping interests and dependent responsibilities across the Service member and Veteran journey. I am honored to join VA’s Under Secretary for Benefits, Mr. Josh Jacobs, and Assistant Secretary of Labor for the Veterans’ Employment and Training Service, Mr. James Rodriguez, to share how the three departments collaborate regarding military-to-civilian transition.

Joint Framework for Transition Success

Nearly 200,000 Service members transition from the military to civilian life each year. This transition is widely recognized as a potentially challenging and stressful process for Service members, Veterans, their family members, and caregivers. While no experience is identical, Service members and Veterans share a broad set of common stages they universally traverse. VA, DoD, and DOL focus on each stage, particularly during the critical transition period—365 days before separation and extending through the critical 365 days after separation—to proactively identify and address potential gaps as well as opportunities for collaboration, coordination, and shared resources. Recognizing the need for interagency collaboration, the Fiscal Year (FY) 2004 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) directed the establishment of the VA-DoD Joint Executive Committee (JEC) to maximize coordination and sharing between

and within the Departments (Attachment 1: Joint Executive Committee Organizational Structure).

In 2020, understanding the critical importance of a successful transition, the Transition Assistance Program Executive Council (TAP-EC) was realigned under the JEC to ensure comprehensive oversight by senior leaders and direct access to decision makers. The military-to-civilian transition process works in large part because of a dynamic and collaborative interagency partnership. In addition to DoD, VA, and DOL, four other federal agencies and the military services comprise the TAP-EC, including the Department of Education, Department of Homeland Security, Small Business Administration and the Office of Personnel Management. This formal collaborative body sets the conditions for a successful military-to-civilian transition and establishes expectations for program and interagency integration, performance measures, and outcomes to facilitate synergy, consistency, and synchronization in the military-to-civilian transition. The TAP-EC ensures that the transition program is relevant, progressive, and continuously improving to meet the needs of the transitioning Service member.

Military-to-Civilian Transition

As the Acting Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness, my job is to support our DoD mission by ensuring readiness of our force; this includes preparing Services members and their families for transition. The Department is committed to supporting our Warfighters and their families as they navigate the transition from military to civilian life. Over the last five years, DoD and our interagency partners have hosted numerous Military to Civilian Transition Summits that yielded two key outcomes: (1) we aligned disparate department and interagency transition activities into one overarching transition framework, and (2) we designated the year before and year after separation as the “critical transition period.” These summits led to the development of the Military to Civilian Readiness (M2C Ready) Framework, adopted by the JEC in September 2019 (Attachment 2: M2C Ready Framework).

Under the auspices of the JEC, the Departments began implementation of a more interconnected and efficient transition process that aligns military-to-civilian transition activities along a continuum during the critical 365 days before separation and extending through the critical 365 days after separation. This 365-pre and 365-post transition time provides for comprehensive, standardized, and individualized assessments across DoD, VA, and the military

services; and reinforces development of an individualized transition plan according to a Service member's unique circumstances.

Military to Civilian Readiness (M2C Ready) Framework

M2C Ready is an overarching framework that aligns all the various activities during transition to provide transitioning Service members with an understanding of, and easy access to, all the benefits, services and resources they are entitled to. Further, M2C Ready provides interagency support to facilitate a holistic and successful transition, and it guides policymakers towards areas of the process that need additional attention without creating duplicative programs or activities. The M2C Ready framework assisted in identifying gaps in the transition process and facilitated agency efforts aimed at advancing the health, benefits, and support of Service members, Veterans, and their families.

Transition Assistance Program (TAP) of Today

Today's Transition Assistance Program (TAP) is far different than the program of ten, five, or even three years ago. Through DoD, VA and DOL focused collaborative efforts, the TAP of today is an individualized, robust program with alternate pathways and multiple levels of assistance. At each step of the process, Service members have access to trained counselors who guide the Service member and tailor the program, allowing Service members to be in control of their transition and use programs, resources, and information that fit their specific needs and align with their post-transition goals.

Initial Counseling

The TAP journey begins with an Initial Counseling (IC) session initiated no later than 365 days prior to separation, and Service members eligible for retirement are strongly encouraged to begin transition 24 months prior to retirement. During the individualized counseling session with a trained TAP counselor, a Service member completes a baseline wellbeing assessment and begins development of an Individual Transition Plan. Based on the personal self-assessment and counseling, the TAP counselor assigns the Service member to a transition tier level. The assigned tier level—one (minimal assistance), two (medium assistance), or three (most assistance)—determines the transition assistance a Service member needs. Each

individual Service member's tier alignment details which TAP components, courses, and Career Readiness Standards (CRS) are mandatory.

Individual Self-Assessment

The military-to-civilian transition process has historically focused on career readiness, as directed by 10 U.S.C 1142, U.S.C. 1144, and supporting Department policies. Illuminated by numerous stories of Veterans who died by suicide, like that of Sgt. Daniel Keegan and Sgt. Daniel Somers, among many others, the TAP-EC is piloting a self-assessment that will assist in determining the likelihood the Service member will face major readjustment, health care, employment, or other transition-related challenges across nine multiple life domains: social & relational, resiliency, hope, financial, employment, housing, sense of belonging, mental & physical health resource awareness. To ensure meaningful data, the pilot will run from March 1, 2023 through February 29, 2024 at 17 installations. We project a potential Phase II pilot from May through June 2024 to evaluate any significant adjustments and lessons learned identified by the initial pilot. A department-wide implementation date will be determined based on the success of the pilot, required adjustments, and lessons learned.

Pre-Separation Counseling Brief

Once the IC and assessment are complete, the Service member attends the Pre-Separation Counseling Brief (Pre-Sep). Pre-Sep informs the Service member of various services, benefits, and resources available during and after transition. The Pre-Sep also familiarizes the Service member with available resources and content within the TAP courses. This provides the Service member with the knowledge and flexibility to determine when to use services based on individual needs and timeline for transition.

Benefits Delivery at Discharge

DoD and VA encourage Service members to apply for VA Disability compensation benefits prior to separation and therefore coordinate closely in the execution of the Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) program. BDD allows Service members who are separating and applying for VA disability to file their claim as early as 180 days prior to separation. In September of 2023, DoD and VA began leveraging electronic pre-separation service treatment

records as a foundation for considering Service members' applications for BDD. This eliminates burdensome requirements for Service members to obtain and transmit records to VA, reduces time-consuming administration at military medical treatment facilities, and speeds the application process by as much as 50 percent. We are working to make all available personnel record and clinical data available electronically for the BDD population to create even more efficiencies.

One Separation Health Assessment (OneSHA)

Furthermore, DoD and VA consolidated the DoD's Separation History and Physical Examination (SHPE) and VA's Separation Health Assessment (SHA) into a single, common VA-DoD separation health assessment with identical questions, terminology, and definitions. The new common form includes a new mental health assessment and collects information about occupational and environmental exposure, women's health, traumatic brain injury, oral health, and other focus areas. This common form facilitates streamlined transition of health care from DoD to VA; improved clinical documentation of health status, including mental health at the time of separation; and improved VA claims processing for separating Service members who apply under the BDD program. The VA is already transferring all of the data from their use of the new form to DoD. The DoD will implement the form Fall 2024.

Transition Curriculum

During the transition period, all Service members must complete five core courses: Managing Your Transition, Military Occupational Code Crosswalk, Financial Planning for Transition, VA Benefits and Services, and DOL Employment Fundamentals for Career Transition.

Along with the core curriculum, TAP includes four two-day courses (tracks) to provide focused information and resources aligned with specific post-transition goals. The four tracks are employment, vocational, education, and entrepreneurship. Regardless of their designated tier, Service members must elect a track based on individual post-transition goals and are encouraged to attend the track-specific course. However, only those determined as Tier Level 3 are required to attend the elected track. Military Departments may exempt Service members determined as Tier Level 2 from track attendance based on the results of their IC and self-

assessment. DoD strongly encourages attendance at any additional track(s) that would provide valuable information supporting the Service member's individual transition plan.

Capstone

Conducted no later than 90 days before transition from active duty, Capstone is the final component of transition administered by the DoD. During Capstone, the Commander, or Commander's designee, reviews the Service member's transition journey to determine completion of all applicable components. Service members identified as requiring additional support require a warm handover by the Commander or designee. These warm handovers may include to Military OneSource for peer support, VA for housing assistance, or DOL for employment assistance. A warm handover creates a connection between the Service member and the appropriate partner or agency with the resources to assist in transition and beyond. Service members may also request a warm handover from the TAP counselor if they have a concern with their preparedness.

Enhanced Statement of Benefits

After separation, a Service member is provided with a list of all the benefits, services, and health care to which they may be entitled, though that list is not tailored to each individual Service member. Under the direction of the JEC, DoD and VA are developing an online, authoritative, and individualized Enhanced Statement of Benefits, which will be hosted on VA.gov. This tailored, searchable listing of eligible DoD, VA, and DOL post-separation benefits will make it easier and faster for Veterans to identify eligibility; search for benefits, services, and health care; and apply for benefits. Acquisitions efforts are planned for 2024.

Eligibility for Military OneSource After Separation

Military OneSource's 24/7 call center, website, and mobile app with access to over 100+ support services for transitioning Service members and their dependents, are available for 365 days after separation. Military OneSource is a familiar and trusted resource for Service members and their families. The top three services requested by transitioning Service members and their families are non-medical counseling (relationship and readjustment counseling), tax services, and hometown information and referral services.

VA Solid Start

As a result of DoD, VA, and DOL's collaboration on M2C Ready, the VA's Solid Start program was launched in 2021. It was designed to contact Veterans at three critical points during the first year of transition at the 90-, 180-, and 360-day mark in order to achieve early and consistent contact and support the transition to civilian life—from help getting a home loan, to health care, to returning to work to mental health support. Additionally, DoD data provided to Solid Start assists VA counselors in prioritizing outreach to Veterans.

Assessment and Joint Longitudinal Study

The DoD uses the Transition Assistance Participant Assessment (TAPA) to capture Service member experiences and knowledge gained throughout the TAP process. TAPA, along with diverse assessments from both governmental and non-governmental entities, allows the TAP-EC Interagency to evaluate TAP, the perception of TAP, and the quality of the counseling and instruction provided. The TAPA also captures basic demographics, such as Service, component, grade, length of service, location, and gender. Participation in the TAPA is voluntary and anonymous. However, the Department encourages Service members to complete the TAPA after each TAP course so that program improvement continues.

DoD and DOL joined forces with VA to participate in the Post-Separation Transition Assistance Program Assessment (PSTAP) Outcome Study. The study uses a cross-sectional and longitudinal survey to collect information from Veterans to continually evaluate and improve the military to civilian transition. Data collection began with the administration of the 2019 Cross-Sectional Survey with more than 3,000 Veterans voluntarily participating and with new cohorts of Veterans added each year. This multi-year study will help the departments determine the effectiveness of TAP on transitioning Service member long-term outcomes in the broad domains of employment, education, health, social relationships, finances, overall life satisfaction, and well-being and provide policy makers at DoD, VA, and DOL with valuable observations help guide future transition policy decisions.

Health Care Transition

The DoD and VA continue to engage in joint efforts to provide a consistent, patient-centered health care experience that delivers excellent quality, access, satisfaction, value, and, most importantly, outcomes. VA and DoD together manage the two largest health care systems in the nation, which care for an overlapping population. Over the years, we have enhanced our coordinated care; gained value, efficiencies, and consistency; and reduced duplication and waste, from a collaborative relationship that provides high-quality care for more than 18 million Service members, Veterans, and eligible beneficiaries.

Mental Health Touchpoints

Over the last two years, the JEC, TAP-EC, Benefits Executive Committee (BEC), the Joint Suicide Prevention and Associated Mental Health Work Group, and the Separation Health Working Group have established mental health touchpoints along the transition process. We have also implemented procedures between VA and DoD to improve data exchange and conduct warm handoffs of Service members at increased risk. Additionally, these touch points include Initial Counseling, an individual self-assessment, VA pre-registration for health care and benefits, a new Separation Health Assessment, inTransition behavioral health care assistance, and post-separation enrollment into VA Solid Start.

InTransition/Warm-hand-off

The DoD's inTransition Program assists Service members who have used behavioral health care services while on active duty in finding new providers and maintaining continuity of care across transitions—including when relocating to another assignment, returning from deployment, transitioning from active duty to the reserve, transitioning from the reserve to active duty, or preparing to leave military service. This assistance takes the shape of world-wide, specialized, telephonic transition coaching to facilitate the connection to a new provider, such as VA, community, or other providers. In 2020, as part of M2C Ready, the inTransition program began providing to VA data that classifies a subset of separating Service members into two categories of potential concern based on six mental health factors to facilitate VA outreach and access to care and benefits through VA's Solid Start program.

Military/Veteran Crisis Line

Today's Military/Veterans Crisis Line (MVCL) has grown to include an online chat and text service with over 500 responders in three call centers across the United States. Since its inception in 2007, MVCL has answered more than 7.1 million calls, 327,000 texts; and engaged in 862,000 virtual chats, resulting in over 1.3 million referrals to suicide prevention coordinators available in each VA medical center across the country. Suicide prevention coordinators can connect Veterans to the counseling and services they need. DoD and VA are committed to evolving the Military/Veterans Crisis Line (MVCL) to find the most effective ways to support Service members, Veterans, and their loved ones in crisis.

Predictive Modeling and Machine Learning

The DoD and the Air Force have partnered with RallyPoint, a social media platform with two million Veterans and current military members, through a pilot program to address the needs across five different populations within the military community: caregivers, transitioning Service members, those needing childcare, those in need of family advocacy services, and those in crisis. The pilot uses a predictive model and machine learning to connect Service members and families to the right Military OneSource resource at the right time. Further, the Air Force's predictive model and machine learning activities provide help to Service members and/or Veterans displaying suicidal ideation by detecting key word indicators. To date, the Air Force pilot has been credited with 49 interventions. The DoD, in close coordination with VA, is evaluating additional opportunities to implement predictive modeling and machine learning to provide the right resource, at the right time, to the right Service member, Veteran, or family member.

Enhancing Caregiver Transition

Caregiver and Service member transition experiences are tightly coupled. To provide a seamless experience to caregivers, the DoD and VA must ensure that they are fully engaged in Service member care coordination and transition planning, and that dedicated personnel are proactively engaging caregivers and families directly to provide guidance, relevant resources, planning, support, and clear expectations for next steps. In December 2022, the JEC directed a Human Centered Design (HCD) research effort to identify and evaluate opportunities to jointly improve and standardize the DoD and VA caregiver programs. The HCD research included discussions and evaluations with caregivers, the military departments, and the VA and DoD

service recovery programs to understand duplication and differences in DoD and VA program requirements, as well as needs, desires, and pain points impacting caregivers of medically separating or catastrophically injured Service members. The research results will be available in early spring 2024 and the JEC will use the gathered experiential information to consider program, policy, and legislative improvements for this group of transitioning individuals.

Career Readiness

Ensuring a healthy, ready force is essential to our national security. That also means we must prepare Service members for the transition into a civilian career. TAP courses are one piece of the transition framework. DoD partners with VA, DOL, and the Office of Personnel Management to advance several programs focused on career readiness, including Service members interested in pursuing civilian employment with the Federal government as an employer of choice.

Skillbridge

The highly popular Skillbridge program permits interested Service members to gain valuable civilian employment skills by providing job training, including apprenticeship programs, with defense industrial base employers as well as federal, state, local, and private-sector employers. In return, these businesses have access to the world's most highly trained and motivated workforce and can evaluate participants' suitability for future employment within their company. The program is voluntary, with the scope and individual participation defined by Service operational needs, force structure policy, and Service member interest. Over 22,000 Service members enrolled or participated in FY 2022, with over 3,800 industry partners to date. In comparison, in FY 2019, approximately 8,000 Service members participated with 450 industry partners.

In 2023, Skillbridge was realigned within the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs to improve program stability, governance, evaluation, and management. Those efforts include enhanced information systems, data collection, and data analysis. The DoD is conducting employer and stakeholder outreach engagements to ensure that the next evolution of Skillbridge is fully informed by Department, military services, Service member, and industry partner assessments and requirements.

Credentialing and Apprenticeships

The DoD credentialing program strengthens the career readiness of Service members by helping them attain civilian credentials, mapping military skills and experiences to enhance the professionalism of the All-Volunteer Force and bolstering preparedness for transitioning Service members to maximize employment opportunities. This is achieved by validating Service members' progress along a skills continuum from novice to expert, assessing milestones, and facilitating the attainment of qualifications along a targeted career and education pathway.

Additionally, the United Services Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP) allows Service members to earn their DOL journeyman certificate through documented hours and skills in Military Occupational Specialties. It is the largest federal government registered apprenticeship program, with more than 93,000 active participants.

Employment Navigator and Partnership Pilot

The Employment Navigator and Partnership Pilot (ENPP) provides one-on-one career assistance to interested transitioning Service members, and their spouses, at 29 military installations worldwide. Provided outside of the formal TAP classroom instruction, participants complete self-assessments, undergo skills testing, explore career options, and identify high-demand occupations and necessary credentials. Participants also review detailed labor-market information and connect with government and non-government partners to identify other services to help secure meaningful and lasting post-separation careers.

Transition and the Military Family

The DoD provides an extensive portfolio of programs and services focused on supporting individuals and families during and after their military service and across the multiple domains of military family readiness: career, social, financial, health, and community. As the needs of Service members and their families change, the DoD continues to adjust and rebalance programs to serve the transitioning military community with relevant programs.

Spouse Transition

The Secretary of Defense has made taking care of people one of the Department's three top priorities, and that includes the health and well-being of our military families and spouses. Military spouses are eligible to attend TAP with their Service member. Additionally, the Military Spouse Transition Program (MySTeP) provides tailored, topical transition resources and information for military spouses.

Often, military spouses find the transition of their Service member an ideal time to begin, restart, or reenergize their career. The DoD has numerous tools and resources in place to assist military spouses in the employment space both during and after their Service member's military career. The Spouse Education and Career Opportunities (SECO) program provides several initiatives that specifically support the career needs of military spouses before, during, and after the transition of their Service member, including comprehensive educational and career coaching services through master's level, certified career coaches. SECO initiatives are available to military spouses for 365 days following the separation or retirement of their Service member.

The Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP) connects spouses to over 700 corporations, small businesses, federal agencies, and non-profits that have committed to recruit, hire, promote, and retain military spouses. Since 2011, MSEP employer partners have hired more than 275,000 spouses across all industry sectors.

Finally, occupational interstate licensure compacts provide consistent rules for licensed practitioners to work in multiple states and provide the most effective means for relieving the burdens of maintaining multiple state licenses for military spouses. The military provisions added to most of these compacts assist military spouses to establish a home state where they hold a license and have that license allow them to practice in all other compact-member states. Compacts offer a national solution for licensure portability for both civilian and military members.

Exceptional Family Member Program

The Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) helps military families with special medical and educational needs to navigate and access the resources to meet those needs. Military and Family Support Centers provide both EFMP family support and transition assistance services to prepare families for civilian life. Service members and their families can use EFMP family support services in conjunction with TAP through their installation's Military

and Family Support Center. EFMP family support services assist families with navigating and accessing resources individualized to meet their needs throughout the military lifecycle, including providing information and referral to essential services and considerations when transitioning out of the military. Each year, an estimated 200,000 Service members transition to civilian life. Of this, an estimated 12 percent have one or more family members enrolled in the EFMP.

Transitional Compensation for Abused Dependents (TCAD)

The Family Advocacy Program (FAP) promotes early identification, reporting, comprehensive intervention, assessment, and coordinated support to victims of child abuse and neglect and domestic abuse. Each installation is responsible for ensuring public awareness activities to include the availability of transitional compensation for abused dependents (TCAD) for victims of child abuse and neglect and domestic abuse. Transitional compensation benefits are designed to help family members establish a life apart from abusive Service members. The FAP Domestic Abuse Victim Advocate (DAVA) and other FAP personnel are available to offer victims education and information about TCAD to include eligibility criteria, application requirements, and expectations of what TCAD can provide and support to the victim through the TCAD application process.

Financial Readiness

DoD's financial readiness program provides mandatory financial literacy training to members at specific milestones across the military lifecycle, including transition, following the best practices outlined by the congressionally established Financial Literacy Education Commission (FLEC). DoD programs provide trusted, factual, objective, and unbiased education and counseling support to members and spouses free of conflict-of-interest, delivered in a non-judgmental manner, allowing individuals to make informed financial decisions to meet their goals and navigate potential financial challenges.

Financial readiness training that supports a successful transition to post-service life begins on day one of military service with an overview of the Blended Retirement System and the importance of saving for retirement and contributing to the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP). Using

the FLEC best practices, transition assistance financial literacy and counseling efforts build on an individual's mandatory prior training and focus on what is needed for transition.

Specific to the TSP, over the course of a career, education is initially focused on TSP basic investing, saving for retirement, and maximizing the government's matching contribution. In preparation for transition, the focus of education shifts to plan portability and options upon separation or retirement to include penalties and tax implications for early withdrawal. At points in between, training and education addresses the implications of being vested in TSP and options to increase one's TSP contributions and build a stronger financial future through pay increases or allotting a bonus to their account. The DoD also provides no-cost on-demand personal financial counseling with supplemental education and resources to members and spouses.

States: An Integral Partner in Transition

State Department of Veterans Affairs (SDVA) offices play a critical role in transition as they have been tasked to specifically manage Veterans' affairs and carry out the responsibility for Veteran services and programs in their respective states or territories. Additionally, these state departments welcome Veterans and their family's home, while connecting them to federal and state benefits, support, high-quality care, and recognition they have earned. DoD initiatives around transition include direct communication and connection with SDVAs.

The newest version of the TAP curriculum includes introductory information and links to SDVAs for 54 states and territories and the District of Columbia. Beginning in January 2024, the TAP VA Benefits Day will include a 45-minute session with state, county VA Reps, and Veteran Service Organizations, jointly identified by the VA and each host installation delivered at over 200 TAP locations around the globe.

Recognizing the importance of data, in both outreach and connecting Veterans to services and resources, the DoD has Memoranda of Understanding with each SDVA. DoD provides 240 data points for each transitioning Service member to SDVAs. In August, the DoD began updating the MOUs with revised language to provide additional data-use flexibilities to SDVAs and the inclusion of new transition data elements contained in the DoD Form 2648: Pre-Separation Counseling Checklist for Active Component, Active Guard Reserve, Active Reserve, Full Time Support, and Reserve Program Administrator Service Members, which will be

provided to SDVAs up to a year prior to separation, providing key data to states to support the transition experience.

Furthermore, the DoD has asked the TAP-EC (inclusive of our interagency partners) to jointly review DD Form 2648 and recommend additional data elements that could be advantageous to the SDVAs in their work to support transitioning Service members. The DoD appreciates the Senate including language in the FY24 NDAA that makes providing transition data to the SDVAs a smoother process. The DoD is committed to our partnership with SDVAs and our effort to facilitate a smooth military to civilian transition.

TAP of Tomorrow

Since its inception in 1991, military-to-civilian transition programming has undergone successive and sweeping statutory and policy changes. Military-to-civilian transition is an ever-evolving, complex, and multi-faceted environment. The DoD and our interagency partners see enormous opportunity in the areas of continuity of care, a one-stop mobile application, enhanced data exchange, and the inclusion of DOL into the JEC governance forum.

Within the JEC, the DoD and VA are assessing existing resources, benefits, programs, and authorities available to enable active-duty Service members with mental health challenges, military sexual trauma, or identified social risks to access and receive care and/or services from the VA during the last 90 days of military service—prior to their date of separation—to establish care and ensure continuity of care and to access VA services while still in uniform.

VA, in partnership with the DoD and DOL, applied human-centered design work to identify experiential needs and desires of transitioning Service members, recently separated Veterans, and their families during military-to-civilian transition. HCD insights led to identifying a wealth of information including four personas of separating Service members such as the “Lifer,” the “Goal-Oriented,” the “Purpose Seeker,” and the “True Separator” that will inform solutions. This information has been instrumental in the development of a minimum viable product, enterprise-wide mobile application, that will better facilitate the transition process across the range of personas. Additionally, the data exchange between DoD, VA, DOL, and other federal partners will elevate our combined abilities to improve the effectiveness, quality, timeliness, and efficiency of military to civilian transition.

Finally, while the JEC is an excellent example of DoD-VA collaboration, we can't fully reach our interagency potential without the inclusion of DOL at the table. The DoD continues to be an advocate for including DOL as a permanent member of the JEC. Transition, including job-training and post-service placement efforts, are an all-hands approach, and we need our DOL partners alongside of us.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss our collaborative military-to-civilian transition efforts, our engagement with states, and the opportunities that lie ahead. Military-to-civilian transition is, and must remain, adaptive to the evolving needs of Service members, Veterans, and their families. With a unique focus on operations and resources that help transition Service members to civilian life, DoD, VA, DOL and our other interagency partners will continue using the Military to Civilian Readiness Framework to align the myriad of independent transition activities, including the Transition Assistance Program, under one overarching umbrella during the critical year before and year after separation. This framework continues to be instrumental in establishing comprehensive, standardized, and individualized assessments across departments. The data generated from these assessments will be leveraged for more personalized services and targeted outcomes.

Senior leaders within the departments have expressed their core focus areas and stressed the importance of working together for the mutual benefit of Service members, Veterans, and their families. In February 2021, VA Secretary Denis R. McDonough highlighted three core non-negotiables: providing all Veterans timely, world-class health care; ensuring that Veterans and their families have access to the benefits earned; and honoring Veterans with a final resting place that is a lasting tribute to their service. In March 2021, Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III identified three priorities for the Force: defending the Nation, taking care of our people, and succeeding through teamwork. Additionally, he reaffirmed DoD's commitment to maintaining interagency collaboration to support Veterans and their families long after they have served.

To that end, my commitment is that transition will remain innovative, responsive, transparent, and collaborative. The DoD, working with our interagency partners, through the JEC, will continuously improve transition services and support. Together, we will build on current successes and achieve ever-improving outcomes for transitioning service members. This

will be achieved by providing agile, adaptive, and individualized support and services, and addressing barriers that inhibit a successful transition to civilian life. We appreciate your continued support of Service members, Veterans, their families, and caregivers. I look forward to your questions.