



## **Testimony of Mike Hutchings, Chief Executive Officer**

U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Hearing: "A Grateful Nation: Maximizing Veterans' Success After Service"

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### **Introduction**

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Combined Arms, a veteran-founded and veteran-led nonprofit dedicated to improving how our nation supports service members, veterans, and their families as they transition to civilian life.

Every year, approximately 200,000 service members leave active duty. Each faces a fragmented support system of agencies, nonprofits, and benefits programs, each with its own eligibility rules, forms, and wait times. The result is a delivery divide: help exists, but too often it cannot be accessed quickly or effectively enough to prevent a crisis.

Combined Arms exists to close that divide.

### **Our Model: A GPS for Veteran Services**

Combined Arms operates the nation's most effective closed-loop referral network for veterans, service members, and military families. Our Veteran Services Coordination Platform integrates more than 300 vetted partner organizations, allowing veterans to connect with multiple services through a single intake.

Since our founding, we have connected nearly over 100,000 members of the military community to critical resources nationwide, coordinating more than 175,000 referrals for housing, employment, financial aid, healthcare, and basic needs. This work has generated approximately \$603 million in economic impact and taxpayer savings by reducing duplication and inefficiency. Our average response time from intake to first contact is 26 hours, far faster than traditional systems.

Our platform also provides real-time data on unmet needs, giving state and federal partners visibility into service gaps, regional trends, and resource use. These insights enable policymakers to act proactively rather than reactively when addressing veteran needs.

Combined Arms' effectiveness has been recognized by the Milken Institute and the American Enterprise Institute, which have each identified our work as a national program of record in modernizing how veterans access care and transition support. These acknowledgments confirm that our model is bipartisan, evidence-based, and scalable wherever veterans live and work.



## **Closing Gaps in the Transition Journey**

The transition from military to civilian life remains complex. Veterans must navigate multiple systems, repeat their stories, and often wait weeks or months for action. Combined Arms and our partners are closing these gaps, but veterans should never have to rely on chance or emergency measures to receive the support they have earned.

Across Texas and beyond, our model has produced more than 100,000 success stories. Consider a few examples:

- A U.S. Army Sergeant was swiftly referred to NextOp, securing full-time civilian employment within just 15 days of leaving service.
- A mother of three who relocated to Houston found stability through Combined Arms' network, receiving deposit assistance from Family Houston, access to food and financial education, and support for both wellness and employment.
- A Vietnam War Navy Veteran arrived at Faith Mission with nothing but the clothes on his back. Through coordinated action by the Northwest Texas Coalition and Combined Arms, he was placed in the Lamun-Lusk-Sanchez Texas State Veteran Home, enrolled in VA healthcare, and rediscovered dignity and community.

Even in smaller moments, this collaboration matters. When a VA psychologist reached out for help, a veteran in need was quickly connected to Baker Ripley for housing support while also introducing a federal provider to the network of local resources available through Combined Arms.

These stories represent a nationally replicable model of coordinated care, a system that ensures no veteran or family member faces their transition alone. When local, state, and federal partners share information and work together, veterans are met with dignity, stability, and hope rather than barriers and delay.

## **Navigating an Oversaturated Service Landscape**

According to a recent Milken Institute report, there are more than 45,000 nonprofits in the veterans' services space.<sup>1</sup> Many are well-intentioned but rarely coordinated, which leads to duplication, confusion, and inefficiency.

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<sup>1</sup> Milken Institute, *Thriving Beyond Service: Strategic Philanthropy for the Military-to-Civilian Transition* (2025), p. 33.



Combined Arms streamlines this environment. Veterans complete one intake and are connected to multiple community services through a single system. Partner organizations are accountable for timely responses and outcome reporting, ensuring closed-loop results rather than open-ended referrals.

Our platform complements, rather than replaces, VA and government systems. It helps veterans access both public and private resources more efficiently and effectively.

### **Veterans as Civic and Economic Assets**

Veterans are leaders, not liabilities. They vote, volunteer, and participate in civic life at higher rates than the general public.

When we invest in their success, we strengthen our workforce, our communities, and our civic institutions. Every successful transition adds stability to one family and resilience to an entire community. Our experience shows that when veterans have food, housing, and employment stability, they go on to lead, innovate, and give back.

### **The Role of Government and Civil Society**

The covenant between our government and veterans is sacred, but it cannot stand alone. Federal systems are vital but often limited by scale and speed, and they cannot meet every need.

Community-based, nonprofit organizations like Combined Arms provide nimble, holistic, and human-centered support that complements government programs. When we work together, no veteran must wait in crisis while help exists just out of reach.

### **Policy Recommendations**

The Committee has the opportunity to strengthen outcomes for veterans by improving coordination, accountability, and visibility across the entire support ecosystem without creating new bureaucracy. The following recommendations leverage existing systems and partnerships to ensure every veteran receives timely, effective, and connected care.

#### **1. Establish Two-Way Referrals Between VA and Community Networks**

Develop a formal mechanism for reciprocal referrals between the Department of Veterans Affairs and accredited community-based organizations. Currently, data flow is one directional. Community partners refer veterans into VA systems but receive no confirmation or outcome visibility. A two-way referral system would enable warm handoffs, verify service completion, and ensure that when the VA cannot provide niche or localized services, veterans are quickly connected to qualified community providers



without falling through administrative gaps.

2. **Modernize the Transition Ecosystem Through a National Vetting and Validation Framework**

Create a federal framework that identifies and highlights “best in class” community-based organizations and state agencies. This framework would use outcome data, evidence-based performance standards, and interoperability requirements to integrate trusted partners earlier in the transition process, ensuring veterans are connected to proven resources wherever they live.

3. **Create a National Interoperable Veteran Data Dashboard**

Develop a secure, privacy-compliant national dashboard that reflects the real-time state of the veteran population, supported by shared digital standards for data exchange among federal, state, and community systems. Aggregated, non-personally identifiable data on veteran demand, service usage, and emerging needs would allow policymakers to allocate resources proactively and identify service gaps at every level of government. This visibility would form the foundation for evidence-based policymaking and coordinated delivery nationwide.

Together, these actions would create an integrated ecosystem of care that ensures accountability, honors partnership, and delivers on the nation’s promise to those who have served.

**Closing**

Veterans should not have to navigate a maze of disconnected systems to find help. Combined Arms demonstrates that when technology, data, and compassion work together, we can close the delivery divide and ensure every veteran and family transitions with dignity, stability, and opportunity.

Our organization stands ready to work with this Committee, the VA, and federal and state partners on bipartisan, data-driven solutions that strengthen the continuum of care for all who served.

Thank you for your time and for your steadfast commitment to those who have worn the uniform.