



The United States Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Columbus, Ohio Field-Hearing

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Testimony from Chip Tansill:

Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Tester, Senator Brown and members of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, thank you for inviting me to testify today.

I had the privilege of serving in the United States Army for 32 years including serving as chief of staff for the Ohio National Guard. Following my military retirement, I served as executive director of the Franklin County Veterans Service Commission. I am proud to continue serving former members of the military as Director of the Ohio Department of Veterans Services (ODVS) under Governor John Kasich.

ODVS is a state cabinet agency that was created in 2008 to partner with county veteran service commissions, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), in order to serve those who have served our country. Ohio is home to nearly 800,000 veterans and their families – the sixth-largest population of veterans in the United States.

Our team actively identifies, advocates for and connects Ohio's veterans with jobs, education and the local, state and federal benefits for which they are eligible.

Last fall, we established the ODVS Regional Veteran Workforce Team. They engage businesses across the state to highlight the unique and advantageous skill sets veterans contribute to the workforce. The team provides customized training for employers on areas such as understanding military culture, how to interview veterans, how to review their resumes and how to create a veteran hiring process.

In their first year alone, the ODVS Regional Veteran Workforce Team conducted nearly 100 trainings for representatives from nearly 800 Ohio employers. I have had the pleasure of visiting some of the employers they have worked with – who have truly embraced the concepts our team introduces – to recognize their significant improvement in veteran hiring practices.

During one of these visits at a veteran-owned business, I was told that if we could connect them with 50 qualified veterans, they would hire them that very day. We commonly see this type of incredible support and demand for hiring veterans. Our trainings also make a big impact on human resources directors who experience first-hand what a huge contribution veterans make to a team.

Ohio employers' efforts to recruit and retain veterans go a long way in developing a framework for the successful transition of members of the military back to civilian life. Building a network



John R. Kasich, Governor
Chip Tansill, Director

of military-friendly employers across the state, currently totaling over 2,800 businesses, is just one way that ODVS seeks out ways to ease this often stressful time of transition.

ODVS also works in collaboration with the Department of Defense and other veteran and military support organizations to examine opportunities for improved coordination between federal, state, and local resources to help service members transition to civilian life. I am aware that discussions surrounding ways to improve this process are well established and ongoing.

Currently, most state resources for recently transitioned veterans and their families require the veterans themselves to be proactive in seeking out services and benefits. This is problematic because many veterans are unaware that resources are available and therefore are not inclined to seek them out, especially while they are balancing the many other challenges that accompany transitioning from military to civilian life.

Going from an environment where lifestyle and career paths are very predictable, to suddenly being on your own is not something that comes with an instruction manual.

The transition experience would be improved if state veteran support agencies like ODVS were provided with contact information for individuals as early as possible *prior* to their separation from the military, primarily by sharing the non-military civilian email address they intend to use. If this email address were included as part of the DD-214 discharge document, it could better facilitate not only rapid and successful transition to civilian life with support from state and local services, but also improve communication with veterans who still have an Individual Ready Reserve commitment.

This new method of communication would enable ODVS to proactively inform military members about services and benefits relevant to their experiences, health concerns and other personal interests. These might include targeted career and education opportunities, veterans' claims and financial assistance locally available and enrollment in VA healthcare facilities.

We hear frequently from stakeholders and peers in other states that increased avenues for communication would make a big impact on our ability to ensure that veterans are presented with significant opportunities for success instead of ambiguity upon their military discharge. Our experiences have demonstrated that the most successful transitions are those in which the veteran and their family are quickly connected to employment, education, housing, benefits, healthcare, and veterans organizations that empower them to thrive in their new community. It is my hope that by contributing to continuing conversations, the next generation of veterans can garner the benefits of improved procedures.

I understand that there are many topics of interest to discuss today, and I am glad to answer questions regarding any of the other services, benefits and resources available to Ohio's veterans or the areas outlined in the supplemental information submitted with my testimony.