

Statement of Holly Hermes, Liaison for Veteran and Military Affairs
Yale University
Before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee
Hearing on “A Grateful Nation: Maximizing Veteran’s Success after Service”
November 5, 2025

Good afternoon. Thank you to Chair Moran and Ranking Member Blumenthal for having me here today.

As an Air Force veteran and actively serving Reservist, I am deeply appreciative of the opportunities provided to me by the Air Force Reserve, but I am testifying here today solely in my civilian capacity as Yale University’s liaison for Veteran and Military Affairs.

I’m here to discuss veterans transitioning out of the military and into higher education, and to share Yale’s commitment to veterans and their families, as well as our partnerships with veteran-serving organizations.

I will outline the timeline of a veteran transitioning into Yale and describe what that journey might look like. This overview of resources is not exhaustive, but it highlights the common services that our veterans frequently use. At Yale, we are fortunate to have access to a wealth of resources that enables us to support veterans and their families in many ways.

When military members prepare to leave the service, they are varied in terms of age, experience, and education level, with different goals and opportunities ahead of them. Some come to us to attend Yale College and earn an undergraduate degree. These are enlisted service members who often joined the military right out of high school and never imagined a Yale degree could be in their future. Other veterans have served as officers and have a bachelor’s degree or advanced degree and are looking to advance their education at the graduate or professional level. Some veterans are looking for employment, trying to relocate back to friends and family in Connecticut, or following a spouse or loved one to the area. Yale has a commitment to all these groups of transitioning veterans and provides help to them in many ways.

The community

Student veterans at Yale College come from the enlisted ranks. They have served, and some continue to serve in the Guard or Reserve and are pursuing the same undergraduate bachelor’s degree that any traditional Yale student earns. They may enroll as first-year

students, transfer students, or in our Eli Whitney Students Program (for non-traditional students). Most of our veterans enroll in the Eli Whitney Students Program (EWSP), as that program provides the greatest flexibility.

Eli Whitney students take the same in-person classes as other undergraduates and have access to the same majors, faculty instructors and advisors, extracurricular activities, research opportunities, and international experiences. The program's flexibility allows students to enroll in courses full or part time, and its advisors have experience guiding adult students. The EWSP is fully integrated within Yale College while providing a built-in community of peers with lived experiences that are often very different from most of Yale's undergraduate students. This support network is vital to the success of our student veterans. Students have come from a variety of career fields, but commonly, language specialists, nuclear engineering, infantry, and special operations. Notably, one of our student veterans to graduate Yale College now serves as on Yale's Jackson School of Global Affairs faculty. He served over 150 deployments as a Navy SEAL and was severely injured on his final mission. His course covers serious texts that explore various angles of human conflict and his experience as a combat veteran and humanities student is integral to that material.

In 2017, Yale College had 17 student veterans. Today, Yale College has 58 student veterans from every branch of the service, including our first Space Force veteran. This almost 4-fold increase over eight years is due to Yale's partnership with organizations that support veterans preparing for, and applying to college, and Yale's deep commitment to making education accessible and affordable for veterans.

More than sixty years ago, Yale became the first private research university in the United States to implement both need-blind admissions and need-based financial aid for undergraduates. Today, Yale College continues to meet 100% of demonstrated financial need for all students - including members of our military and veteran community. As a result, 100% of our undergraduate student veterans attend Yale at little to no cost.

Veterans are not required to use VA benefits before accessing Yale's financial aid. They may choose to combine university funding with VA benefits or rely solely on Yale's need-based aid, depending on their personal circumstances and long-term educational goals. Funding choices may also be adjusted on a semester-by-semester basis. Many student veterans choose to utilize Yale's institutional aid so they may preserve their VA benefits for future graduate or professional studies, or transfer them to eligible dependents. Yale proudly supports all VA education benefit programs, and all fourteen of Yale's schools participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program.

Yale University's Financial Aid office includes a dedicated veterans and military student resources coordinator, who serves as the school certifying official and provides individualized financial aid counseling for veterans using military benefits and/or institutional support.

In addition, Yale College students receiving need-based financial aid and incurring qualifying childcare expenses are eligible for dependent childcare support of up to \$4,900 per academic year, available for each child under the age of six. Additional emergency funding resources are also available at both the undergraduate and graduate/professional school levels for students experiencing unforeseen financial hardships during their time at Yale.

Before Yale

Regardless of their military and academic background the following services support veterans to and through Yale. The Warrior-Scholar Project (WSP) was started by a Yale Eli Whitney student fifteen years ago and, in partnership with colleges and universities nationwide like Yale, provides intensive and immersive one-week, college-preparatory academic boot camps for enlisted veterans and transitioning service members. Yale supported 45 enlisted veterans through this program last summer. These military members may be thinking about college after graduation, or they may have been accepted already to start in the fall. Having taught and supported the WSP at Yale, I can tell you from personal experience that WSP gives enlisted veterans the confidence to know that they have the skills and drive to be successful at a school like Yale.

Once students have the desire to attend a highly competitive institution, they often turn to Service to School. Service to School is a non-profit organization that provides free college and graduate school application counseling to military veterans and service members at the undergraduate and graduate level. By partnering with Service to School through its VetLink program, military applicants to Yale College are able to provide an addendum to their application to fully explain and elaborate on military achievements, job training courses, and deployments. VetLink also connects veteran students to current admissions staff, students, and mentors to assist in navigating the transition from service member to student.

Veteran undergraduates also come to Yale through the Research Experience for Veteran Undergraduates (REVU) program, a 9-week summer program where enlisted U.S. veterans conduct STEM research and build skills to become research scientists. Students work in labs across campus in fields such as geology, medicine, and robotics. Last summer, a former submariner helped build a robot to assist breathing in children experiencing

anaphylactic shock, while a retired Special Operations medic explored a novel avian-flu detection method using discarded PCR tests. REVU is unique in that it supports veterans in a cohort-based model with sustained mentoring during and after the program.

At Yale

In addition, Yale's Office of Veteran and Military Affairs serves as an umbrella program to support students, faculty, staff, and alumni, and to assist veterans in accessing services and resources both internal and external to Yale. We have permanent space, co-located with Yale's Office of Student Accessibility Services (SAS), to offer events, programs, and services that support community, education, and advocacy efforts.

Student veterans in Yale College and the graduate and professional schools have access to SAS to coordinate disability accommodations and resources to pursue equitable access to education and student life. Being co-located with SAS has led to formal and informal partnerships, student support groups, and genuine interactions which, in turn, has led to greater support for our disabled student veterans.

In addition, our student veterans have access to the Veterans Affairs (VA) facility in neighboring West Haven, and we also have a close relationship with our local VA Post-9/11 Military2VA (M2VA) Case Management Program Coordinator. The coordinator joins us at orientation to enroll newly arrived students in VA care and troubleshoot any appointment scheduling issues. She offers one-on-one meetings and group presentations multiple times during the academic year for students and employees. We are grateful for the VA's support, most recently helping a student-veteran secure a long-term mental health provider appointment in a timely fashion.

Yale's office of Mental Health and Counseling is an additional benefit that offers students a wide range of services, including individual therapy, group therapy, and medication consultations and management. Dependent on individual needs, veteran students may use these services free of charge and in conjunction with VA care.

In addition, social and community events are a cornerstone of building the veteran and military community at Yale. One of the toughest parts of leaving the service is leaving a close team of colleagues who are intent on working towards a collective mission. We are committed to bringing together the broader Yale veteran and military community to support each other and build camaraderie. Yale has an active veteran alumni group, the Yale Veterans Association; an employee group, the Yale Veterans Network; and offers three options to earn a commission through the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs for the U.S. Air and Space Forces, U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, and the U.S. Army. Currently, we have over 100 students working towards commissioning into the armed

services. Supporting veteran students, faculty, and employees, along with the cadets and midshipmen training for military service, brings the community together in a way that is supportive for all.

Next week we will celebrate Veterans Day with a series of events hosted by Yale including our traditional university-wide ceremony to celebrate veterans. Highlighting the centrality of veterans at Yale, it will be held outdoors on Yale's busiest plaza. Other events to mark the occasion will include a book talk by a veteran author, a round-table discussion with a veteran alumnus, a reception at Yale Law School, an off-campus military ball, and a play about an Army combat medic's time in Iraq.

After Yale

Following graduation from Yale, our veteran students go on to do remarkable things for our nation and community. Veteran alumni go on to win prestigious awards and fellowships, including, in recent years, Tillman, Marshall, and Truman scholarship winners. They also pursue graduate and professional degrees in fields such as law, medicine, and public policy.

Yale has been teaching and preparing leaders for service in the military and civilian sectors for over 300 years and fully recognizes the important role that veterans play in our society. Personally, I am thankful for Yale's support of my own continuing military service, and I am proud to support my brothers and sisters in arms as they work towards their future education and career goals at Yale.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to your questions.