

VETERANS IN PENNSYLVANIA'S WORKFORCE

CREATING CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FOR THOSE WHO SERVED

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Veterans are a crucial part of Pennsylvania's workforce.

Having served our country, they deserve to come home to a wealth of opportunities and training for any profession they choose. If they choose a career in which their military training is applicable, their military training and service should be taken into consideration.

As I continue to explore the state's workforce and training needs after my workforce development audit and participation on the Governor's Workforce Command Center, I have looked at the specific needs of veterans and military families.

During a roundtable discussion at Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology on Oct. 29, 2019 – which featured veterans' organizations, state departments, and academics – I explored the needs of veterans and their families in Pennsylvania's workforce. Veterans returning from active service require not only job training but also support services to ease that transition.

Here are the main issues I heard, as well as possible solutions:

1. Greater coordination is needed between state and federal veterans programs.

- In addition to funding programs, more coordination and communication must exist between agencies, as veterans can often receive conflicting answers on available assistance.
- Private foundations such as The Pennsylvania Wounded Warriors Inc. should be promoted across agencies when public funding is unavailable.
- External communication to veterans should increase through television, job fairs, media, social media and regular traveling public events around the state.



- Programs must provide structure for returning veterans to ease the transition from structured military life to civilian life.

2. Congress and the Pennsylvania General Assembly should increase funding for job programs, veterans housing, mental health supports, healthcare, and services to disabled veterans.

- To reduce wait times and processing backlogs, these programs should hire more caseworkers, particularly veterans, to guide applicants.

3. State, federal and private agencies must work together to continue to remove the stigma of seeking mental health treatment within the veteran community.

- Mental health treatment must be destigmatized and made more widely available for returning veterans.
- Mental health must be considered during and sometimes prior to job training or other assistance.
- Veterans' courts must be expanded to more counties across the state.
- Employers should receive more incentives to hire veterans.

4. Study of professional licensing requirements for certain occupations should continue to determine if they can be streamlined to ease the burden on veterans and military families who relocate while serving.

- Pennsylvania must continue to provide grant funding for veterans and their families who are transferring licenses and must increase reimbursement programs for spouses.
- The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the Department of State must continue to provide a transition to returning veterans moving into occupations that require professional licenses.
- Licensure boards must increase veteran participation, including on its boards, to provide more veteran perspective.
- Pennsylvania departments must work with their equivalents in other states to ensure smooth transitions from base transfers.

At the state level, [Pennsylvania CareerLink Offices](#) offer free job counseling, training, referrals, and placement services. Eligible veterans receive priority in the referral to job openings and training opportunities, with disabled veterans receiving the highest priority. Pennsylvania's government and private institutions have made great strides toward providing and expanding benefits for returning veterans and military families in the workforce. However, much work remains to be done, and I believe that with these steps and cooperation among groups across the state, we can accomplish these goals.



5. The state should continue to expand programs to assist veterans seeking education and training services.

- The legislature should strongly support student veteran organizations on state university and college campuses and encourage opportunities in technical and job-skill programs, career exploration and mentorship resources, internships and entrepreneurial opportunities. This will contribute to a veteran-friendly Pennsylvania and provide a trained and ready workforce.

6. Pennsylvania must promote and encourage veteran preferences for those applying to colleges and universities.

- Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology's program should be used as a model for other schools for both hiring and accepting students within their programs, as well as for providing credit for applicable military training.
- Veteran student groups on campuses must be encouraged to share their experiences and resources.