

OPENING REMARKS OF LAUREN THOMPSON STARKS
SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR, OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY (OUS)
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee
“Examining Access and Supports for Service Members and Veterans in Higher Education”
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Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Burr, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this roundtable. I am pleased to share how the U.S. Department of Education (ED), working together with our partner agencies, is contributing to efforts that support the postsecondary success of service members, veterans, and their families.

I would like to focus my remarks on ED’s initiatives designed to increase access to quality and affordable educational institutions, remove barriers to degree completion, and foster practices that strengthen campus cultures for student veteran and service member success.

Federal Interagency Collaboration and Technical Assistance to Improve Access to Quality and Affordable Educational Institutions, and Streamline Degree Completion:

Following the President’s August 2011 call to action for a comprehensive Federal approach to supporting a career-ready military, we have collaborated with the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, Labor, and other agencies on a redesign of the “Transition Goals, Plans, Success” (Transition GPS) program, which strengthens and expands information, counseling, and support available to transitioning service members.

ED is providing expertise in areas such as postsecondary access, affordability, Federal financial aid, and adult learning strategies. We have contributed to the development and evaluation of modules on accessing higher education and career and technical training, and have continued to advise on program direction and assessments.

Our core efforts also include providing our agency partners with transparency tools and resources to help students and families garner information about postsecondary access and costs, identify programs that meet their individual needs, and select among quality institutions and available Federal student aid options.

Interagency coordination is not only helping to bridge the gap between military service and educational opportunities, but it is also helping to remove barriers to degree completion once students are enrolled.

In August 2013, the Departments of Defense, Education, and Veterans Affairs formed the Academic Credentialing Task Force. The Task Force is dedicated to increasing awareness of promising practices and policies that promote awarding academic credit at postsecondary

institutions for prior military training and experience, facilitating the ability of these institutions to understand how prior military training and experience is relevant to their programs of study, and supporting degree completion and career-readiness among our nation's veterans.

Supporting the Implementation of the "Principles of Excellence" Executive Order:

Executive Order 13607, "Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members," (Principles) offers principles designed to ensure that service members, veterans, and their families are offered quality educational opportunities and have the educational and financial information needed to make informed decisions. The Principles ask educational institutions to do more to ensure support services for service members and veterans, which ultimately helps foster learning communities where all students can thrive.

The Principles signal the importance, to student consumers, families, and institutions, of the Administration's commitment to strengthening accountability, enforcement, and oversight within Federal education benefit programs. They are enhancing transparency to facilitate educational comparisons, through tools like the Financial Aid Shopping Sheet, and are enabling mechanisms that empower students and families to get the support they need and deserve in accessing education benefits through the new centralized student complaint system.

Promoting Best Practices for Veteran Student Success:

As part of efforts to build on E.O. 13607, the Departments of Education and Veterans Affairs, in conjunction with more than 100 education experts, convened to review approaches that could be scaled and replicated to foster veterans' success on campus. The result was the "8 Keys to Success"—a voluntary effort to promote best practices with the goal of fostering postsecondary environments that are committed to veterans' success and to ensure that veterans have access to the information they need to make informed decisions concerning their Federal educational benefits.

The "8 Keys" offer concrete steps postsecondary institutions can take in order to assist veterans and service members in transitioning to postsecondary education, completing their college degrees, and obtaining career-ready skills. The strategies include creating a culture of connectedness on campus, coordinating and centralizing campus efforts for all veterans, collaborating with local communities and organizations to align services and supports for veterans, implementing an early alert system, utilizing a uniform set of data tools to collect and track information relating to veteran students (i.e., retention and degree completion), and developing systems to ensure sustainability of effective practices.

ED will continue working with our agency partners as we strengthen ladders of opportunity for our veterans and service members to reach their educational and career goals. Thank you for the opportunity to highlight this information about key Department initiatives, and I look forward to today's conversation with you and fellow roundtable participants.