

Testimony

Joint Senate and House Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committees

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Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

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Mr. Anthony Calicchio, Veterans' Employment and Economic Wellness

Good morning, Chairman Mastriano, Chair Muth, Chairman Solomon, Chairman Gillen, and members of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the transition from military service into civilian careers in Pennsylvania. Our purpose today is to briefly share several areas where the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) is currently engaged and what we are learning through that work.

My name is Keith Graham, and I am the Executive Director of Veteran Programs and Services for the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs. I retired from the military after more than 26 years. With me is my colleague, Anthony Calicchio, who supports strategic planning for workforce development and economic wellness at DMVA.

Before taking this role at DMVA, Mr. Calicchio spent 22 years in the United States Marine Corps and has firsthand experience with the military-to-civilian transition.

From that experience and my work with veterans, employers, and partner organizations, I believe Pennsylvania's challenge is not simply whether resources exist. It is whether people can move through those resources in one understandable and actionable pathway. Pennsylvania has strong workforce development programs, educational institutions, employment services, SkillBridge opportunities, employers seeking veteran talent, and regional veteran organizations focused on these concerns. However, these resources do not always operate in one connected system.

Our first area of work is translating military experience into civilian careers.

Service members may leave the service with years of experience leading people, managing logistics, operating equipment, or working in occupations that are highly valuable to

the Pennsylvania economy. Yet employers, licensing organizations, educational institutions, and veterans may describe that experience differently. Depending on the occupation, a veteran may require an examination, additional training, or another credential. We are currently examining how best to show veterans what experience counts, what requirements remain, and where to go next while preserving professional standards. The question should not simply be, “Does Pennsylvania value military experience?” It should be, “How quickly can we turn valuable military experience into a civilian career?”

The second area of our current work is navigation and coordination.

A successful transition may require a veteran to move among employers, PA CareerLink, employment services, educational institutions, licensing agencies, federal benefits, SkillBridge, and vocational rehabilitation. We are examining how those handoffs can become clearer so veterans understand the next step, know who can help, and see how the pieces connect. We also want to understand whether a referral succeeded or further assistance was needed. A referral by itself is not necessarily an outcome. A strong system should allow veterans to enter through multiple doors without getting lost between them.

The third area of our current work is connecting employers to the transition system.

We cannot expect employers to become experts in military occupations, SkillBridge, apprenticeships, workforce funding, and every available veteran resource. Therefore, we are engaging employers through organizations they are familiar with, including workforce development boards, chambers of commerce, industry associations, and educational institutions. SkillBridge can help, but it is one tool within a broader workforce pipeline. Our current efforts are helping us understand where veterans and employers encounter friction, how existing

programs connect, and whether those handoffs are working as intended. Employment alone should not be our only measure of success. The goal is meaningful employment that uses veterans' skills and supports retention, advancement, and long-term economic stability.

Pennsylvania already has the programs, partners, employers, and talent. Our responsibility is to connect them into a system that veterans and employers can understand and use.

When service members consider where to build their lives after the military, Pennsylvania should stand out as a Commonwealth where their experience is valued, employers are prepared to hire them, and the pathway to a meaningful career is clear. **The military services built their skills. The Commonwealth should help build what comes next.**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am happy to take any questions the Committees may have at this time.