

Written Testimony for the Record

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Joint Committee on Veterans Affairs
for the Hearing
“From Combat to Careers”

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There are many challenges faced by members of the military as they transition from military to civilian life. These challenges include barriers related to credentialing, unfamiliarity with civilian hiring processes, challenges in translating military skills, and limited access to career pathways that value their military experience.

One important consequence of the Commonwealth's population decline is the difficulty of maintaining adequate staffing for first responder services. At the same time, many veterans leaving the military want to continue serving their communities but encounter real obstacles entering first responder careers. All service members receive basic life-saving skills training. Some of those members serve in combat medic roles, while others are trained as military police, and yet others serve in logistics and crisis-response roles. All these military positions provide relevant experience for first responder roles.

The From Service to Safety (S2S) initiative was developed through a collaboration among the Ross and Carol Nese Foundation, the City of Pittsburgh, and the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State. This initiative addresses both workforce shortages in public safety and employment challenges faced by transitioning Service members and veterans. S2S combines evidence-based practices with practical implementation strategies to strengthen recruitment, training, job placement, and retention pathways for veterans pursuing first responder careers. The attached report provides an analysis of evidence-based research conducted by the Clearinghouse and a summary of their findings. While the initial focus is on law enforcement and emergency medical services

(EMS), the long-term goal is to develop and demonstrate a successful model that can be adapted and transferred to other public and private sector employers.

As part of the S2S initiative, the Ross and Carol Nese Foundation awarded the City of Pittsburgh a \$1 million, five-year grant. The funding supports a newly established Head of Talent Acquisition role within the city and provides resources for the Clearinghouse to deliver ongoing implementation support, technical assistance, and evaluation expertise throughout the initiative. Through this investment, Pittsburgh is serving as a national demonstration site for leveraging veteran talent to strengthen the public safety workforce while creating a scalable model that can be replicated in communities across the Commonwealth.

Throughout this project, the city of Pittsburgh has demonstrated a strong willingness to collaborate and to consider more comprehensive ways to support its first-responder initiatives. Together, we are examining recruitment, hiring, and retention trends across the first responder workforce to identify opportunities for greater efficiency and effectiveness. This work can help increase the likelihood that all individuals, veterans or civilians, who secure first responder positions will experience fulfilling, sustainable careers. Recruiting veterans to work in Pittsburgh not only fills a needed first-responder position, but it also helps bring families to the area. That can mean new residents, new consumers, new homeowners, and new contributors to our neighborhoods and local economy.

This work is also expected to strengthen recognition of veterans as valuable community and workforce assets. Veterans understand what it means to put the mission and the people they serve ahead of themselves. They bring extensive training, leadership experience, discipline, and a commitment to public service. These qualities can benefit civilian employers while strengthening the communities in which veterans live and work. By attracting veterans to Pittsburgh, we can strengthen our public safety workforce, grow our communities, support veterans and their families, and demonstrate that the skills learned through military service remain an extraordinary asset.

Drawing on the Clearinghouse's applied research expertise and systematic approach to problem-solving, this work has the potential to improve workforce planning, reduce reliance on overtime, and strengthen the quality and continuity of policing and emergency services in Pittsburgh.

The Ross and Carol Nese Foundation and the Clearinghouse are supporting project implementation by clarifying roles, timelines, and accountability; facilitating workgroup meetings; and monitoring relevant research, stakeholder discussions, and project progress

to identify opportunities for improvement. This approach emphasizes meaningful, sustained progress while allowing the project to adapt as new information emerges.

The collaborative nature of this work has fostered a culture of engagement and creative problem-solving with City of Pittsburgh, the Ross and Carol Nese Foundation, and Clearinghouse. As such, it offers a promising model for how applied researchers and local government can work together to address complex workforce challenges. The model offers the potential to expand beyond Pittsburgh, as other municipalities face similar staffing pressures. Partnerships that provide practical tools, structured support, and evidence-informed guidance can help local governments make progress on issues that directly affect public safety, veteran employment, and community well-being.