

PRIORITY IN EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE
FOR
UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES VETERANS

G.S. 143B-1280 through 143B-1285

REPORT TO THE NORTH CAROLINA
JOINT COMMISSION
ON GOVERNMENTAL
OPERATIONS

September 30, 2024
North Carolina Department of Commerce
Division of Workforce Solutions

Background

§§ 165-44.3 through 165-44.06: Recodified as G.S. 143B-1280 through 143B-1285 by Session Laws 2015-241, s. 24.1(j), as amended by Session Laws 2015-268, s. 7.3(a), effective July 1, 2015.

Statute that requires eligible veterans be given Priority of Service in employment and training programs. The General Assembly finds and declares that veterans in North Carolina represent a strong, productive part of the workforce of this State and are disadvantaged in their pursuit of civilian employment through their delayed entry into the civilian labor market and that it is only proper and in the public interest and public welfare that veterans be provided priority in programs of employment and job training assistance. Veterans' priority shall apply to any State agency, department or institution, any county, city or other political subdivision of the State, any board or commission and any other public or private recipient that receives federal or State job training funds and provides employment and training assistance including, but not limited to, employability assessments, support services referrals, and vocational and educational counseling.

Priority of Service is defined as providing all eligible veterans who register or otherwise apply and qualify for services the opportunity to participate in or otherwise receive the services provided before that opportunity is extended to other registered applicants.

The bill directs the North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development (NCWorks Commission) to submit a compliance report to the Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations annually.

Introduction

The North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS), acting on behalf of the Governor, is the recipient of funds granted through the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 (P.L. 113-128), the Wagner-Peyser Act (29 U.S.C. 49, *et seq.*), the Trade Adjustment Assistance Extension Act of 2011 (P.L. 112-40), and the Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) Program. The division is the administrative and oversight agency for these funds which are used to provide employability, training, and re-training activities to eligible persons in the state. The resources flow to the division through the U.S. Department of Labor which has regulatory power and policy-making responsibility for activities provided with these funds. WIOA resources are required to be allocated to the 20 local Workforce Development Boards in the state who oversee the delivery of local services to eligible individuals. Services are primarily provided through a network of NCWorks Career Centers around the state that make a variety of employment and training programs accessible to North Carolinians.

The U.S. Department of Labor has provided guidance and policy oversight to states on the implementation of the Jobs for Veterans' Act (P.L. 107-288). This law also establishes a Priority of Service for veterans and eligible spouses for services funded through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

Implementation

North Carolina's NCWorks Career Centers ensure that services are broadly available and address the employability and support needs of individuals and businesses in the state. Staff offer core employment activities including self-service and staff-assisted services, more intensive career services, which may include in-depth assessments and career counseling, and resources for occupational skills training.

While NCWorks Career Center staff serve many special populations, the federal Jobs for Veterans' Act dictates that each state has dedicated Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVERs), Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPs) and Hybrid or Consolidated (LVER/DVOPS) representatives strategically assigned to service delivery points throughout the NCWorks Career Center system to ensure accessibility to all veterans with employment or training needs. In addition, program staff offers information and employment services to service members who are transitioning out of the military at the six military installations in North Carolina. To support the state's

veterans, the North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions employs 8 LVER positions supporting businesses, 12 DVOP Specialist positions supporting veterans with barriers to employment, and 27 Hybrid positions supporting both businesses and veterans. All these personnel are themselves qualified veterans, thus conforming to the guidelines in the law.

Priority of Service to veterans and others who meet eligibility requirements has been honored in North Carolina for decades. Throughout the workforce delivery system, Priority of Service is enhanced by the State's electronic job matching system, NCWorks Online (NCWorks.gov), which matches registered veterans to new job orders on the day they are listed - 24 hours ahead of non-veterans. DWS leaders monitor Priority of Service to veterans to ensure that all staff comply with policies which stipulate that qualified veterans are given an opportunity to apply for jobs ahead of non-veterans.

A major role and responsibility of the dedicated DWS Veterans' Services staff is building the capacity of other service providers to enhance their knowledge of veterans' Priority of Service in employment and training programs. The Veterans Staff has frequent contact with other NCWorks Career Center partners to keep them informed of current veterans' employment and training issues and to assist in providing direct services to veterans. They also attend staff meetings to provide updates, answer questions from staff, and discuss needed services.

Veterans Services leadership staff are also available to provide training to other center staff and front line Veterans staff members also collaborate with the management and staff of these career centers to provide outreach services for veterans, including homeless veterans, and other veterans with Qualified Employment Barriers. Veterans Services leadership staff conduct employer outreach and plan job fairs and other activities to promote the employment of veteran customers with the state's businesses. The Consolidated position staff focus on the rural areas of the state and provides services to both employers and to the most in-need veterans. This allows one position to fill both roles to ensure veteran services are being provided in all areas of the state.

Federal guidelines establish that states will have a maximum of 10% of their Jobs for Veterans State Grant funded positions classified as "Consolidated/Hybrid". North Carolina has repeatedly demonstrated the success and value of these positions, so the Department of Labor has now authorized the state to have over 57% Consolidated positions. This increased capacity allows DWS much more flexibility in meeting the operational needs of businesses and veterans across the state. Once a veteran's employment and training needs have been identified, the NCWorks Career Center staff ensures that appropriate services are provided.

Strategies to address individual needs include literacy and basic skills programs, resources for occupational skills training, job accommodations, assistive technologies, disability awareness training, and other activities that may address barriers and support the achievement of positive employment outcomes. North Carolina has established, closely monitors and continues to adhere to a Priority of Service to veterans. Our Veteran Services staff have been trained and certified in Mental Health First Aide and in Peer Support Specialist, and 22 (over 30%) are certified Veteran Support Specialist

(Mental illness, Post Traumatic Stress, Military Sexual Trauma, Substance Abuse). This makes North Carolina's NCWorks Veteran Services staff much better prepared to assist those veterans with barriers to employment.

Outreach and Information for Veterans

In addition to veterans served through the U.S. Department of Labor funded programs referenced above, we support the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Veteran Readiness & Employment Service (VR&E) program. This ensures a seamless employment transition that eliminates duplication, fragmentation, or delay in delivery of employment services which leads to the goal of successful career selection, placement, and rehabilitation for veterans enrolled in the VA Chapter 31 program. VR&E refers all veterans who have been found entitled to services and in Job Ready status to JVSG staff. In FY24, this equated to 543 veterans who transitioned from VA support to JVSG support.

DWS offers information services to veterans through links on the Department of Commerce main website, NCWorks Online at www.NCWorks.gov (the state's comprehensive job search/matching career exploration and labor market analysis portal for job seekers and employers), and the Veterans Portal at veterans.ncworks.gov. DWS also promotes NCWorks Veterans Services on social media, including Facebook, Twitter (X) and LinkedIn.

Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program

The division also continues to work closely with the state's two Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (HVRP) grantees currently operating three USDOL-funded grants to assist homeless veterans. Our DVOP Specialists enroll these veterans in the NCWorks.gov veterans' program as they are simultaneously enrolled in the Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program. The HVRP grantees provide services to 44 of North Carolina's 100 counties.

Female Veterans Table Talk

DWS initiated a unique program for female veterans, Female Veterans Table Talk (FVTT). The main goal for FVTT is to provide resources, information and support for this unique group of women, who represent part of the fastest-growing demographic among veterans nationwide. Attendees learn about programs and services available to female veterans, along with upcoming hiring events, training, and opportunities. Events are facilitated by female Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) staff. At the events it allows participants to experience a unique opportunity for fellowship and learning about resources, in a way that was safe and convenient for people over a wider geographical area. The FVTT format is straightforward but requires significant coordination by staff. Each event features one or more female guest speakers that are relevant to the female veteran community, as well as time for the attending veterans to share their stories and their life experiences.

Off-Base Transition Training

US Department of Labor selected North Carolina and 4 other states (MA, PA, CA, TX) to participate and support a new program called Off-Base Transition Training (OBTT). The FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) created this new five-year pilot program which is intended to make the curriculum and services currently offered to active duty transitioning service members on military installations, available to Reservist, National Guard, veterans and military spouses. Cumberland County and Wake County were part of the initial selection by USDOL but, based on the significant success of North Carolina's OBTT pilot program, USDOL has approved North Carolina to conduct OBTT in Mecklenburg, Union, Gaston, Cabarrus, Forsyth, Guilford, and Durham Counties in FY 2023. For FY 2024, OBTT has expanded to other counties such as Buncombe, Rowan, Durham and Craven.

HIRE Vets Medallion Program

North Carolina continues to excel in the USDOL HIRE Vets Medallion Program (HVMP), which encourages employers' commitment to veteran careers, including hiring, retention, and long-term development. Employers must demonstrate a sustained commitment to hiring veterans. Through the efforts of the DWS Veterans' staff, 31 NC employers were recognized with the HVMP award in 2023. The NCWorks.gov Veterans Portal highlights the businesses that received this distinction. Veteran job seekers now see the medallion on any of the awardee's job postings.

Employment Navigator Partnership Program

The U.S. Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service has selected DWS to assist in a program to enhance its ability to provide transitioning service members and their spouses with the assistance needed to be successful in the civilian workforce. The program is called the Employment Navigator Partnership Program (ENPP). Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point Havelock NC was selected as one of 13 worldwide sites for the ENPP. Employment Navigators (ENs) are now available to offer personalized, one-on-one career assistance to transitioning service members and their spouses (TSM/S). The program has grown from 13 to 36 locations worldwide. Additionally, ENs are facilitating email introductions between TSM/S and the designated state workforce agency (NCWorks Veterans Services) point of contact, who will guide them to the nearest career center based on their future residence.

Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina & Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Veterans Services

The DWS Veterans Services Program was able to place a veteran staff member in the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina specifically to assist the tribal veterans with employment readiness and placement. DWS also has a veteran staff member serving the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians who has also established a stable relationship with the Native American community. Recently both were part of a presentation of promising practices of serving Native American Veterans at the National Association of State Workforce Agencies Conference in Washington D.C. representing North Carolina. Both engage in advocacy efforts and employment opportunities to Native American veterans to build strong and stable relationships. This is done through events such as

Lumbee Tribe stand downs which was held in June 2024. Over 420 veteran attendees, 40+ community resources, which included over 60 free haircuts and 54 health screenings were provided and the first PACT ACT Benefits and Resource Claims Event was held in Cherokee, NC. More than 90 veterans were served which included a WWII veteran who finally received his benefits. The team also has working relationships with other state-recognized tribes through engagement with the Intra-Tribal Council.

Veterans Treatment Courts (VTC)

The Veterans Treatment Courts, pre-entry solutions, engage with veterans before they enter the justice system. Unlike traditional criminal courts, the primary purpose of a VTC is not to determine whether a defendant is guilty of an offense but to ensure that he or she receives treatment to address unmet clinical needs. As a best practice, Consolidated staff collaborate with other veteran service providers on pre-entry, in-reach and outreach strategies that can help communities plan to meet the needs of justice-involved veterans using approaches that best fit their local circumstances. There are 11 VTCs throughout North Carolina in Buncombe, Catawba, Cumberland, Forsyth, Gaston, Harnett, Iredell, Moore, Onslow, New Hanover and Pitt Counties. The goal is to connect eligible veterans with benefits and treatment earned through military service. NCWorks Veteran Services has assigned one staff person who is a veteran to each of the VTCs to facilitate employment services and access to community resources.

North Carolina for Military Employment (NC4ME)

North Carolina for Military Employment (NC4ME) is a comprehensive public-private partnership designed to make NC the number one state for military employment. Established in 2015, NC4ME leverages existing workforce development resources and technology to implement an employer-centric strategy.

Since January 2024, NC4ME hosted 45 engagements with strategic business leaders and employers on the value of hiring a military workforce. The team has provided accredited human resource training on how to recruit, select, and retain high performing military talent to more than 30 new employers through a recent partnership. NC4ME is proud to have connected 1,234 new candidates with veteran-ready companies with the through the Career Connections 365 portal and face-to-face during NC4ME-hosted Career Expos and networking opportunities. NC4ME has helped candidates make more than 12,700 career connections through July 2024 with companies that recognize the value of hiring military talent.

NC4ME is dedicated to supporting our veterans by bridging the gap between military service and civilian employment. The initiative ensures that veterans, transitioning service members, spouses and members of the National Guard and Reserves can leverage their unique skills and experiences to benefit local businesses and communities. Through the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, NC4ME partnered with Marshall Aerospace to provide candidates for the more than 250 positions at their new Greensboro, NC location where they will provide maintenance, repair and overhaul work for C-130 fleets within our state.

NC Office of State Human Resources - Military Spouse Transition Network

To support the needs of our current and future military families, the State of North Carolina is a member of the National Association of State Personnel Executives Military Spouse Transition Network (MSTN). As a partner to the MSTN, DWS veterans staff ensures that the program is available to all identified military spouses working for state government agencies. This program is designed to help military spouses moving to or leaving North Carolina identify career resources. The program connects military spouses with career services resources to help aid in resume building, skills translation, and informal contacts to support military spouse re-employment. The program activates when a military spouse receives notification of a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) for their spouse and notifies the North Carolina Office of State Human Resources (OSHR) Talent Acquisition Division of their desire to participate in the program.

Veteran & National Guard Preference Policy

On March 3, 2022 State law required that employment preference be given for having served in the Armed Forces of the United States on active duty (for reasons other than training) during periods of war or any other campaign, expedition, or engagement for which a campaign badge or medal is authorized by the United States Department of Defense. The preference to be accorded eligible veterans shall apply in initial employment, subsequent employment, promotions, reassignments, horizontal transfers and reduction in-force situations.

Hilton Honors Military Program

The Hilton Honors Military Program provides up to 100,000 hotel points to eligible Transitioning Service Members, Veterans and Military Spouses to support needed travel for verifiable employment-related activities, such as a job search, training for a new job, or finding housing near a new job by contacting a local NCWorks Career Center and ask to speak to someone who works with Veterans. Once approved, the jobseeker can redeem the points to help pay for accommodations at any Hilton property. So far North Carolina has received over 180 referrals for the calendar year of 2024.

NLX (National Labor Exchange)

National Labor Exchange is an electronic labor-exchange network that was created in 2007 and provides a public-private partnership that leverages private non-profit-owned technology with existing state workforce agency resources. NLX allows state job banks to seamlessly receive and share job openings and is offered at no cost to state workforce agency customers (jobseekers and employers) as well as to workforce agencies and federal partners. It connects nonprofit and Veteran organizations as well as disability and diversity partners. North Carolina's state workforce agency chose NLX services based on our service needs.

Compliance

A priority measure of compliance is the comparison of the ratio of service between veterans and non-veterans. To establish that veterans are given Priority of Service, the percentage of number of veterans that applied for services and were determined eligible, compared to the number of veterans served should not be substantially less

than the ratio of non-veterans that applied for services and were determined eligible, compared to the number of non-veterans served. For all¹ programs the “Vet Service %” is greater than the “Non-Vet Service %” indicating that veterans are receiving priority services.

The table below includes data for DWS programs for the July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024 program year.

Program	Eligible ²	Served ³	Non-Vet Service %	Vets Eligible	Vets Served	Vet Service %
Title I - Adult	3261	2086	64	137	91	66.4
Title I - Dislocated Worker	1418	1318	92.9	217	202	93.1
Title I - Youth	1528	1401	91.7	14	14	100
Title III – Wagner Peyser	90311	60384	66.9	6446	4396	68.2
Trade Adjustment Assistance	13	10	76.9	13	1	7.7

¹ The exception to this is for the TAA program, which has not been reauthorized by the federal government as of July 1, 2022. USDOL has specified that states may not provide benefits under the TAA program after that date, and no new worker groups may be certified, however workers who were receiving benefits prior to the termination date may continue to receive benefits. The TAA program has continued to operate and receive appropriations to serve workers who established eligibility for the program prior to the effective date of the termination provisions.

² Completed the program application and met all criteria to be deemed eligible

³ Received services under the specified program