

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD  
STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL JOYCE M. JOHNSON  
ON  
TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND THE DISABLED  
TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
JULY 18, 2002

Good morning Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. It is a pleasure to appear before you today to discuss the Coast Guard's Transition Assistance Program.

Transition assistance was established for Coast Guard personnel in October 1994, to comply with the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal year 1995 (Public Law 103-337). As you may know, this law mandated that all separating and retiring service members have access to transition assistance services and that members who are involuntarily separated receive specific benefits. Coast Guard policy for transition assistance is similar to DoD. The primary differences between Coast Guard and Department of Defense programs are in the manner in which the program is implemented and delivered, and are due in large part to the geographic dispersion and the small size of Coast Guard units.

Coast Guard transition assistance is delivered at each of our twelve Integrated Support Commands and our Headquarters Support Command in Washington, DC. Each of these designated transition sites features a Work-Life Supervisor who is responsible for managing the Transition Assistance Program, and a Transition Relocation Manager who coordinates the program for their area of responsibility. A typical area of responsibility encompasses several states. Each Transition Relocation Manager is a certified International Job and Career Coach and is responsible for the area Transition Assistance Program, the Relocation Assistance Program, and Spouse Employment Assistance Program. Unlike the Department of Defense, where Family Service Centers are located on major installations, Coast Guard units are smaller and members are more geographically dispersed. Delivery of Coast Guard transition services therefore encounters many of the service delivery logistics problems that the Department of Defense faces with its reserve personnel, such as travel and per diem costs and scheduling problems.

The goal of the Coast Guard's transition assistance program is to provide members and their families the opportunity to make an informed and effective transition from military service to civilian employment. An integral aspect is to ensure that separating members are made aware of, and have access to, the numerous programs and services that are available to assist them in the transition process.

Each unit commanding officer has the responsibility to ensure separating and retiring members and their family members receive the transition benefits and services to which they are entitled. To meet this requirement, each command is required to identify all prospective separating and retiring members and advise them of locally available transition programs and services. Each command coordinates a member's transition with the appropriate administrative support and Work-Life staffs.

A command representative is required to meet with all members separating, retiring or entering the Disability Evaluation System (officers and enlisted) approximately 180 days before separation and not later than 15 days after official notification of separation. As directed under Coast Guard policy, pre-separation counseling must occur at least 90 days prior to separation. Depending on the requested counseling, the command will either direct the member to the appropriate office for delivery of services, or provide the necessary counseling. During pre-separation counseling, the command representative is also required to assist members in achieving educational, training and employment objectives, as well as those of the spouse, if applicable.

As with the Department of Defense transition assistance program, there are four elements to the Coast Guard's transition assistance program: pre-separation counseling, employment assistance, relocation assistance for separating members stationed overseas, and benefits for involuntarily separated members.

To assist commands in providing employment assistance and pre-separation counseling, Coast Guard Transition Assistance Program seminars have been developed in cooperation with the Department of Defense, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Veterans Affairs. These workshops provide instruction on skills identification, resumé preparation, interview techniques, and veteran entitlements. Coast Guard sponsored seminars are typically four days in length, with three days for the job search process and one day to discuss benefits.

Commands are also responsible for ensuring separating and retiring Coast Guard members and their family members stationed overseas are provided information and assistance to help them in the unique task of preparing for re-entry into civilian life while outside the continental U.S. This program focuses on the special needs and requirements of such members and family members due to their overseas locations and includes computerized job relocation assistance and job search information.

To maximize the Coast Guard's ability to provide transition services, Coast Guard Transition Relocation Managers work cooperatively with Department of Defense, Labor, and Veterans Affairs staffs, contractors, state and community organizations, and non-profit service organizations. Using these options allows us to maximize the flexibility of available programs and schedules to accommodate the member's individual needs. In addition, Coast Guard members who are separating due to medical conditions are referred to the Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense Disabled Transition Assistance Program seminars, since we are not able to offer this service.

The Coast Guard will be testing an additional method of delivering transition services in August 2002 - a Transition Assistance Strike Team. This is an internal team of Coast Guard Transition Relocation Managers who have been trained to travel to remote locations, or locations where small groups of separating and or retiring members are stationed, to conduct a Transition Assistance Seminar.

Evaluation of our transition assistance program effectiveness is subjective. During Coast Guard sponsored seminars, each participant is given a seminar critique to complete. Critiques evaluate the relevance, length, and content of the seminar, solicit ideas for improvement, and rate overall effectiveness. At a recent seminar, participant evaluations revealed what are typically favorable ratings; specifically these surveys showed a 66% excellent, 22% very good, and 12% good rating of overall seminar effectiveness. It is rare that any of the approximately 35 seminars conducted each year contain ratings of fair or poor.

As part of the critique, participants are also asked to rate their level of understanding of transition and job search techniques before and after attending a seminar. The majority of participants indicated a significant increase in their knowledge and understanding of the process.

The coordinating Transition Relocation Manager also completes a critique that evaluates the knowledge, preparation, and effectiveness of the instructor to ensure quality control of the program. All critiques are also reviewed by our Headquarters Transition Assistance Program Manager to ensure service quality, and conformance with contract provisions regarding performance by contractors.

In an effort to continually improve our transition assistance program, we look forward to continuing the positive working relationship with the Department of Defense in sharing new ideas and tools. For example, our Transition Relocation Managers will attend the Department Of Defense Worldwide TAP Conference that is scheduled for the end of July 2002.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.