

**House Committee on Veteran Affairs
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
Hearing**

Hiring and Retaining Veterans for The Modern-Day Workforce

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Witness Statement

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Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and Members of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, my name is Chuck Sevola and I head Prudential's Office of Veterans Initiatives. Thank you for having me here today and for the opportunity to speak with you about Prudential's Veterans Programs and specifically our VETalent program.

Prudential has historically had numerous veteran hiring programs. To help address the unemployment crisis with our nation's veterans after the economic downturn of 2008, our dedicated office of Veterans Initiatives was formed in 2010 at the direction of our Chairman, John Strangfeld. The mission statement of our Veterans Initiatives Office is to establish sustainable programs and activities that have a positive impact on the lives of veterans and their families, helping them to achieve professional success, financial prosperity, and peace of mind. This statement reflects our desire to distinguish Prudential as a preferred employer for veterans, a community leader in supporting veteran service organizations and initiatives, and a national leader in developing and sharing best practices for corporate veteran programs. To create a rounded approach, we established a five-pillar strategy to achieve our goals.

The first pillar and our primary focus is Education and Employment. This covers our programs in recruiting, training, and retaining veterans and Military Spouses not just for jobs, but for fruitful careers at our firm. Additionally, we seek to use Prudential as a test bed for programs that once proven and refined, can be exported to other likeminded companies. Our flagship program of this pillar is our VETalent collaboration with Workforce Opportunity Services (WOS) which I will detail later.

Our second pillar of Employee Engagement focuses on harnessing the passion that exists in our workforce to help veterans and their families through volunteerism. Service to the community in which we do business is a part of our corporate DNA and Prudential employees can be found lending their time and

expertise to such organizations as the United Service Organization (USO) on a regular basis.

The third pillar, Thought Leadership, covers our work to understand the issues that veterans and their families face, and establishing and sharing best practice programs to address these issues. An excellent example of this work is our sponsorship and collaboration with the Institute for Veterans and Military Families' (IVMF) research on employing Military Spouses.

The fourth pillar is Corporate Giving. Here we provide financial resources through philanthropy and sponsorships to like-minded organizations to extend our reach beyond what we can do on our own. We provide more than \$4 million dollars annually to many excellent organizations working on activities in line with our mission. Some examples of our partners include Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), U.S. Chamber of Commerce Hiring our Heroes organization, and the United Service Organizations (USO).

Finally, our fifth pillar, Veterans and Military Business Support seeks to find the intersection between the work we do with veterans through our Corporate Social Responsibility and the work we do as a Financial Services firm. Our primary focus is bringing Prudential's expertise in Financial Wellness education to the issues that Veterans and their families face as they transition to civilian life. Through a partnership with the USO, we offer a completely non-solicitous Financial Wellness training program to help transitioning Service Members plan for, and work towards, their financial needs in civilian life.

Our multi-faceted approach to our veteran programs is robust and mutually supporting among the five pillars. While these activities are distinct, there is a common thread in how they support our main focus of veteran employment. Elements of our WOS program mentioned previously can be found within each of these pillars.

Founded in 2005, Workforce Opportunity Services (WOS) is a leading nonprofit committed to developing

untapped talent from underserved and veteran communities through partnerships with organizations dedicated to diversifying their workforce. The WOS Program has its roots in a program developed by Dr. Arthur Langer of Columbia University. It started with Dr. Langer's research on solutions to address the effects of poverty, social isolation, and stress in underserved populations who may lack resources and access to higher education and career opportunities. The initial program was a collaboration between Dr. Langer and Prudential's Global Chief Information Officer Barbara Koster to establish a new talent channel for Prudential's technology organization. This program was then adapted in 2010 to serve as the basis our Veteran training and hiring activities for post 9/11 Veterans. This adapted program, branded VETalent at Prudential, was one of the first programs of its kind training veterans for new careers in Corporate America.

The WOS model is unique among U.S. organizations because WOS combines all aspects of the new employee lifecycle to ensure its participants are successful. The hands-on model is a key driver of the programs' success as well as the success of those who've completed the program. The process is holistic as WOS and the sponsoring partner works with participants throughout the recruiting, training, and employment process. The program summary is as follows:

- WOS works with a partner organization to identify its workforce needs. Once the number of roles and individuals requested are agreed upon, WOS conducts a needs assessment to understand the type and length of the training required for the program.
- WOS uses the information gathered during the needs assessment to create a unique program. Each WOS program is unique due to the specificity of the requests of WOS partner organizations. Once the program design and development are complete, WOS identifies academic partners with the technical expertise required. WOS also infuses its own interpersonal skills curriculum into the program. The interpersonal skills training is the common thread throughout all WOS programs. During this stage, WOS builds a program participant profile and creates a unique selection tool for the program.

- WOS casts a wide net to recruit applicants to the program, with the intent of having the largest pool of candidates to put through the selection process. WOS uses numerous online and in-person channels to do so.
- The WOS selection process is rigorous and designed to identify the best qualified candidates. These top candidates are invited to precertification, the final stage of selection where candidates take part in a various assessment to gauge interest in the course material and fit for the identified roles. Once candidates complete the precertification, WOS confers with the sponsoring organization to finalize the program participants.
- WOS manages the entire academic training. WOS has resources in the classroom and works with the participants and training providers to ensure the designed curriculum is being delivered and that the participants are engaged and absorbing the content. The in-class WOS resource facilitates early issue identification and remediation to ensure maximum candidate course completion.
- Once the training is complete, WOS then employs the program participants. After 90 days of employment, program participants receive individual health insurance with a \$0 contribution to the premium, tuition reimbursement for up to three classes per semester, which includes books and fees, at a public higher education institution, paid holidays and vacation, and access to zero interest loans for unexpected financial issues. Finally, the partner company's sponsorship fee helps finance a stipend that is paid by WOS to the candidate during the academic phase prior to employment. This is particularly important given that veterans are often married would likely be less apt to focus on the training if they are worried about supporting a family.
- After the candidates are fully trained by WOS and at the requisite level of expertise for the assigned role, employment is offered by the sponsoring organization and the candidate is fully integrated into the work force.

One of the key attributes of the Prudential VETalent program is its adaptability to a variety of roles. The program has been customized to accommodate a host of technology roles such as Quality Assurance, Database Development, Technology Operations, Security Administration to name a few. Other roles include, customer service and project coordination. The multi-phased approach to the program allows the sponsoring company to see the progress of the candidate in the program and to assess readiness at various checkpoints for eventual hire. This is valuable as it allows hiring managers to provide guidance to WOS for them to provide further training if specific skills are still in development.

This program has been used with success in many of our offices around the country but most recently in our newly established Business and Technology Center in El Paso Texas. The experience we gained in implementing the program elsewhere made it a natural fit for our work in El Paso. There are many types of work done at this office and the adaptability of the WOS model allows its use as an effective talent source for this key location. Since the office opened in 2014, we have hosted 15 cohorts of veterans and military spouses. Of the Prudential staff in the El Paso Office, more than 50% are veterans or military spouses – the majority of which were sourced using the WOS model.

Refinement of the selection and assessment criteria for the program is an ongoing effort to better select candidates with genuine interest and aptitude to learn and flourish in the specified roles. Our focus is providing opportunities for meaningful careers, rather than providing just a job. This is in line with Prudential's vision to help veterans and their families find the long-term prosperity they helped to protect while in service to their nation.

Consistent with our desire to be a national leader in establishing and sharing best practice programs, we tested and refined the WOS Prudential model with the intent of sharing it with other like-minded companies to expand its impact beyond what Prudential could do on its own. As a result, in close cooperation with WOS, the program model has been adopted by over 60 other companies around the country.

In support of our efforts to hire and retain veterans and military spouses, Prudential has found it helpful to educate hiring managers on the military in general and the value that veterans and military spouses bring to the work place. With a very small percentage of our nation's population having a direct connection to military service, there is a lack of knowledge and misconceptions that must be overcome by hiring managers before they will routinely consider them a viable source of talent. Prudential has developed an in-house training curriculum specifically designed to close this gap in understanding. Both the in-class and web based training versions have been well received and effective in increasing veteran and military spouse representation on hiring slates. The efficacy of this training approach is being shared via the Veterans Employment Advisory Council (VEAC) and the Military Spouse Employment Advisory Council (MSEAC) – both sponsored by the U.S. Chamber Hiring our Heroes organization. These bodies are excellent forums for sharing of best practices with other public and private organizations.

Private sector programs can effectively be built on governmental initiatives to help advance veteran and military spouse employment. An excellent example of a successful program is the Corporate Fellowship Program of the Hiring our Heroes organization. Implemented on the authority of the Skills Bridge program of the Department of Defense, transitioning servicemembers can intern with a prospective employer before they leave active duty. Not only does this allow the fellow to begin the acclimation process into corporate America much earlier, but also gives the prospective employer an extended period to judge fit into company culture. These factors play a positive role in job satisfaction and retention. Prudential has piloted this program in two locations and we plan to expand participation based on our success.

Prudential Veterans Initiative Program's mission is to establish sustainable programs and activities that have a positive impact on the lives of veterans and their families. Prudential has created an integrated five pillar strategy to focus our effort in the area of Education and Employment of veterans and military spouses. By adapting an effective model created by Workforce Opportunity Services, Prudential and WOS have created a program that has not only been a

key enabler in our own staffing activities, but also in the staffing activities of other companies interested in tapping into this valuable talent pool. Hiring manager training as well as participation in select governmental hiring programs has been a significant factor in the overall success of achieving our mission. Active participation in bodies such as the VEAC and MSEAC allow Prudential to learn from others and to propagate our lessons learned to other like-minded organizations.

Prudential would like to thank the committee for its invitation to speak with you and share our experiences. We stand ready to work with others to help further expand the WOS program or any other that will be beneficial to Service Members, Veterans, and their families. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.