

**TESTIMONY**  
**Veteran Affairs & Military Installations**  
**Senate Committee**

by

**Carlos Martinez**

**President**

**American GI Forum National Veterans Outreach Program, Inc.**

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**Fort Worth, Texas**

Chairman Van de Putte and Honorable Members of the Senate Veteran Affairs & Military Installations Committee, it is my pleasure to come before you today to speak in regards to Charge #One. I am speaking on behalf of Carlos Martinez, President of the American GI Forum-National Veterans Outreach Program; headquartered in San Antonio, Texas with five field offices throughout the State of Texas.

As a Veteran Service Organization (VSO), The American GI Forum National Veterans Outreach Program, Inc., or NVOP as many refer to it, is a 38 year old organization that has served veterans with special challenges to employment since its founding in 1972. It is an organization that has cobbled many opportunities together to create an extensive continuum of care for veterans that is considered by many across the country as unique and innovative. The organization provides services for veterans from active outreach in the streets and under bridges, through case management for stabilization, through transitional and permanent housing. The NVOP is a specialist in job placing veterans with barriers to employment and is committed to an extensive follow-up system that maximizes opportunity for success of the client. We serve recently separated veterans, homeless veterans, disabled veterans and other veterans with special challenges to employment. Since 1972 the NVOP has served over 450,000 veterans.

However, our experience with today's newly discharged veteran come with a set of different needs and expectations than when the NVOP first began to service the Vietnam and Post-Vietnam Veteran.

Let us remind ourselves of today's men and women currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, approximately 50% come from the Reserve and Guard.

Having said this, our newly discharged veteran is:

- a more mature veteran than previous
- may already have a family—which stretch resources
- prior to deployment, may have already had a job and a “life”
- comes back with greater work placement expectations
- hence, today's veteran returns with a “higher” expectation of job than previous and rightly so!

However, even with today's population of newly discharge veterans, therein lies a varied population of veterans; some of the past “demons” (if you will) continue to haunt today's veteran.

- Re-socializing
- Homelessness
- Substance abuse

This is a “hard to place” veteran which requires an initial stabilization phase and various support services including housing and VA medical and counseling services prior to job training and placement.

As a Veterans Service Organization, The American GI Forum-National Veterans Outreach Program (NVOP) works with every mentioned level of skill veteran; the NVOP recently placed an Air Force veteran as a test Pilot, an Army infantryman as a Weatherization Technician through an OJT contract, and helped another veteran first find a job in construction and installation of solar panels which led him to begin his own small business enterprise installing residential solar systems.

In expanding the work opportunities for more veterans, as well as creating an economic generator for Veteran Service Organizations, I would also encourage this Committee to re-introduce legislation previously introduced in the 81<sup>st</sup> Legislature which would enable a Non-profit (501-C-3) Veteran Service Agency to be categorized as a “small business” for the purpose of bidding on State procurement opportunities.

California enacted new legislation that allowed eligible non-profit veterans organizations that met certain strict criteria, to be defined as small businesses for procurement opportunities with the State. California is the state with the largest veterans' population in the country, but Texas is second, and it has the fastest growing population of new veterans.

I am not advocating for special preference or HUB certification; only for legislation to expand the definition of small business to include non-profit veteran service organizations committed to hiring a veterans in their workforce.

This type of legislation, if enacted, would enhance the NVOP's job training and employment of the "hard to place" veteran described earlier and offers veterans employment opportunities as part of our continuum of care. This type of legislation would allow our enterprises, truly small business entities, with an equal opportunity to compete for work, which in turn would offer veterans with special challenges an opportunity for employment and work where other employers may be hesitant to hire them.

In example, we serve homeless veterans, some of which have not worked regular employment in months, years, or even decades. Not only are many employers hesitant to hire these individuals, but the veterans themselves are also afraid to commit to a regiment that is stressful for them. Our companies understand this dilemma and we make accommodations to transition them into the workforce.

In the hope of expanding these sheltered work shops, we have attempted to apply as a small business, but we were rejected because we are not a small business by the State's definition, and therefore not a priority to the procurement offices. We chose to create our businesses as non-profit entities because all the proceeds that are derived from the sales and services are reinvested back into the services for veterans.

Legislation to expand the definition of "small business" to include Non-Profit Veteran Service Organizations offers our organization an opportunity to compete fairly with other small businesses like ours, and at the same time create a new vein of service for Texas veterans.

In closing;

The economics of today and in Texas continue to call for a Entrepreneur Vision and a skilled yet varied workforce. The Veteran of today comes to us with varied needs. The American GI Forum-National Veterans Outreach Program, as a Veteran Service Agency continues to serve the veteran yet seeks to expand their base of service to allow the creation of more jobs in sheltered environments that can serve veterans with special challenges to employment.

I applaud you, Senator Van de Putte and each Senator on this Committee for their heartfelt effort and actions to continually provide the Best for our Veterans and their families.

I thank you for this opportunity to present this testimony on behalf of Carlos Martinez, President of the American GI Forum-National Veterans Outreach Program.