

Questions for the Record
“Review of VA’s Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program”
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
Committee on Veterans Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives

May 17, 2018

From Representative Beto O’Rourke

QUESTION 1: Please provide the following information on VR&E’s digital case management project:

- a. A detailed description of every option considered in the plan for obtaining a digital case management system, including each option’s total cost (including all VA and outside expenditures), and the rationale for the final decision on which option to pursue.**

VA Response: A detailed needs assessment was completed to capture the future needs for Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) modernization and to determine the requirements for a digital case management system. The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) is taking a multifaceted approach to VR&E modernization, which includes leveraging existing VA technologies like the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) eFolder and potentially acquiring a Commercial Off the Shelf (COTS) solution, with the end goal of VR&E digital case management. A Request for Information (RFI) was released to industry on May 25, 2018 and responses were received from multiple contract sources by June 8, 2018. Responses were reviewed and the vendors provided presentations of their proposed solutions to VA. Since no procurement has occurred to date, VA is currently unable to provide detailed information about options, cost, or rationale regarding a final decision.

- b. A detailed description of the chosen option for developing or purchasing a digital case management system.**

VA Response: VA cannot provide a detailed description of the chosen option for developing or purchasing a digital case management system until VA makes a final determination regarding the final option.

- c. The estimated timeline for when VR&E will transition to a digital case management system.**

VA Response: VA is unable to provide a complete timeline of when VR&E will transition to a digital case management system. However, by the first quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, VA expects to have additional and more comprehensive information to share on the details of the options, the costs of the various options, and timelines for procurement and production implementation.

QUESTION 2: Please state VR&E's goals for the Class Success Rate and the Class Persistence Rate for the next fiscal year.

VA Response: In FY 2018, VA revised VR&E's performance measures to align with agency goals and priorities. The Class Success Rate was removed from external reporting and the Class Persistence Rate was renamed to the Class Achievement Rate. The methodology behind the Class Achievement Rate is a more accurate depiction of Veterans' success in the program than a true persistence rate. The measure includes Veterans that have achieved a positive outcome in addition to those still persisting in the program at the 6-year participation mark. The FY 2019 Class Achievement Rate target is tentatively set to 70 percent. At the conclusion of FY 2018, VA will analyze the results of the Class Achievement Rate and set a final target.

From Representative Lou Correa

QUESTION 1: While VA does not believe that the veterans to counselor ratio is an accurate measure of program success, the VA Los Angeles Regional Office, responsible for VR&E in Southern California, has a ratio of 225 veterans to one counselor.

Please provide a detailed description for how VA's Class Success Rate and Class Persistence Rate, as well as any other measures of success that VA uses, are applied across various regions so that Congress can have sufficient insight into VR&E's counselor performance in specific areas of the country.

VA Response: The Class Success Rate and the Class Persistence rate were used more broadly to assess overall VR&E performance from a national standpoint. Neither of these performance measures is used in the evaluation of VR&E performance at the VA Regional Office (VARO) level.

VBA evaluates VARO VR&E divisions nationwide on several metrics. The primary metric for VR&E performance is Positive Outcomes, a measure which evaluates the number of Veterans who have successfully achieved their rehabilitation goal (employment, independent living, etc.). The full list of VR&E Performance Measures that are captured in the Director's Performance Plan is provided in the table below.

Details regarding the FY17 performance of each VARO on these measures are provided in the attached document (VRE FY17 Performance.pdf).

Metric	Description
VRE Positive Outcomes	The positive outcomes are a combined measure of the number of Chapter 31 Employment Rehabilitations, Independent Living Rehabilitations, Maximum Rehabilitation Gains, and Chapter 18 and 35 Rehabilitations achieved by a station during the 12-month rating period.
VR&E Outcome Accuracy	Measures the correctness of case closure decisions for both Outcomes-Rehabilitated and Outcomes-Discontinued.
VR&E Percent Active Cases	A station's total current workload of cases in the seven non-outcome statuses (Applicant, Evaluation & Planning, Extended Evaluation, Independent Living, Rehab to Employment, Job Ready Services, and Interrupted), divided by the number of "Active" cases. Cases are flagged as "Active" if they are within the timeliness threshold established for each status.
VR&E Average Days in Evaluation & Planning	Measures the average number of days stations' cases are in Evaluation & Planning status at the end of the month.
VR&E Days to Entitlement Determination	Measures the average number of days (Fiscal Year to Date (FYTD)) it takes the VA to notify the Veteran of entitlement or non-entitlement to a plan of VR&E services. Days to Entitlement Determination is calculated by the number of days elapsed from the date of application to the entitlement determination notification date.
VR&E Days in Job Ready Status	Measures the average number of days that a case has been in Job Ready Services status.
VR&E Chapter 36 Days in Applicant Status	Measures the average number of days (FYTD) it takes the VA to complete a request for Ch. 36 services and move the case from Applicant status to a closed status. Services may be completed as Closed With Counseling or Closed Without Counseling.
VR&E Evaluation, Planning and Rehab Services Accuracy (EPRSA)	Uses Quality Assurance Web Actual FYTD and EPRSA Performance Accuracy measures to compute a rolling 12-month cumulative accuracy rate based on VR&E outcome questionnaires.
VR&E Fiscal Accuracy	The accuracy rate of Evaluation & Planning and Rehabilitative Services is expressed as a ratio: the number of correct determinations reviewed compared to the total number of determinations; 12-month rolling average.
VR&E Chapter 36 Accuracy	Measures the overall quality of work for Servicemembers and Veterans who receive Chapter 36 services as rated on VR&E outcome questionnaires; 12-month rolling average.

QUESTION 2: Please provide a detailed description of what VA is doing to fill its counselor vacancies across the country, and in particular, in Southern California.

VA Response: VA has filled seven counselor vacancies in the Los Angeles Regional Office; six are on board as of June 11, 2018, the last will start on July 8, 2018. VA is conducting an analysis of the data to confirm which stations currently have a

counselor to Veteran ratio above 1:125 and will use the results of that analysis to implement a focused hiring plan to achieve the 1:125 ratio nationwide by September 2018.

QUESTION 3: Please state what, if any, Congressional authority or assistance VA needs to fill counselor vacancies.

VA Response: VA does not currently anticipate needing additional Congressional authority in order to fill counselor vacancies.

QUESTION 4: Please provide a comparison of VR&E counselor compensation to compensation for similar positions across the government.

VA Response: Compensation for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors in the VR&E program is comparable to similar positions across the Federal government. Compensation is based on level of difficulty, responsibility, and qualifications required of the position. Each agency classifies positions, appoints, and compensates employees using the General Schedule (GS) pay system based upon statutory and U.S. Office of Personnel Management guidelines.

QUESTION 5: Please provide VA's policy for providing child care for Veterans participating in VR&E.

VA Response: Child care assistance under VR&E is provided on a case-by-case basis in limited situations and for a limited time. VR&E currently allows reimbursement of child care expenses for Chapter 31 participants if the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) determines child care is necessary for the implementation or continuation of the Veteran's rehabilitation program and after other avenues have been explored and determined not to be viable solutions. As such, child care assistance is generally limited to one semester or the equivalent, as the VRC and Veteran work together to identify appropriate long-term child care solutions. Ordinarily, the cost for child care assistance is limited to \$1,250 per year or five percent of training costs for any 12-month period. When payment of child care expenses is approved, the expenses must be for child care in a licensed facility. This means that payment should not be authorized for child care services that are being provided by a Veteran's family member.