

Florida Defense Alliance

Final Minutes of the Military Family Support Working Group teleconference of the Enterprise Florida, Inc. (EFI), Florida Defense Alliance (FDA) was held on August 20, 2009 at 10:00 a.m.

Members Present

Brock, Susanne	FCCJ
Duchman, Nichole	Operation Life Transformed,
Forehand, Shawn	State Veterans' Program Coordinator, AWI
Harding, David	Army OneSource Serco
Homitz, Doris	MFEA Brevard Job Link, Patrick AFB
Jacobs, Stephanie	MSEA Workforce Development Board of Okaloosa and Walton Counties/JobsPlus
Marcos, Elmer	Operation Life Transformed, Manager Transition Training Academies
Mercurio, Tania	Operation Life Transformed, CEO
Murphy, Michael	MFEA Program Coordinator AWI
Panyko, Debi	Pensacola Chamber of Commerce
Payne, Amanda	Army OneSource Serco
Piazza, Patty	MFEA First Coast Workforce Development Board, Inc./WorkSource
Reese, Andrea	MilitaryOneSource & JFSAP
Reuter, Bill "Roto"	Capt. XO Naval Support Activity Orlando
Youngston, Amanda	SERCO Army OneSource

Staff present

Pena, Juliana Program Manager Military and Defense, Enterprise Florida Inc.

Meeting Agenda

- I. Greetings and Introductions
- II. Capt. Reuter briefs Executive Summary for Florida Base Commanders
- III. Carver Spencer (AWI) briefs WOTC (Work Opportunity Tax Credit)
- IV. The following participants will provide current Florida State status and what anticipated actions will need to be taken in each area:
 - a. Ms Andrea Reese – WOTC for military spouses
 - b. Ms Stephanie Jacobs – Unemployment benefits for military spouses
 - c. Ms Patty Piazza – Military spouse federal hiring preference
- V. Recap of meeting and expectations/assignments for next meeting

Meeting start time 10:05 a.m.

Greetings and Introductions

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The following new members were welcomed at the meeting:

Amanda Payne Army OneSource Serco
Doris Homitz MFEA Brevard Job Link Patrick AFB

Executive Summary for Florida Base Commanders

Capt. Reuter, Executive Officer, Navy Support Activity Orlando provided PP slides for the Executive Summary of the MFSWG brief he is providing to the Base Commanders VTC on 9 September. Information contained on the slides:

CHILD CARE STANDARDS MISMATCH –

- Previous mismatch between the Florida Gold Seal and DoD Quality Rating System
- DoD recently revisited standards such that the Florida Gold Seal and DoD standards are potentially consistent. Current beta test will provide verification
- Issue Closed

MILITARY SPOUSE HIRING PREFERENCE –

- Several cases of discrimination against military spouses based on stability of residence/OPTEMPO
 - State hiring preference/incentives suggested as mitigation
 - Similar to Federal Employment Preference
 - Guard and Reserve implications discussed

UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT –

- Recommendation that Military Spouses be able to collect UC for up to 60 days additional without filing an extension.
 - Can resign a period of time prior to PCS and still collect in order to manage affairs associated with PCS
 - Need data to show the magnitude of this issue, data collection ongoing. Agency of Workforce Innovation providing assistance
 - Recognize funding implications

XO, NSA Orlando reiterated the need to ensure the Commanding Officers are briefed on the actions/purpose of the MFSWG and to raise awareness for the issues that the military spouses/families are facing. He also stated the need to find the data to back up any claims and to provide support for recommendations from the working group as we move forward.

Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)

Carver Spencer (AWI) provided an overview of the States Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program (WOTC) and the different categories that are currently in place. The definition for WOTC provided by AWI is:

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“A federal income tax credit that provides incentives to private, for profit employers to encourage the hiring of individuals from twelve different target groups of job seekers who traditionally have difficulty finding employment.”

The 12 current target groups are:

- A. Qualified IV-A [Family Assistance] Aid to Families with Dependant Children (AFDC) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- B. Qualified Veteran -Based on active service, the amount of time served, and the receipt of food stamps
 - Qualified Disabled Veteran –
 - Based on entitlement to compensation from service-connected disability of at least 10%
 - Hiring date not more than one year after being discharged or released from active duty; or
 - Unemployed for a period or periods totaling at least 6 months during the one-year period ending on the hiring date.
- C. Qualified Ex-Felon
- D. Designated Community Resident
- E. Voc. Rehab Referral
- F. Qualified Summer Youth
- G. Qualified Food Stamp Recipient
- H. Qualified SSI Recipients
- I. Long-term Family Assistance Recipient

AWI stated that the program has quite a few disabled veterans but does not have a great deal of veteran participation probably due to submission of proper documentation. He stated that if the military family is currently on food stamps then the military spouses would already be eligible under target group G. When asked in his opinion if it would be a good idea to add the active duty military spouses as a target group he stated that it could be attainable but felt it would not make a significant impact on hiring of military spouses for the same reason – submission of proper documentation from the employers.

MFSWG member’s briefed their research on current Florida State status and what anticipated actions will need to be taken in the following areas:

WOTC - Andea Reese, JFSAP briefed her research on the Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program. She stated the Department of Labor recommended the following website: <http://www.doleta.gov/business/Incentives/opptax/#content> for information on the WOTC. She emailed the following information for inclusion in the minutes.

The definition of the Work Opportunity Tax Credit according to the Department of Labor is:

- **WHAT IS THE WORK OPPORTUNITY TAX CREDIT (WOTC)?**

The WOTC is one tool in a diverse toolbox of flexible strategies designed to help move people from welfare into gainful employment and obtain on-the-job experience. It joins other tax

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credits, education, and workforce training programs that help American workers with barriers to employment prepare for good jobs; ease their transition from job to job; benefit from the creation of effective regional economic development strategies; and create high performance workplaces.

- **WHAT NEW HIRES CAN QUALIFY EMPLOYERS FOR THE WOTC?**

The new employee must belong to one of the following nine WOTC target groups:

Long-term TANF Recipient. A member of a family that:

Received or recently received Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) payments for at least 18 consecutive months ending on the hiring date, or received TANF payments for any 18 months (whether or not consecutive) beginning after August 5, 1997, and the earliest 18-month period beginning after August 5, 1997 ended during the past 2 years, or stopped being eligible for TANF payments during the past 2 years because federal or state law limited the maximum time those payments could be made.

Other TANF Recipient. A member of a family that is receiving or recently received TANF benefits for any 9-month period during the 18-month period ending on the hiring date;

Qualified Food Stamp Recipient. An 18-39 year old member of a family that received Food Stamps for the past 6 months, or received Food Stamps for at least 3 of the past 5 months;

Designated Community Resident. An 18-39 year old resident of one of the federally designated Empowerment Zones (EZs), Enterprise Communities (ECs), Renewal Communities (RCs), and for individuals who begin to work for an employer after May 25, 2007, this High-Risk Youth group has been renamed "Designated Community Resident" and expanded to include residents of Rural Renewal Counties;

Note: All Round I Enterprise Communities (ECs) including enhanced Enterprise Communities expired on December 31, 2004. Round II ECs are still in existence as are all the EZs;

Summer Youth Employee. A 16-17 year old EZ/EC or RC resident hired between May 1 and September 15;

Note: All Round I Enterprise Communities (ECs) including enhanced Enterprise Communities expired on December 31, 2004. Round II ECs are still in existence as are all the EZs;

Qualified Veteran. A veteran who is a member of a family that is receiving or recently received Food Stamps for at least a 3-month period during the past 15 months; and for individuals who begin to work for an employer after May 25, 2007, the veteran group is expanded to include "disabled veterans" who are entitled to compensation for a service-connected disability and who, during the one-year ending on the hiring date, were: a) discharged or released from active duty in the U.S Armed Forces, or b) unemployed for a period or periods totaling at least 6 months. The first-year wages taken into account for these "disabled veterans" are capped at \$12,000;

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Vocational Rehabilitation Referral. An individual who completed or is completing rehabilitative services from a State certified agency, an Employment Network, or the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs;

Qualified Ex-Felon. An individual who has been convicted of a felony and has a hiring date which is not more than one year after the last date on which he was so convicted or released from prison;

SSI Recipient. A recipient of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for any month ending during the past 60 day period ending on the hire date.

- **MINIMUM EMPLOYMENT OR RETENTION PERIOD?**

All new adult employees must work a minimum of 120 or 400 hours. Individuals hired as Summer Youth employees must work at least 90 days, between May 1 and September 15, before an employer is eligible to claim the tax credit. The WOTC amount an employer may claim depends on the hours the employee works. The credit is 25% of qualified first-year wages for those employed at least 120 hours but fewer than 400 hours and 40% for those employed 400 hours or more.

Ms Reese stated her perception from those individuals she spoke with and the information she had gathered that it would be better to have the military spouses added as a WOTC Target group at the DOL(federal) level and then have the State of Florida piggy back on that. This could be accomplished by communicating with Senators and Congressman via letters etc.

Unemployment benefits for military spouses - MFEA WDB Okaloosa & Ft Walton Beach
Ms Stephanie Jacobs stated she was unable to find any definitive verbiage for guidelines on the policy for providing military spouses with unemployment compensation. She was unable to find how many days prior to the military family PCSing military spouses were qualified to voluntarily resign their positions nor how many days after relocation they were eligible. She also stated that the application form for applying for UC is extremely vague as to where you indicate that you are a military spouse and this may be a reason some claims are denied. The members of the working group commented that perhaps the first step in the process of resolving this issue would be to recommend clearer and concise verbiage and guidelines for military spouses qualified to claim UC.

Military spouse federal hiring preference – The Chair reviewed the following information:

- Report on State Employment Assistance to Military Spouses submitted to MFSWG Chair on April 24th 2007 by the DOD State Liaison Mr. Eric Sherman. The report stated the conclusion of nationwide research conducted to identify relevant programs in other states that could serve as an example for a Florida program. The states included in the research were Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Virginia, and Washington. The summary stated “Many states offer a hiring preference for spouses of *veterans* applying for state jobs. The preference is usually in the form of points added to a composite application or test score and the points vary depending on the physical

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condition of the veteran spouse. Some states, such as Indiana, provide placement and training programs for spouses, yet this is not a true preferential hiring program.” And the conclusion that the DOD State Liaison stated was, “There is little or no evidence that state governments routinely provide hiring preferences for military spouses seeking state jobs, outside of circumstances involving the disability of the military member or veteran. It is difficult for military spouses to overcome the obstacles associated with their migratory lifestyle, which hinder employment opportunities. Because of this, DoD emphasizes, from a public policy standpoint, the need to remove barriers to employment, including cross-state licensing and certification challenges, while advancing portable careers. It does not have a policy that supports state government-sponsored preferences for hiring military spouses, nor mandates by state governments directed toward the private sector to do so.

- MOAA Report: Military Spouses to Get Non-Compete Hiring. The report stated that on August 12th the final regulations on the non-competitive appointment/hiring of certain military spouses were posted in the Federal Register. The regulations will take effect on September 11, 2009. After that date, three categories of military spouses will be eligible for non-competitive appointments to jobs with federal agencies:
 - Spouses who are relocating with their service member on military orders
 - Spouses of 100% disabled service members who were injured on active duty
 - Un-remarried widows/widowers of service members killed while performing active duty

Certain spouse categories DON'T qualify for the program:

- Reserve component spouses whose service members are attending service schools or engaging in training duties
- Spouses who marry service members after PCS orders are issued
- Spouses who aren't physically relocating with the service member to the new location specified in the PCS orders
 - An agency may waive the geographic limitation if no Federal agency exists in that geographic area
 - Spouses married to 100% disabled service members aren't restricted to geographic parameters
- Spouses relocating in conjunction *with retirement or separation orders* (unless the retiring/separating member has a 100% service-connected disability)

Eligibility is limited to a maximum of two years after the date of the PCS orders, 100% disability award, or active duty death.

The Chair reviewed the format the working group will need to document the information that is being gathered on these issues. The preferred format will be an executive summary that shows

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the current status, what others are doing, what we want the outcome to be, and then what needs to happen. She raised the question of possibly doing a Zoomerang survey to collect data on EEO discrepancies i.e. employers not hiring a person because they are a military spouse. The MFEA Coordinator as well as the EFI Program Manager, Military and Defense stated that the information collected would not be verifiable. It was further discussed that AWI has good data that is verifiable that we can use to back up our claims and the Zoomerang survey could be utilized in opening statements to raise awareness and to support the perception of discrimination against military spouses in the hiring process. The AWI data could be used to show a lag or discrepancy between civilian and military spouses.

Items to accomplish before next meeting

- All members prepare to provide feedback on proposed verbiage of guidelines and forms for Military Spouses filing UC claims i.e. length of time for pre & post PCS and military spouse status qualification questions on application
- Patty Piazza provide list of questions for review for Zoomerang survey to collect perception data
- Everyone review and update list of proposed invitees to send Official Letters of Invitation for the Nov. semi-annual meeting
- Make appropriate contact to collect data from various agencies on employment rates, UC claims filed and other pertinent data needed

The Chair, Ms Patty Piazza, request for those group members that were unable to attend this teleconference to please submit your suggestions and feedback on this meeting to her at your very earliest opportunity. For those who are in receipt of these minutes and no longer wish to be an active participant please send a request to remove your name from the roster.

Next teleconference meeting

The next teleconference will be scheduled in October. The Chair will send invites with date and time in the near future.

Next Semi-annual FDA Meeting

The next semi-annual FDA meeting is scheduled for the 17th and 18th of November in Orlando. Anticipate the MFSWG to meet on the 17th for approximately 3-4 hours dependent on agenda development.

The Chair thanked the attendees for their participation and encouraged them to feel free to contact her if they should have any questions.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00.