

## Public Comments

Jack Lyden

Pittsburgh Hires Veterans.

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman, Senator Robinson, and members of the Senate Majority Policy Committee. My name is Jack Lyden and I am the Executive Director of Pittsburgh Hires Veterans.

Pittsburgh Hires Veterans is a small non-profit organization that specializes in assisting veterans and their spouses find good employment at no charge to them or the employers who hire them. The work is funded by various state grants, foundation grants, and donations from companies and individuals. PHV does not, however, pursue the PA Veteran Employment Program Grant due to administration requirements.

Our emphasis since 2016 has been on providing one-on-one assistance so that the veterans get the help that they each specifically need.

PHV's operating template is very similar to that of the PA CareerLink veteran services, with a veterans' representative, an employer relations manager, and a job board to communicate job opportunities.

Using this model, Pittsburgh Hires Veterans helped place veterans into 153 jobs last year with veterans employed full-time earning an average of \$61,000 annually. The process works.

Interestingly, our organization is just completing a partnership with the Ukrainian organization, Green Stripe, seeking to mirror many of our procedures to benefit their service members returning from battle. We are in the process of translating their recently completed transition materials to see how they are applying the processes we shared and what we can learn from their terrible ongoing experience.

PHV typically serves 80 to 100 active job seekers at any point in time. A small number of those are transitioning military members from small active-duty organizations, the guard, and reserve units in Moon Township and those scattered throughout the region. PHV does have quite a reach, though, demonstrated in our recent assistance to a veteran retiring from Fort Wainwright, Alaska who just recently gained employment with Allegheny County.

Most veterans we serve, though, have been separated from military service for several years. The average age of veterans we serve is 43 years and 30% of the veterans we helped place into employment last year were over 50 years old, which might be considered a challenge to finding sustaining employment.

Another employment barrier our veterans face is having a criminal background, which affected 29 of the veterans placed last year and will grow along with our recently established reach into the Allegheny County Jail and Veterans Court.

Finally, I will mention that 30% of our clientele carry service-connected disabilities that can make finding the right job a bit of a challenge.

The Pittsburgh region is blessed with employers who work hard to hire veterans, like UPMC, Zoll, and several others. Further veterans have access to many apprenticeship, education, and training opportunities. The Carpenters Union, along with the Millwrights, are obvious examples but there are many aside from the labor unions, as well. Syracuse University's Onward to Opportunity Program, Per Scholas, Bidwell Training Center and others provide low-cost, free, and even paid training opportunities to veterans.

Disappointingly, a very low percentage of veterans we present program information and referral toward these opportunities take advantage of them.

I appreciate the opportunity to join this discussion on veteran workforce initiatives today with hope of better serving the veteran community.

Thank you!