



IMPROVE Transition for Servicemembers Act Section-by-Section

Section 1: Short Title & Table of Contents

- Table of Contents & Title: Improving Preparation and Resources for Occupational, Vocational, and Educational (IMPROVE) Transition for Servicemembers Act

Section 2: Recodification, Consolidation, and Improvement of Certain Transition-Related Counseling and Assistance Authorities

What it does:

- Cleans up and consolidates the two sections of U.S. Code that make up the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) (10 USC 1142 and 1144) and places the program under the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security in coordination with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Labor.
- In addition to commencement deadlines implemented in the FY19 NDAA, this section instates **completion deadlines** requiring, servicemembers to complete TAP no later than 120 days (for a retirement) or 90 days (for a separation), with an exception for an unanticipated separation or mission needs.
- Requires servicemembers take TAP **in-person rather than online** except in extreme situations in which in-person participation would place a high burden on mission requirements.
- Requires servicemembers take a course in one of the following specialized **2-day courses** that are currently optional: entrepreneurship, career technical training, higher education, or another track created by the Secretary.
- Requires DoD to report annually on participation in and compliance within TAP, including number of waivers issued for online courses.

Why it matters: In a November 2017 study¹, GAO estimated that, in FY 2016, around 53% of transitioning servicemembers completed TAP with fewer than 90 days left before separating from the military. This short timeline can prevent servicemembers from being able to fully absorb TAP material, take advantage of the full breadth of transition-related assistance programs, and sufficiently prepare for separation. GAO also reported that, while DoD encourages the use of in-person rather than online TAP courses, some TAP managers are concerned about an overreliance on online curriculum, which is not always as effective as in-person training. When it comes to the specialized tracks, GAO reported that only around 14% of servicemembers took one of these courses in FY 2016, and TAP manager feedback indicates the optional nature of these program and lack of leadership support for them factor into the low attendance rates. This section aims to ensure servicemembers are able to access these programs.

Section 3: Connections of Members Retiring or Separating from the Armed Forces with Community-Based Organizations and Related Entities

What it does:

- Requires DoD and VA to enter into an MOU with State veterans agencies to facilitate the transmission, with the servicemember's consent, of a transitioning servicemember's personal



contact information to community-based organizations that provide transition and readjustment assistance to veterans in the areas they plan to live after separation.

- Provides that a servicemember must consent to the transmission of his or her information and can define the scope of purpose for sharing the information.
- Directs VA to maintain a database of community-based organizations selected by State veterans agencies as potential recipients of this information.

Why it matters: Community-based organizations, including veterans service organizations, veteran-centric nonprofits and other community organizations, can provide valuable assistance to separated servicemembers as they adjust to their new lives as civilians. These organizations often specialize in providing community engagement, mentoring, advocacy, and other assistive services that the VA and DoD do not provide. Additionally, State veterans agencies can play a vital function in connecting newly-separated servicemembers with state-specific resources; however, these agencies are not always notified when a servicemember is separating and arriving in their states. This section would facilitate communication and information-sharing between the federal and state and local levels to ensure transitioning servicemembers receive proactive outreach and assistance.

Section 4: Personnel Matters in Connection with the Transition Assistance Program

What it does:

- Requires a **ratio** of at least 1 full-time, non-contract TAP employee per 250 transitioning servicemembers + their spouses at a military installation.
- Urges DoD, to the extent practicable, to fill TAP coordinator positions with individuals who have both **prior military experience** and at least two years of **civilian workplace experience**.
- Suggests DoD look into affording a formal hiring preference to individuals who meet the aforementioned criteria.

Why it matters: This section is modeled after the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation program, which statutorily must maintain a certain ratio of counselors to veterans served. The government provides a hiring preference for those with prior military experience; however, in the case of those who help guide servicemembers into the civilian world, it is also important that these employees have relevant experience in the civilian workplace themselves. This section would ensure enough full-time staff with relevant experience are available to meet the needs of servicemembers.

Section 5: Tracking of Participation in Transition Assistance Program and Related Programs

What it does:

- Requires DoD to establish a single **electronic database** for storing information and resources related to TAP, logging TAP counselor notes, and tracking individual participation and progress in TAP.
- Requires this system be accessible to TAP administrators, Departments involved, commanders, and transitioning servicemembers.

Why it matters: In November 2016, DoD launched the TAP-IT Enterprise System to collect the necessary data on TAP completion and statutory compliance metrics. Additionally, some branches have complementary systems for recording additional data. DoD is continuing to improve this



system to be able to track unit- and installation-level information. This section is intended to undergird and support these improvements and ensure this system is accessible to the participating servicemembers, their commanders, and all federal agencies involved in administering TAP.

Section 6: Surveys on Member Experiences with Transition Assistance Program Counseling and in Transition to Civilian Life

What it does:

- Requires a **post-TAP survey** of servicemembers (and their spouses, if applicable) to gauge satisfaction with TAP courses and experience.
- Establishes a biennial **post-transition survey** of veterans who underwent TAP not longer than 4 years ago and who have been separated for at least one year prior to the start of the survey to assess the impact and effectiveness of TAP in the member's first foray into the civilian world.

Why it matters: The post-TAP survey codifies a survey along the lines of what TAP programs already administer to assess servicemember satisfaction. The post-transition survey is intended to assess the long-term outcomes of TAP by examining the effectiveness of TAP through a voluntary survey of those who have already transitioned.

Section 7: Command Matters in Connection with Transition Assistance Program

What it does:

- Requires inclusion of leader support for TAP, Skill Bridge, and other transition assistance programs in **command climate assessments**;
- Requires **education of installation commanders** in transition-related programs available on and around base upon assuming leadership of a new installation.

Why it matters: In its 2017 study, GAO reported that many TAP managers across the branches think more top-down, leadership support for TAP and other transition-related services is needed. In assessing the factors that impact lack of participation in TAP, the reports says that nearly a third of installations cite lack of direct supervisor support, a quarter cite lack of unit commander support, and 16% cite battalion/squadron commander support as factors. Additionally, over 40% said that servicemembers feel they can't leave their duties to participate in TAP. These factors have even higher impact on participation in the 2-day specialized courses. Some branches have independently taken steps to make leaders more accountable for and supportive of TAP participation, and this section aims to bolster those efforts.

Section 8: Comptroller General of the United States Report on Participation in Transition Assistance Programs at Small and Remote Military Installations

What it does:

- Requires a **GAO study** assessing implementation of and access to TAP and other transition assistance programs at **small and remote bases** defined as those with (a) not more than 10,000 members assigned, or (b) located more than 50 miles from a city with a population of at least 50,000 people, respectively.
- This study would specifically look at: (a) rates of in-person vs. online TAP participation, (b) rates of compliance with commencement and completion requirements, (c) ratio of permanent, full-

time program staff to transitioning servicemembers, and (d) average total number of staff (including contract) physically and permanently located on-base.

Why it matters: In order to ensure that all servicemembers are receiving quality transition assistance and access to transitional resources, the government needs to examine access and availability of resources at small and remote bases, as the resources of large bases or those near population centers may skew participation and access rates. The goal is to ensure all servicemembers, even those transitioning out of small or remote bases are not overlooked and receive the resources and personnel they need.

Section 9: Education of Members of the Armed Forces on Career Readiness and Professional Development

What it does:

- Requires **education of servicemembers** on programs of professional development and post-service career preparation available to servicemembers during service, such as Tuition Assistance, the COOL Program, and Skill Bridge;
- This education would take place at various **touchpoints** throughout a servicemember's career, specifically upon arrival at each new duty station, promotion, and reenlistment.

Why it matters: In 2015, DoD implemented the Military Life Cycle (MLC) model, which is intended to equip members for eventual departure from service by providing continual education and professional development at key touchpoints throughout their military careers.² Anecdotal reports from TAP managers and servicemembers indicate that this cycle is not necessarily tangible in practice and that many servicemembers do not hear about all the in-service opportunities available to them until it is too late for them to participate in them. In its action plan to Congress pursuant to Section 552 of the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2019, DoD stated it is working with the VA to integrate TAP into servicemembers' MLC at various points prior to separation. This section aims to support these efforts by codifying the portions of education and preparation related to transition and specifying the touchpoints at which servicemembers will receive education about these programs and resources available to them.

Section 10: Sense of Congress

- Acknowledges the competing pressures on the Armed Forces in carrying out their essential function to defend the nation, but also asserts that effective transition is an important component of that mission;
- Asserts that TAP should be designed for the holistic personal development of servicemembers, in both good and bad economic climates, and not simply to achieve employment;
- Expresses support for ongoing efforts by DoD and DOL to help members identify equivalencies and bridges between military occupational specialties and civilian occupations, but also expresses that TAP should also help members retool for their desired occupations, even if they don't align with their MOSs;
- Commends and encourages efforts to incorporate compliance with TAP requirements into leadership assessments and criteria for promotion of commanding officers;



- Urges DoD to assign accountability and responsibility for compliance with TAP to lowest level of command appropriate and establish uniform DoD-wide policy on who at the unit level is responsible for monitoring member compliance;
- Encourages DoD to take steps to collocate all staff and entities associated with TAP on base to improve accessibility;
- Encourages ongoing efforts by DoD and DOL to minimize subjectivity in career readiness metrics under TAP, according to GAO recommendations;
- Encourages DoD, DOL, and VA to work together with State agencies and veterans service organizations to establish local points of contact at the state, regional, or local level responsible for providing relocation-specific resources and coordinating services and connections for servicemembers.

¹ <https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/688203.pdf>

² https://www.dodtap.mil/rest/docs?filename=MLC_Transition_Model.pdf