

Improving Preparation and Resource for Occupational, Vocational, and Educational (IMPROVE)
Transition for Servicemembers Act
One-Pager

Background

For those who have served our nation in uniform, transitioning out of military life back into the civilian world can be a stressful and uncertain time for servicemembers and their families. Congress and the Executive Branch have taken action in recent years to institute programs of counseling, training, and assistance to help separating servicemembers prepare and adapt to new lives in the civilian world. This assistance is encapsulated in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) by the Department of Defense (DoD) in coordination with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Department of Labor, and Small Business Administration, which provides counseling and preparation for civilian work, education, entrepreneurship and general success after transition. Under current law, all servicemembers (the Coast Guard) are required to go through TAP before separating or retiring.

Problems

While improvements have been made to TAP over the years, anecdotal accounts from servicemembers, veterans, and the organizations that represent them, as well as formal government studies, indicate there is still much room for improvement. Among the primary concerns are: servicemembers not having adequate time to complete the coursework and absorb the material, a lack of leadership support for TAP down to the unit level, and the need for more long-term assessments on TAP effectiveness. The IMPROVE Transition for Servicemembers Act has drawn directly from these sources, including Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports and interviews with servicemembers, base leaders, and TAP managers, and aims to provide the pathway for these reforms.

IMPROVE Transition for Servicemembers Act

This bill, led by Senator Crapo and Senator Stabenow, seeks to accomplish the following goals:

- Instating earlier commencement and completion deadlines for participation in TAP to ensure servicemembers have adequate time to complete and absorb the material;
- Limiting the use of online TAP curriculum as a substitute for in-person instruction only to extreme circumstances;
- Urging DoD and VA to enter into MOUs with state veterans services agencies to develop a database of and connect servicemembers to supportive services and organizations in the communities to which they are relocating;
- Making currently-optional 2-day specialized courses in entrepreneurship, career technical training, and higher education, with the addition of advanced employment assistance, part of the mandatory curriculum in order to boost participation in and access to those courses;
- Requiring a ratio of at least one full-time, non-contract TAP employee per 250 transitioning members at an installation to ensure enough full-time personnel are available to meet servicemembers' needs during transition;
- Requiring the establishment of an electronic database to log and track individual participation and progress in TAP and an online portal for servicemembers to access information and resources related to their personal transition;
- Establishing pre-TAP, post-TAP and post-transition surveys in order to tailor servicemembers' TAP counseling, solicit their feedback, and examine the effectiveness of TAP;
- Requiring the education of servicemembers and military leadership on programs and resources for professional development, academic advancement, and post-service career preparation available to them during service; and
- Directing GAO to study the implementation of and access to TAP and other transition assistance programs at small and remote bases to assess any disparity in resources and access compared to larger bases.