

Veterans Chamber of Commerce, Wisconsin Veterans Network: Launches VetWorks Wisconsin serving military members and families transitioning to Wisconsin

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Program provides comprehensive employment, wellness, and reintegration support during transition process to communities around Wisconsin

MILWAUKEE, Wis. – The Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce, Wisconsin Veterans Network, and the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs announced Thursday the launch of a program providing comprehensive support to active duty military service members as they transition out of military service and relocate to communities across Wisconsin. VetWorks Wisconsin will provide transitioning service members and their families with assistance in employment, education, housing, legal services, veterans benefits, and medical care. Through the VetWorks Wisconsin program, the Veterans Chamber and Wisconsin Veterans Network will partner together to coordinate services and resources and direct support to service members and their families, addressing needs across social determinants of health such as economic stability, employment, and health literacy.

“This new program not only puts Wisconsin on the map as the state where service members and their families can experience the highest quality of life and overall well-being after their military service, but it also provides employers with an opportunity to connect with the most highly skilled labor force in the country,” said Saul Newton, President & CEO of the Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce. “VetWorks Wisconsin meets the needs of service members and their families, and addresses the critical workforce needs of Wisconsin’s employers.”

VetWorks Wisconsin is an extension of the Expiration Term of Service-Sponsorship Program, a program established in partnership with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to sponsor service members through the transition process from military to civilian life. The program is grounded in a personal relationship between the transitioning service member and a matched volunteer sponsor living in the community where the future veteran will reside. Service members are matched with sponsors up to one year before leaving the military, allowing time to plan for transition and develop a strong personal relationship with their sponsor. Service members remain with the program through graduation, up to 12 months after leaving the military. Wisconsin Veterans Network, a nonprofit organization based in Milwaukee, connects the transitioning service members to sponsors, as well as essential resources and services in communities around the state. The Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce, the state's only business association dedicated to supporting veteran-owned and veteran-friendly businesses, will work with employers to meet their workforce needs and ensure positive employment outcomes for transitioning military members and their families.

According to the Department of Defense, more than 4,000 military members relocate to Wisconsin every year. Foundational to the VetWorks Wisconsin approach is a focus on the 12 months between leaving the military and reintegrating into a civilian community, a period of time known as the 'deadly gap,' when the combined stresses of a perceived loss of purpose, geographic relocation, financial uncertainty, and underlying medical and psychological issues lead to new veterans committing suicide at rates two times higher than civilians in the same age group, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. The program's goal is to set conditions for service members and sponsors to achieve purpose and prosperity, reduce stress and risk, and engage together for continued service to the nation.

"For the past six years, Wisconsin Veterans Network has been collaborating with veteran service organizations, other nonprofits, state and local agencies and the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide services to veterans and their families who are in crisis or facing urgent needs to deliver benefits and resources to our veteran clients," says Quentin Hatfield, Executive Director of VetsNet. "Most recently, in 2021, we were able to serve 427 veterans in 38 Wisconsin counties, meeting needs ranging from homelessness, rent and energy assistance, employment, food insecurity, health and mental health services, education benefits and a range of other urgent needs. The Expiration Term of Service-Sponsorship Program, which launched October 1, 2021, in Wisconsin with VetsNet as the

Community Integration Coordinator for the state, gives us the perfect opportunity to connect service members coming home in the next 6-12 months to jobs, education benefits, housing and a range of needs that ensures their homecoming is a 'soft landing' and, prevent these warriors from facing the kinds of crises our current veteran population deals with on a daily basis. The goal, ultimately, is a reduction in the rate of veteran suicide in Wisconsin by eliminating many of the stressors that could be potential triggers for self-harm. By connecting a service member with a volunteer sponsor/mentor who can help them build a homecoming plan and identify the resources they need for themselves and their families, we ensure that the soon-to-be veteran knows they have a team at home to pave the way for smooth transition to civilian life"

"Leaving the military and returning to civilian life should be an exciting opportunity for the service member who is opening the door to the next chapter of their life. Yet, often the stresses associated with walking through this door are challenging," said Newton. "VetWorks Wisconsin bridges that process for our military and their families and empowers them to be successful once they call Wisconsin home, all while growing our workforce and attracting new talent to Wisconsin. When we support and empower Wisconsin veterans and their families, our communities are improved and our economy grows. Everyone wins."

The VetWorks Wisconsin program will formally launch next Tuesday, March 22 at the 6th annual Wisconsin Veterans in the Workforce Summit, the largest single convening of veteran employers and employment resources in the state. The event, hosted at the Brookfield Conference Center, features breakout sessions, an employer resource expo, and luncheon. More information regarding the 2022 Wisconsin Veterans in the Workforce Summit can be found at wiveteranschamber.org.

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The Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce is a nonprofit business association dedicated to expanding economic opportunity for Wisconsin veterans and their families by supporting veteran-owned and veteran-friendly businesses.

The Wisconsin Veterans Network (VetsNet) is a nonprofit organization bridging a major gap in the veterans benefit system: identifying and connecting at-risk veterans and veterans in need to the benefits and programs they earned through their service to our country. VetsNet veterans help in a number of areas, including: emergency relief, rehousing, benefits counseling, financial counseling, substance

abuse assistance, mental health care, legal assistance, relationship counseling, employment counseling, job training and placement.