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COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: September 27, 2022

28

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT
INCREASING VETERANS IN THE COUNTY WORKFORCE: HIRING SAN DIEGO HEROES (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

San Diego County is home to one of the nation's largest population of veterans. As of 2021, more than 200,000 veterans call San Diego County their home.¹ The County is not only home to the largest concentration of female veterans in the world numbering over 35,000 but is also expected to become more racially and ethnically diverse.² The need for adequate services and support is critical, as the veteran population continues to grow annually; each year an average of approximately 7,000 active-duty service members decide to settle in San Diego County after leaving military service.

One of the challenges of transitioning out of active duty to civilian life is rejoining the workforce. Employers and companies benefit greatly from hiring veterans because of the unique skillset and experience they have in a variety of tasks and responsibilities. Veterans have a strong sense of duty and work well within teams. They possess a strong work ethic and can succeed, even under stressful circumstances. As noted by the Veteran's Administration, "Hiring a Veteran can result in the hiring of a dedicated employee who has developed valuable teamwork, leadership, and job skills."³ The County of San Diego stands to benefit from hiring this highly valued workforce.

However, veterans may face barriers in entering the civilian workforce that their nonveteran peers do not. Veterans face employment barriers for a variety of reasons including difficulty translating military experience to civilian work, lack of job search and interview experience, a supportive work environment, and health issues.⁴ Because of these barriers, employers must make concerted

¹ U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: San Diego County, California

² <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/p25-1144.pdf>

³ Why Veterans Make Good Employees - Veterans Employment Toolkit (va.gov)

⁴ Veteran-Employment.pdf (sdchamber.org)

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efforts to recruit the veteran population and adapt to support and meet the needs of the existing veteran workforce.

Although San Diego County is historically known as a military town and hosts one of the largest veteran workforce ready populations in the country, our veteran unemployment numbers are higher when compared to other metropolitan areas. San Diego ranks second highest in veteran unemployment when compared to competitor metropolitan areas, nearly double the rate of Austin, TX.⁵ Intentional and tailored policies that aim to address barriers for veterans in the workplace, with input from Human Resource professionals and the veteran community, can have positive outcomes for recruitment and retention of a veteran workplace.

The County of San Diego stands to benefit from hiring this highly valued workforce. Currently, the County of San Diego has 19,888 positions in the County Enterprise with a vacancy rate of 13.5%. Veterans stand as a ready workforce able to fill that gap. The County of San Diego would greatly benefit by recruiting our veteran population into County employment.

The military is a part of San Diego's community and always will be. The region's culture, economy, and spirit are intertwined with the U.S. Armed Services and the people who answered the call to serve. Our veterans deserve the upmost respect and support, and the County has a duty to demonstrate that ethos to the region. By committing to investing in our veteran workforce we will not only be finding a new talent pool to help address the County's vacancy rate, but we will be doing right by the scores of veterans that call San Diego home.

Today's request is to direct the Chief Administrative Officer to develop a strategy that fosters collaboration to increase recruitment and retention efforts for veterans in the County workforce.

RECOMMENDATION

CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER AND SUPERVISOR JIM DESMOND

Direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to develop a comprehensive strategy to recruit and retain veterans within the County workforce, which shall include:

1. Direct the CAO to set a County Enterprise Goal to increase recruitment, retention, and outreach efforts to focus on veteran applicants by 2030.
2. Direct the CAO to assess the number of employed veterans, set aggressive targets for veteran employment levels in the San Diego County workforce, and report back to the Board of Supervisors (Board) with findings within 120 days. In addition, report back to the Board annually with updates to reaching those goals.
3. Direct the CAO to identify ways the County can foster collaboration among all County groups, departments, and programs to increase recruitment efforts for veterans in the County workforce and report back to the Board within 120 days.
4. Direct the CAO to develop and implement veteran recruitment, outreach, and retention strategy tailored for each County group, department and program. Direct the CAO to work

⁵ Regional-Job-Strategy-Final-Report-1.pdf (sdchamber.org) San Diego Regional Chamber Foundation. October 2017

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with independently elected officials such as the District Attorney, Treasurer-Tax Collector, Assessor/Recorder/County Clerk, and Sheriff as well to implement this recruitment, outreach, and retention strategy. These efforts should include communicating the benefits of hiring veterans directly to hiring managers and others involved in the hiring process.

5. Direct the CAO to consult with local stakeholders, nonprofits, advocacy groups that focus on issues relating to veteran employment, and County veteran employees to inform any new veteran workplace policies, plans, and strategies.
6. Direct CAO to develop any additional programs and strategies that would support veterans during their employment within the County, including access to mental healthcare, support for military partners, and other needs.
7. Direct CAO to develop a marketing program tailored for each department to recruit veterans with skillsets that match the Department's needs.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The County is committed to finding equitable solutions to help all people that wish to serve in the workforce. The veteran population is a protected class that experiences unique challenges which calls for special attention or accommodation by employers. Veteran employees who have experienced combat are more likely to report difficulty entering the workforce than nonveteran employees and may need other supports and accommodations for those living with service-related disabilities like Post-Traumatic Stress. By advocating for County of San Diego policy changes that help accommodate the unique needs of our veterans, the county can make the workplace more equitable for all employees.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Increasing veterans in the County workforce could result in positive social and economic enhancements, contributing to the overall sustainability of the region by providing support for the veteran population of our community. Veterans have proven qualities that add value to our society. Their selflessness, honor, loyalty, and dedication to the wellbeing of others provide positive social contributions to our communities and therefore, positive social sustainability for our region.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year 2022-23 Operational Plan in the Department of Human Resources. There will be no change in net General Fund costs and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

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BACKGROUND

San Diego County is home to one of the nation's largest populations of veterans. As of 2021, more than 200,000 veterans call San Diego County their home.⁶ The County is also home to the largest concentration of female veterans in the world numbering over 35,000 people. Furthermore, as with trends in the U.S. population overall, the veteran population is expected to become more racially and ethnically diverse. Between 2021 and 2046, the share of veterans who are non-Hispanic White is expected to drop from 74% to 62%. The share of veterans who are Hispanic is expected to double from 8% to 16%, while the share who are Black is expected to increase from 13% to 15%.⁷ The need for adequate services and support is critical, as the veteran population continues to grow annually; an average of approximately 7,000 active-duty service members annually decide to settle in San Diego County after leaving military service.

This large population group experience challenges that the general population does not. Two-thirds of veterans cited experiencing difficulty in their transition from military service to civilian life, and nearly half of the veterans involved identified themselves as feeling unready in regard to their transition.⁸ In terms of support prior to discharge, two-thirds of veterans claimed they received some form of support/training for and in advance of their post-service transition. However, only 24% of veterans claimed that their chain of command prepared them properly.⁹ During their transition to civilian life, joining the workforce is one of the many challenges that veterans overcome.

The US Department of Veterans Affairs acknowledges that veterans may struggle to find employment after leaving the military; some veterans never worked prior to their military service, leaving them without the necessary experience and tools to job hunt after discharge. Additionally, the skillsets and expertise they developed during their enlistment may be difficult to translate into civilian terminology in an interview or on a resume, despite qualifications.¹⁰

Veterans display many characteristics that make them ideal job candidates, including the self-identified (84%) and publicly acknowledged (67%) trait of being disciplined.¹¹ As of 2021, the unemployment rates for veterans dipped below the unemployment rates for civilians (4.4% v 5.2%).¹² However, despite the substantial improvement over the past decade, in 2012, 22% of veterans were unemployed.¹³ By comparing the 2012 unemployment rates of veterans to the 2012 unemployment rates of residents of San Diego County (22% v ~9%), we can see that, not long ago, veterans were 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed than their civilian counterparts. Though these staggering rates have exponentially improved, veterans remain a vulnerable group. It is the duty of the County of San Diego to expand the opportunities for and further improve the employment rates of veterans in San Diego County.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: San Diego County, California

⁷ <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/p25-1144.pdf>

⁸ https://coa.oregonstate.edu/sites/coa.oregonstate.edu/files/veterans_employment_challenges.pdf

⁹ Id.

¹⁰ https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/em_challengesReadjust.asp

¹¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/09/10/the-american-veteran-experience-and-the-post-9-11-generation/> pg.6&7

¹² <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/vet.pdf> pg.1

¹³ https://coa.oregonstate.edu/sites/coa.oregonstate.edu/files/veterans_employment_challenges.pdf pg.6

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Employers need to take proactive steps to not only recruit a talented and qualified veteran workforce but must adapt workplace policies to retain them. A study conducted by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that veterans, when compared to nonveteran workers, left government jobs at a higher rate (6.7% vs. 5%) between FYs 2014-2018.¹⁴ They also resigned 1.6 times more often and left in their first 5 years at higher rates (18.7% vs. 11.1%) and were less satisfied with their relationship with supervisors and the meaningfulness of work.

Recommendations by the GAO to address the difficulty in retaining workers examine a few possible drivers as to why veterans leave. Some reasons for departures include issues around how veterans interact with their supervisors, the confidence they have in their leaders, the meaningfulness of their work, and access to training and skills development. By helping various departments recognize these driving factors and take proactive steps to address those concerns retention of the veteran worker may have better outcomes.

Currently, the County of San Diego has 19,888 positions in the County Enterprise with a vacancy rate of 13.5%. Of the total workforce, only 5.7% are veterans. This number may not accurately reflect our veteran population. Upon the hiring process some veterans may not have self-identified military status and have not had an opportunity to self-identify after hiring. However, by conducting a countywide survey on existing workforce veteran status, we can gain a more accurate reflection of existing veteran numbers. This will also allow us to determine the proportion of veterans in each department. This data can help guide targeted outreach efforts and discover best practices and areas of improvement.

With greater demand for highly skilled individuals, the County would greatly benefit from enhancing recruitment efforts of our veteran population. As a hub for veterans, San Diego County has a large, qualified, and capable population of citizens who are actively looking for employment opportunities. The County should aim, and can, double its existing veteran workforce by 2030.

The County of San Diego takes pride in its veteran community and has implemented measures to attract, support, and retain a veteran workforce within the County. The County has adopted elements of the Federal Hiring Our Heroes initiative which establishes best practices for recruiting and retaining veteran and military spouse talent.¹⁵ The initiative provides veterans with resources and tools necessary to maximize their employment opportunities and to assist veterans with their transition into civilian life by applying the valuable skills, knowledge and training acquired in service to positions and career paths available within the County of San Diego. In addition, the County helps veterans apply for benefits and navigate the military veteran-specific enrollment period.

Although the County is a boon to our veteran workforce, more can be done to further recruit, retain and support our veteran workforce. Many of our job-seeking veterans may have the background to be excellent candidates for a department opening but may not be aware their talents can translate

¹⁴ Veteran Federal Employment: OPM and Agencies Could Better Leverage Data to Help Improve Veteran Retention Rates | U.S. GAO

¹⁵ Home Page - Hiring Our Heroes

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into this civilian role. This can be remedied if the County learns how to translate job duties to terminology veterans would connect with, attend veteran hiring events to answer and explain the type of positions available at the County, and engage any other campaigns where a more active role by the County may enhance veteran recruitment outcomes.

To help guide this work, the County should lean into the many local nonprofits, clubs, offices, and advocacy groups that represent and assist veterans transitioning into civilian life. For example, organizations like Zero8hundred work with our local veteran population and provide services for those that want to prepare for civilian career options, and for those who are ready to find an employer. Their expertise, and expertise from organizations like theirs, will augment any strategic approach to the target audience.

Today's request is to direct the Chief Administrative Officer to develop a strategy that fosters collaboration to increase recruitment and retention efforts for veterans in the County workforce.

The County can only benefit by increasing its veteran workforce. Veterans are highly skilled, honorable, and outstanding American's who deserve opportunities for success in life beyond the military. These men and women volunteered to do a job that required them to put their lives on the line to secure our nation's freedoms and uphold our national virtues. Veterans have value. Their traits make them valuable members of our society and ideal employees, which is why we encourage you to support for this board letter today.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed actions supports the Economic Opportunity strategic initiative of the County of San Diego's 2022- 2027 Strategic Plan by supporting opportunities for economic growth and development to all individuals and the community.

Respectfully submitted,



NATHAN FLETCHER
Supervisor, District 4



JIM DESMOND
Supervisor, District 5

ATTACHMENT(S)
N/A