



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES
REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

COMMISSIONER

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Dear Colleagues:

In July, our nation celebrates its independence, independence that is protected and sustained by the many dedicated and brave members of the military services. July is also the month during which we recognize the pride of individuals with disabilities in their growing independence in American society. Independence achieved, in part, through expanding opportunities for competitive integrated employment and the high-quality supports and services provided by the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. Therefore, this is an opportune time to take stock of the ways in which the VR program is well positioned to assist members of the military whose families include students, youth, and adults with disabilities. In particular, the VR program can help to ensure that these military-connected families experience smooth and seamless transfers when relocating to new duty stations.

The Department of Defense has estimated that there are nearly 1.6 million military children. Of the 1.6 million children, approximately 915,000 are school-age (6 to 18). Assuming that 15 percent of the school-age military children receive special education and related services, there are at least 61,000 military children (i.e., students) with individualized education programs under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, a portion of whom could benefit from pre-employment transition and other VR services to explore careers and improve their own transition to postsecondary education and employment.

Military-connected families can experience delays and lack of continuity in service provision when relocating to another military installation. To better serve students with disabilities from military-connected families and mitigate delays and lack of continuity in service provision, it is incumbent on VR agencies to strengthen connections with military installations in all 50 States and outlying areas, especially in the ten States with the highest school enrollment of military-connected students: Virginia, California, Texas, North Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Washington, Maryland, South Carolina, and Hawaii. By conducting outreach directly to military personnel and those who educate students with disabilities in Department of Defense schools and local educational agencies, and children with disabilities placed by their parents in private schools, you will raise the visibility of your agencies among educators and military-connected families, providing them with critical and timely information about the wide variety of services available to these students, including career counseling, work-based learning experiences, work-readiness training, and instructions in self-advocacy, as well as other VR services such as rehabilitation technology, job search and placement services, and financial support for postsecondary education.

In addition, you can help students, youth, and adults with disabilities to avoid prolonged disruptions in the VR services they already are receiving as their families are transferred from one military installation to another. By partnering with the VR agencies in the States where these

families were originally located, you can expedite the VR process and obtain relevant information concerning eligibility determinations, the employment outcomes specified on individualized plans for employment (IPE), services authorized through the IPEs, and the progress of individuals through their plans. In this way, you will honor the informed choice of these individuals and reduce the burden on VR counselors while enabling individuals to experience only short-term interruptions and continuity in service provision, and the opportunity to complete their VR programs within the time frames originally anticipated.

By becoming highly visible in military communities and implementing efficient and responsive practices, VR agencies will maximize the VR experience for the students, youth, and adults from military-connected families, fully meet their needs, and exceed their expectations.

Sincerely,

Danté Q. Allen