

# Strengthening the Military-to-Civilian Transition

Texas Senate Select Committee on Veteran Affairs

Sean Hanna, LAc, MAOM | August 26, 2026

# Veterans in Texas: A Crisis Among the Youngest

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- Texas is home to **more veterans than any other state in the nation** — roughly **1.42 million** as of 2024.
- Texas veterans **ages 18 to 34 die** by suicide at a rate of **51.4 per 100,000**, compared with 18.6 per 100,000 among all Texans in the same age group — **nearly three times higher**.
- Texas takes in **more transitioning service members than any other state**. Among military installations participating in the Veteran Sponsorship Initiative (VSI), **42% of transitioning service members relocate to Texas after separation**.

*The first year after separation is the **highest-risk window** (the “deadly gap”), with suicide risk running about **three times the active-duty rate**.*

# Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

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## What TAP Covers

- Mandatory for all service members with at least 180 days of active-duty service.
- Provides pre-separation counseling and self-assessment
- Core Curriculum: benefits, financial planning, skills crosswalk
- Elective Tracks: employment, vocational, education, or entrepreneurship
- Capstone: verifies Career Readiness Standards no later than 90 days before separation

## Where TAP Stops

- Built for paperwork, benefits literacy, and job-search mechanics
- Ends at a one-time checklist verification
- Does not replace what is lost: command, unit, and daily battle rhythm, which is exchanged overnight for full autonomy
- *A one-time checklist verification is not, by itself, an intervention.*

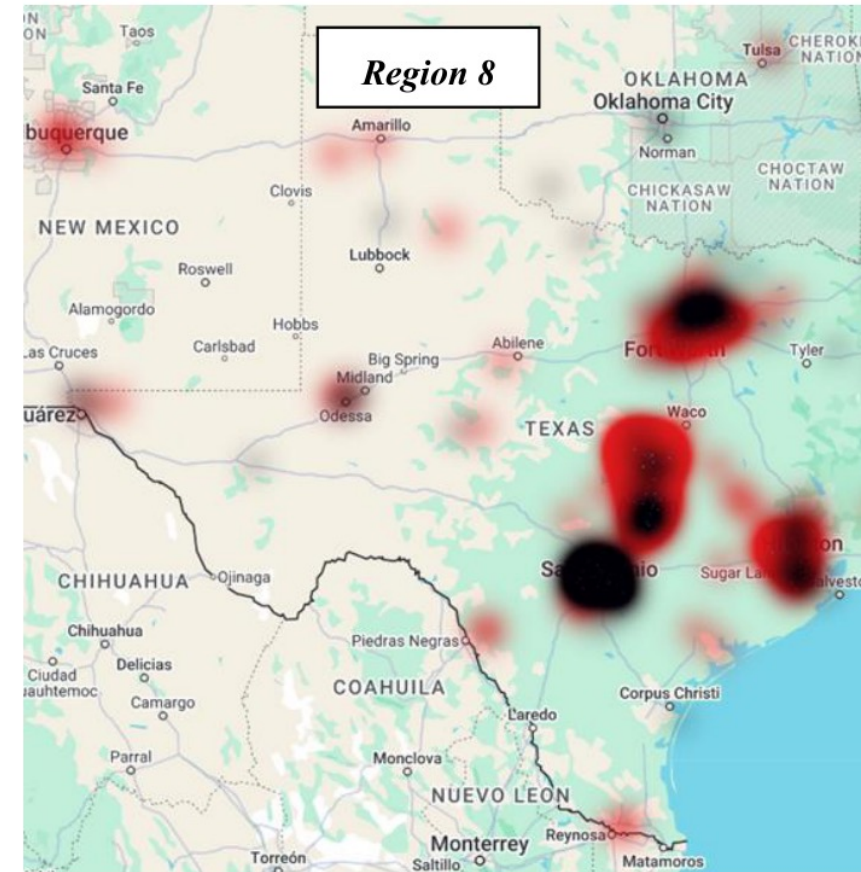
# The Deadly Gap

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The first year after separation is the **highest-risk window**, with suicide risk running about **three times active-duty levels**.

- **REACH VET** flags who is at risk, *but a flag is not an intervention*.
- **What Works:** a trained peer paired with a transitioning veteran.
- **VSI** puts that model into practice.
- VSI's current trial uses a **validated predictive model** (STARRS) to identify each service member's **risk before separation** and match the **appropriate level of intervention**.

***Texas is short an estimated 491 certified sponsors.***



Transitioning veterans (red) vs. certified sponsors (black).  
Geraci et al., IJERPH 2026, Fig. S2.

# The Pipeline and Where Texas's Efforts Fit

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## VA (VSI)

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- Sets the model: a trained peer sponsor for every transitioning service member
- Public-private partnership
- Scaling nationally to 12,000 more service members, prioritized by predicted risk

## Onward Ops

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- VA's sole national partner for VSI
- Recruits, trains, and VA-certifies volunteer sponsors
- Matches sponsors before service members leave the base
- Manages the relationship

## Endeavors

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- Onward Ops' Texas partner
- Runs the Cohen Clinics; hosts sponsor intake as the "Transition Support Program"
- Closing part of the gap: *cannot recruit 491 more sponsors without added capacity*

# The Missing Link

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**A state effort to grow the sponsor pool doesn't exist, yet. Texas already funds the workforce to build it: the Military Veteran Peer Network (MVPN).**

**In FY 2025, the MVPN:**

- Served **60,763** veterans, service members, and their families
- Housed **57 peer service coordinators (PSCs)**, plus volunteer peers
- Led **53,900+ one-on-one sessions** and **4,500+ peer support groups**
- Accounted for **214,000+ total interactions**, on a **\$5 million investment**

**Opportunity:** *PSCs should recruit sponsors into the Onward Ops pipeline, not just become sponsors themselves. This could become an official, measurable PSC activity and credited in MVPN reporting to help close the 491-sponsor gap.*

# Recommendations

**If the committee agrees that this gap should be prioritized, the Meadows Institute offers the following recommendations:**

- TVC should **formally credit PSCs**, in coordination with Onward Ops and Endeavors, for sponsors they recruit and for MVPN peers who become certified sponsors.
- TVC should **report annually**, in its 89(R) HB 114 Action Plan, on sponsor certification numbers against need, MVPN-VSI referrals, and VA primary care connection rates.
- Future legislation or guidance could **name the command-to-autonomy transition explicitly**, making peer sponsorship — not a class or a checklist — the state's primary response.

# Questions

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# Thank You!

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