

# VA MISSION Act of 2018: Section 505 – Personnel Transparency Quarter Ending March 31, 2020

## Executive Summary

May 29, 2020

This report is submitted pursuant to section 505 of the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018 (VA MISSION Act) (Public Law 115-182), regarding “Personnel Transparency.” Under section 505(a), the VA Secretary shall make publicly available on a quarterly basis information pertaining to staffing and vacancies, specifically including: the number of personnel encumbering positions, the number of accessions and separation actions processed during the prior quarter, the number of vacancies by occupation, and the percentage of new hires hired within the time-to-hire target of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). This quarter VA is reporting vacancies by funded and unfunded full-time equivalent employee FTE.<sup>1</sup>

As of March 31, 2020, VA had 393,751 employees onboard (includes full-time, part-time, and seasonal employees), representing a total of 384,541 onboard FTEs. With funding for 390,539 FTEs in VA’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 appropriation approved by Congress, and a request for 400,502 FTEs in VA’s FY 2021 President’s Budget submission,<sup>2</sup> VA had 5,998 funded vacant FTE at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter FY 2020. This FTE level represents a fill rate of 98.4% for the funded FTEs provided by Congress. While VA reports another approximately 46,000 unfunded vacant FTE in its HR database, VA’s FY 2021 budget proposal requested almost 10,000 additional FTEs to address unfunded requirements and enable VA to address emerging needs for Veteran care.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of FY 20, VA had a net increase of 3,219 onboard employees, reflecting successful hiring, low turnover rates, and additional funding for FTEs.<sup>4</sup>

Unfunded vacant FTE do not necessarily indicate that there is a staffing gap or funding shortfall impacting the VA’s mission. In early March, VA announced internal system changes to the HR•Smart system to put controls in place to enhance position management processes with better data integrity and gain fidelity in the reported positions, particularly vacant positions. It was expected that these HR•Smart system and business process changes would enable a comprehensive position validation review that would clean up position data starting in March and ending no later than May 30, 2020. This validation process was also designed to include participation from financial managers to ensure positions marked as “budgeted” have available

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<sup>1</sup> Full-Time Equivalent means the total number of regular straight-time hours worked by employees divided by the number of compensable hours applicable to each fiscal year (regular method); or, the total regular hours worked in a fiscal year (2080 hours) divided by 26 biweekly pay periods (pay period method). OMB A-11 Circular § 85.5(c).

<sup>2</sup> FTEs exclude OIG and VCS; Source FY 2020 and FY 2021 Veterans Affairs Annual Budget Submissions, Supplemental Information and Appendices.

<sup>3</sup> As noted in this document and prior related publications, VA and is making progress on its manpower management capabilities to ensure positions are validated in its Human Resources Information System, but at this time that work is not complete. These 46,000 unfunded vacancies do not necessarily indicate that there is a staffing gap or funding shortfall impacting the VA’s mission.

<sup>4</sup> Net increase in employees reflects 11,340 total gains and 8,121 total losses. Due to a change in the source data and additional quality review steps for this report, net gains cannot be calculated by comparing onboard Q1 and Q2 data.

funds to support actual hiring. Unfortunately, due to the impact of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, those changes were postponed. Thus, VA is not yet at the point where the HR•Smart reported vacancies are indicative of true current and budgeted positions, but VA is making progress nonetheless in understanding its full staffing capacity picture.

VA is committed to accurate position management together with efficient staffing to fill vacancies and increase the size of the workforce to meet Veteran demand for healthcare, benefits, and memorial services. Historical staffing and vacancy data are available on VA's Web site at <https://www.va.gov/employee/va-mission-act-section-505-data/>.

## **How do I interpret the data?**

### **Onboard Employees**

Onboards (i.e., the number of personnel encumbering positions) are the number of employees (i.e., headcount) onboard at the time the data are reported. Note that "onboards" differ from "FTE," which is a budgetary term based on compensable hours as opposed to headcount; Since VA hires some part-time employees (i.e. partial FTEs), that explains why onboard figures consistently exceed FTE figures. Onboard does not include unpaid health professional trainees or other volunteers.

### **Accessions (Hiring) and Separations**

Accessions are personnel actions that result in the addition of an employee to an agency's staff (i.e., transfers-in from another agency, and new hires to the Federal government) and generally lead to increases in onboards. Separations are personnel actions resulting in the loss of an employee from the agency's staff (i.e., transfers-out, quits, retirements, terminations or removals, death, and other separations).

### **Vacant FTE**

Positions that do not have an employee, measured by the total number of compensable hours (with one FTE equaling 2,080 hours). Pending comprehensive review and validation that the positions meet the following criteria, vacant positions may be funded or unfunded. As referenced earlier in the Executive Summary, work is on-going to put controls in place to enhance position management processes with better data integrity and gain fidelity in the reported positions, particularly vacant positions. This work will improve the data quality of manpower and funding data.

### **Time-To-Hire**

OPM's 80 calendar day time-to-hire target (see MISSION Act section 505 (a)(1)(D)) is used for positions filled through a Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA) posted to USAJobs, as well as onboard new hire types that are onboarded in USA Staffing and are not associated with a competitive announcement. Time-To-Hire is measured in two ways. The primary measure reflects the elapsed time between when a hiring need is validated and when an employee enters on duty, and the secondary measure reflects the elapsed time between when a hiring need is validated and when the candidate responds to a tentative offer. For health care

professionals hired by VHA, the time to hire includes the extra requirement of credentialing which lengthens the time to hire average for those occupations.

### **Applying for a position at VA**

The Section 505(b) MISSION Act Annual Report (June 2019) identifies the steps VA is taking to achieve full staffing capacity. VA is continuously recruiting for committed professionals who are dedicated to serving our Nation's Veterans. Employment at VA provides a competitive salary and benefits package and a strong work/life balance. Above all else, the highest honor in working at VA is the opportunity to serve the brave men and women who have served our Nation. Additional information regarding careers at VA can be found at <https://www.vacareers.va.gov/>.