

FLYING HIGH—THANKS TO NMDVR

Becoming a commercial airline pilot was an achievable goal for John O’Laughlin, with help from the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

“I don’t think you truly understand the good work you do,” O’Laughlin says of NMDVR’s rehabilitation services. “You took something that was unattainable for me and made it attainable. It has allowed me to not only have a better life for myself, but it’s also made an impact on my family. You allowed me financial security. You took someone at a disadvantage and put them in a position to thrive by providing them with what they need to be successful. That’s an amazing thing.”

A military veteran, he qualified for NMVDR services due to his spinal stenosis, severe arthritis, and other musculoskeletal issues. His aunt and uncle are pilots, which sparked his interest in aviation. O’Laughlin logged some flight time while serving his country, and his wife suggested he pursue that as a post-military civilian career.



The view from John O'Laughlin's "office."

“The process is very time consuming and financially burdensome,” the Albuquerque resident says. “(NMDVR) allowed me to overcome the financial barrier that would have kept me from getting the certificates and ratings, and also the flight time I needed.” The agency helped him through the hours requirements as well as the Airline Transport Pilot Combined Training Program, consisting of ground school, simulators, and a knowledge test. Passing those earned him the certifications and ratings necessary to qualify as an airline pilot.

O’Laughlin flies for Envoy, a regional subsidiary of American Airlines. His routes take him throughout most of the United States and Canada, as well as parts of the Caribbean and Mexico. At age 32, his short-term goal is to be promoted to captain and join the parent American

within the next few years.

His disability is not something that needed to be overcome, but rather managed. “Some days, it’s fine. Other days, I’ll roll out of bed the wrong way and it throws me off for the rest of the day,” says O’Laughlin. “Sitting in the cockpit doesn’t typically affect me.”

He adds he is not the type of person to reach out for help, and only came to NMDVR on the suggestion of a friend of a friend. “Don’t count yourself out before you even ask,” O’Laughlin advises. “Take a chance. They turned my life 180 degrees.”

For information about NMDVR programs, contact your nearest office. There are two dozen locations across the state: dvr.state.nm.us/locations/.

The New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation helps individuals with disabilities find suitable employment. Vocational rehabilitation is a voluntary program supporting people who want to work. With a long history of success and proven methodology for making the best fits, NMDVR is committed to helping participants thrive in their communities. For more information, visit dvr.state.nm.us or call 505-954-8500.

The Vocational Rehabilitation program receives 78.7% of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For federal fiscal year 2024, the total awarded is \$24,698,300. The remaining 21.3% is funded by state appropriations and transfers from the Commission for the Blind and Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

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