



MANPOWER AND
RESERVE AFFAIRS

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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Vermont General Assembly
House Committee on Health Care
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Rep. Lori Houghton
Chair

Remarks of
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Support of: HB 62, An Act Relating to the Interstate Counseling Compact

Testimony

The Department of Defense is grateful for the opportunity to support the policies proposed in Vermont House Bill 62, An Act Relating to the Interstate Counseling Compact, which addresses licensing issues affecting our service members and their families. The purpose of the Compact is to facilitate interstate practice of licensed professional counselors with the goal of improving public access to professional counseling services. Such services occur in the state in which the client is located at the time the counseling services are provided.

My name is Melissa Willette. I am the New England Regional Liaison for the United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office, operating under the direction of Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. Each liaison represents the Department and works with state officials, policy makers, and stakeholders regarding issues that affect military service members, veterans and their families.

Taking care of our people remains the top priority of the Department of Defense, and is at the center of our National Defense Strategy.¹ Military spouses provide the strong foundation upon which their loved ones in uniform stand, and both our communities and Nation rely on their resilience, and to further expand employment opportunities for military spouses, the Department has been directed to accelerate the passage of interstate licensure compacts to ease a burden for

¹ Terri Moon Cronk, Austin Outlines His Top Three Priorities on Defense, People, Teamwork, United States Department of Defense, March 5, 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2526532/austin-outlines-his-top-three-priorities-on-defense-people-teamwork/>

spouses who must go through the often challenging and frustrating process of transferring their professional licenses with each move.²

To address license portability for military spouses, states have turned to occupational licensure interstate compacts, which streamline relicensing between member States of a compact for all practitioners in an occupation, and provide specific support for military spouses of relocating active-duty personnel through provisions recognizing unique requirements of military life. This is significant for the military community in that along with active-duty military spouses receiving the benefit of compacts, active-duty members, members of the reserve component, reserve component spouses, transitioning Service members and other Veterans benefit from the mobility provided through the compact.

The Interstate Counseling Compact supports relocating active duty military spouses, increases public access to counseling services, and enhances public safety and cooperation in regulating multistate practice.³

Of additional benefit is the compact's utilization of a mutual recognition model of interstate practice, which enhances opportunities of portable careers for military spouses by providing consistent rules which allow licensed members to work in other states through "privilege to practice policies", or more easily transfer their license to a new state.

Over the last eighteen months, seventeen States have joined the Interstate Counseling Compact. The compact has the potential to significantly change the way counselors can practice and will provide continuity of care as well as the ability of counselors to reach underserved populations.⁴

There are many unique requirements that come with a life of service in the United States armed forces, and those requirements are not only bestowed on the service member, but also on the spouses and children of those who serve.⁵

For military spouses in particular, professional licensing requirements remain an enduring challenge. Due to the nature of the military, most active-duty service members change duty stations every few years. Not only is the service member expected to reacquaint themselves with a new installation, unit, and command, the spouse too is forced to reinvent themselves

² Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, Taking Care of Our Service Members and Their Families (Memorandum for Senior Leadership), United States Department of Defense, September 22, 2022, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Sep/22/2003083398/-1/-1/0/TAKING-CARE-OF-OUR-SERVICE-MEMBERS-AND-FAMILIES.PDF>

³ United States Department of Defense, "DOD Receives Approval for Grants to Develop Interstate Compacts for Licensure Portability." March 15, 2021. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2537098/dod-receives-approval-for-grants-to-develop-interstate-compacts-for-licensure-p/>

⁴ American Counseling Association, "Advantages of the interstate counseling compact and what it means for professional counselors." August 9, 2022. <https://www.counseling.org/government-affairs/counseling-compact#>

⁵ The annual percent of the military spouse population that moves across state lines is 14.5% compared to their civilian counterparts at 1.1%. As much as 34% of military spouses in the labor force are required to be fully licensed; and of those spouses, 19% experience license maintenance difficulties.

professionally. The Interstate Counseling Compact will allow counseling professionals to transcend these boundaries.⁶

Frequent moves and cumbersome licensing and certification requirements limit career options for military spouses. Removing these barriers, creating reciprocity in licensing requirements, and facilitating placement opportunities can help a military family's financial stability, speed the assimilation of the family into its new location, and create a desirable new employee pool for a state.

With the above stated benefits in mind, we look forward to engaging in efforts that will create increased quality of life for all populations we aim to serve. We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the policies contained in House Bill 62, and thank the bill sponsors, Representative Houghton and Representative Durfee for introducing this legislation.

Thank you for your time and attention. Should you have any questions, I would be happy to answer those at this time.

Respectfully,

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⁶ National Center for Interstate Compacts. "What will these interstate compacts achieve?" <https://compacts.csg.org/our-work/ics/>