

Testimony on H.689

Good morning, Madam Chair, Madam Vice-Chair, and Committee –

Thank you for the opportunity to present H.689 for your consideration. This is a bill that was brought to the National Guard & Veterans Affairs Caucus; it is a priority of the US Department of Defense for this legislative session, and I am happy to introduce it on their behalf.

This bill proposes to require the Commissioner for Children and Families to enter into memoranda of understanding with the military family advocacy program to establish protocols and procedures for child abuse and neglect allegations, assessments, and investigations involving military personnel. This bill also proposes to require the Department for Children and Families to collect the military status of the parents or other persons responsible for the child's care once a report is accepted as valid and to share such information with the appropriate military authorities.

Seventy percent of all military families live off military installations and in our communities. Military families frequently move from state to state, and there is the unfortunate potential for cases of abuse to fall through the cracks of the existing system. This legislation would provide for a critical link between civil and military law enforcement, in conjunction with the federally mandated Family Advocacy Program, that will serve to protect vulnerable children.

Thirty-four other states have already passed this legislation, two other states in New England have legislation pending during this current session (MA and ME). Maine held a public hearing on their bill yesterday morning (January 31st). The committee immediately entered into a Work Session and voted the legislation unanimously out of committee, with the addition of an emergency preamble to the bill so that it will take effect immediately upon passage.

I hope that you will consider passing this victim advocacy legislation as well.

For further information, I will direct you to a document provided by Ms. Melissa Willette, the DoD Regional Liaison for New England, which is on your webpage.

Thank you for your time.