



MANPOWER AND
RESERVE AFFAIRS

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

1500 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-1500

March 29, 2023

**Vermont General Assembly
Senate Committee on Health and Welfare
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301**

**Senator Virginia Lyons, Chair
Senator David Weeks, Vice - Chair**

**Remarks of
Melissa J. Willette
New England Regional Liaison
United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office**

Testimony in Support of H.77, An Act Relating to Vermont's Adoption of the Physical Therapy Licensure Compact

On behalf of the Department of Defense, I am writing to submit written testimony in support of the policies reflected in H.77, as introduced, which addresses licensing issues affecting our service members and their families. Simply put, the purpose of the compact is to facilitate interstate practice of physical therapy, with the goal of improving public access to physical therapy services.

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 in their individual region, and works with state officials, policy makers, and stakeholders regarding issues that affect military service members, veterans and their families.

Licensure issues for both our transitioning military members and their spouses have been a priority for the Department for several years, and the State of Vermont enacted its first compact in 2021 with the passage of the Nurse Licensure Compact. States are now considering licensure compacts for several occupations. Our office is working across the country to approve thirteen occupational licensure compacts in 2023, and here in Vermont, we've begun work on three of those in this very committee: The Licensed Professional Counseling Compact, the Physical Therapy Compact, and the Audiology and Speech Language Compact.

Occupational licensure compacts provide consistent rules that allow licensed members to work in other states through "privilege to practice policies" or to more easily transfer their license to a new state. The policies reflected in H.77 would achieve seven objectives to include: increasing public access to physical therapy services; enhancement of public safety; support of relocating military spouses; amplified information sharing among states; cooperation in regulation and greater accountability.

The Physical Therapy Compact will allow a member state to provide compact privilege to a licensee holding a valid unencumbered license in another member state, in accordance with compact rules. Under such compact privilege, the licensee is to function within the laws and regulations of the remote state and is subject to that state's regulatory authority. This is especially important to the spouses of our military service members.

A licensee who is active-duty military or is the spouse of an individual who is active-duty military may elect either their home of record, their permanent change of station, or their state of current residence, if different from their permanent change of station when applying. Upon completion of their application, the licensee would then be allowed use of the "privilege to practice" provision in the compact to work in any other member state without obtaining another license.

It's important to note that forty four percent of married service members reported that their spouse's ability to maintain a career impacts their decision to remain in the military and eighteen percent report spouse employment challenges as a reason for potentially choosing to separate from the military.¹ As our military members and their families move from state to state, the ability for them to quickly gain employment and progress on their chosen career paths is very important.

In closing, let me say that we are grateful for the tremendous efforts that Vermont has historically made to support our military members and their families. We appreciate the opportunity to support the policy reflected in H.77, and especially thank Representative Ode for bringing this important policy forward.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. I can be reached at melissa.j.willette3.civ@mail.mil or 703-623-2035.

Sincerely,

MELISSA WILLETTE
New England Regional Liaison
Defense-State Liaison Office

¹ "The Military Spouse Experience: Current Issues and Gaps in Service", June 3, 2021
https://militaryfamilies.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Military-Spouse-Experience_Current-Issues-and-Gaps-in-Service_3June2021.pdf