

Testimony of

Harold E. Cooney

**State Liaison, Northeast
DoD-State Liaison Office
Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense,
Military Community and Family Policy**

**H. 275 An act relating to professional licensing of members of the Armed
Forces**

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Vermont House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs

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Chairwoman Head and members of the Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs, on behalf of the Department of Defense, and in particular, the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of H. 275 - An act relating to professional licensing of members of the Armed Forces.

My name is Colonel (Ret) Harold Cooney. I am the Northeast Region Liaison for the Department of Defense State Liaison Office. Our mission is to be a resource to state policymakers addressing the issues that affect the quality of life of our military and their families.

Our top two priority issues this year are facilitating Service members receiving credit for military education, training, and experience when applying for a state license and/or academic credit, and portability of military spouse licenses and unemployment compensation. The language in H. 275 will certainly help our transitioning Service members and military spouses in obtaining state licenses and quickly finding work.

Separating Service members are frequently delayed getting post-Service employment even though they have applicable military education, training and experience which can qualify them for licenses. These Service members leave the military with documented training and experience that can prepare them for civilian employment; however, this documentation is not always used by state entities to qualify them for licenses required for their occupation or academic credit.

While unemployment rates have been improving, as of July 2013, 702 thousand Veterans were unemployed and the jobless rate for post-9/11 veterans was 7.7 %, with young male Veterans (ages 18 to 24) experiencing an unemployment rate of 17.4%. Through statute and regulation, states can establish requirements for licensure boards to accept military education, training and experience to fulfill requirements that are substantially the same, to ensure separating Service members do not have to repeat requirements completed during their military career. Even in cases where the licensing authority determines that the Service member's education, training, and experience only fulfills part of the licensing criteria of the state, the Service member will still

save time and expense and be able to enter the workforce more quickly. It is important to us that you know we are not asking for direct licensure if it is not equivalent. We only seek credit where credit is due. Another point to consider: You and I have already paid for this veteran's training, within the DoD schools and years of experience while serving our Nation, with our federal tax dollars.

The American Council on Education (ACE) has established college credit recommendations for these learning experiences, which are published in the *ACE Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services*. This document provides the mechanism, but not a requirement, for academic institutions to accept military training and experience. States can establish requirements, as outlined in H. 275, for academic institutions to grant separating Service members credit towards degree and certificate requirements for education, training and experience gained in the military.

The Department of Defense recognizes that if we are going to ask credentialing bodies to evaluate military training and experience, we have to make it easier for them to do so, minimizing any fiscal impact.

- First, there are currently different Service transcripts that record the training, experience, and education received by Service members. We are working with the Services and with credentialing organizations to see how we can better standardize the information and make it more understandable to non-military audiences.
- Second, since some credentials require an individual to have completed an approved or accredited training program, we are determining which credentials related to military occupations require training program approval or accreditation and identify methods of facilitating this.
- Finally, a key aspect of providing accrediting and credentialing agencies the ability to assess military training is making the training programs of instruction (POIs) available to them for review. Currently, the Services each have their own policies and procedures related to development and maintenance of POIs and there is no centralized location for agencies to access them. Ensuring POIs have some degree of standardization and are more easily accessible to accrediting and credentialing agencies and educational institutions will make it easier for them to assess whether the military training courses meet their criteria.

Last year, 22 states enacted new laws to help grant our veterans credit towards licensing and/or academic credit. Currently in the 2014 session, there are 17 bills in 17 additional states resembling the one before you today. All but 7 states have passed similar measures.

These licensing challenges also affect our military spouses. Because each state sets its own licensing requirements, these requirements often vary across state lines. Consequently, the lack

of license portability – the ability to transfer an existing license to a new state with minimal application requirements – can impose significant administrative and financial burdens on licensed professionals when they move across state lines. Because military spouses hold occupational licenses and often move across state lines, at a rate 10 times higher than their civilian counterparts, the patchwork set of variable and frequently time-consuming licensing requirements across states disproportionately affect these families. The result is that too many military spouses looking for jobs that require licenses are stymied in their efforts.

A spouse's employment plays a key role in the financial and personal well-being of military families, and their job satisfaction is an important component of the retention of service members. Without adequate support for military spouses and their career objectives, the military could have trouble retaining service members.

Approximately 85 percent of military spouses either work, or desire to work, outside the home; nearly 35 percent of these require licenses or certification.

Last year 14 states enacted laws that addressed this issue by - allowing for modification of a license by endorsement (which allows a state board or regulator to recognize active credentials from another state); providing for temporary licenses to allow a military spouse with a current license to secure employment while completing state requirements that may be different from what was required by the previous licensing state or while awaiting verification of current license, certification and/or employment history for an endorsement; and/or expediting procedures for regulatory department or board approval to provide opportunity for spouses to obtain an endorsed or temporary license. There are 12 bills pending and all but 8 states have passed similar legislation.

Unemployment compensation is important to military families, who cannot afford to lose income during a military move. A military family moves to fulfill military requirements and spouses should not be penalized by states for “voluntarily” leaving employment. There are currently 50 active duty military spouses in Vermont. Currently 44 of 50 states current grant unemployment compensation to military spouses.

In closing, let me say that we are grateful for the tremendous effort Vermont has historically made in supporting our Service members and their families. We want to thank Representative Maxine Jo Grad for sponsoring this legislation. This initiative will continue that legacy. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

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