

Testimony on H.531 – Military Spouse Perspective

Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I'm here today in my personal capacity as a **military spouse**, although my family is now retired from military service. I'm testifying about the challenges I experienced **during my husband's active-duty years**, which is the period this bill is designed to address.

I grew up in the military. My father served in the **82nd Airborne Infantry**, working in **signals intelligence**. He was a native Spanish speaker and was also sent to language school for Russian and Polish — work that placed our family in the middle of the Cold War era.

Later, I married an **Air Force officer** who served in **counterintelligence**. During his **22-year career**, we moved **14 times** and lived in the **Middle East on multiple occasions**. Between **2003 and 2013**, he completed **four deployments to the Middle East**.

We have **three grown children**, and two are continuing the tradition of military service. Like many military families, we accepted frequent relocations, long separations, and uncertainty as part of our commitment to service.

During those active-duty years, employment for me was **not a straight line**.

Each move meant starting over — new job markets, new licensing rules, new employers, and new professional networks. I routinely faced questions about **gaps in my employment history**, even though those gaps were the direct result of military orders and deployments.

At the same time, I was deeply involved in **community, school, and volunteer leadership roles** at each duty station — often coordinating programs, leading teams, managing budgets, and supporting military families during deployments. These roles were meaningful, demanding, and skill-building, but they were rarely valued the same way as uninterrupted full-time employment.

I didn't lose my skills during those years — **but the hiring process often treated them as if they hadn't counted**.

One example that illustrates this instability occurred while my husband was deployed to Afghanistan. When his father's health declined, the Air Force granted a **humanitarian assignment**, allowing him to leave his 12 month deployment early and teach ROTC at **Norwich University** so we could be closer to family. While that assignment provided family stability, it still required another professional reset for me.

That cycle — relocation, restart, explanation — repeated itself throughout my husband's active service.

That is the reality H.531 addresses.

This bill does not guarantee employment and does not bypass qualifications. It provides a **modest preference — five additional points — for military spouses who meet all requirements and pass point-based competitive examinations for State employment**.

That matters because even a small adjustment can help offset the cumulative disadvantage created by frequent, mandatory relocation. It recognizes that military spouses are not less capable or less committed — in fact, we are often **highly adaptable, experienced in leadership, and deeply oriented toward public service**.

Importantly, H.531 preserves Vermont's **merit-based hiring system**, collective bargaining agreements, and affirmative action standards. It levels the playing field without tipping it.

Military service is not carried by service members alone — it is shared by families. **Supporting military spouses during active service is a practical way to honor that shared sacrifice while strengthening Vermont's workforce.**

For those reasons, I respectfully support H.531.

Thank you,

Kristen LaJeunesse