

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I want to begin by sharing why H.531 matters to me personally, and why it matters to thousands of families like mine across Vermont and across this country.

I am a military spouse. Like so many military families, my household has been shaped by service that requires flexibility, sacrifice, and in a lot of cases-frequent relocation. Each move brings opportunity, but it also brings disruption especially when it comes to employment. Military spouses are often highly educated, skilled, and eager to work, yet they face unique and persistent barriers to entering the workforce.

- Military spouses are unemployed at a rate of 21%; a rate that is significantly higher than their civilian counterparts.
- 48% of Active Duty military spouses have articulated that finding employment is the biggest point of stress during a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) move.
- The average age of a military spouse is 32 years of age; 49% hold a bachelor's degree.
- According to the Defense Manpower Data Center's Reporting System, there are 112 Active Duty Spouse in Vermont and 1424 Guard/Reserve Spouses

Even when employed, military spouses are far more likely to be underemployed meaning that they are working below their skill level or outside their field simply because they must start over every single time their family moves. Professional networks that disappear overnight, hiring timelines that don't align with their spouse's military orders and résumés that show frequent moves can all be misunderstood rather than recognized as a sign of resilience.

That reality has real consequences. It affects family financial stability, mental health, and long-term career growth. It can also influence whether a service member chooses to remain in the military at all because of the added stressors this puts on their families. And for states like Vermont, it means we are leaving qualified, motivated workers on the sidelines at a time when our workforce is stretched thin.

In 2011, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff established the Total Force Fitness framework to recognize that military readiness depends not only on service members, but on the overall well-being, stability, and resilience of their families — including economic security and meaningful employment for spouses. This bill directly addresses 2 of the 8 domains, Social (family life) and Financial. It also has the potential to improve other domains such as Nutrition (better family income = more money to purchase wholesome foods). *A holistic assessment of health and fitness is a major concern right now for each of the military services.

H.531 is a modest, practical solution to a very real problem. It's a focused, practical step that applies only to State employment and will help military spouses access jobs they are qualified for while strengthening our State workforce. It does not guarantee anyone a job and it does not lower standards or bypass qualifications. What it does is recognize the unique circumstances

military spouses face and ensures they receive fair consideration when seeking state employment.

As a military spouse, I can tell you that the ability to secure meaningful work quickly is essential. It allows families to put down roots, to contribute to their communities, and to maintain stability. State employment can offer exactly that— public service, continuity, and a chance to contribute to the places we call home, even if only for a few years.

This bill also reflects Vermont's long-standing commitment to supporting military families with action. By creating a hiring preference for military spouses, we send a clear message: Vermont values their service, understands their challenges, and is willing to remove unnecessary barriers that prevent them from fully participating in our workforce.

I urge the committee to view this bill not just as a policy proposal, but as a statement of our values and a practical step toward making Vermont a more welcoming, supportive place for those who serve, including their families.

Thank you.

Rep. Mary-Katherine Stone
Chittenden 14-Burlington