

3

Statement of
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Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense,
Military Community and Family Policy
Kansas House Bill 2178

Good morning Mister Chair and Committee Members. I'm Martin Dempsey with the Department of Defense State Liaison Office. Personally, I've been in service to the military community since 1975. My office partners with states on certain issues to educate on quality of life concerns affecting military families. One of our top priority issues is military spouse career portability.

Military spouses relocate on average every 2-3 years. Sometimes spouses become discouraged and give up their careers to take lower paying jobs for which they are frequently over-qualified. They make this decision to stabilize their family and stay together as a family. While some make this decision spouses constantly face the challenges of trying to build and rebuild a career while moving from place to place. Not all military families make the same choice. As many families continue to face the challenges and sacrifices that a mobile lifestyle creates; others decide to leave the military all together.

Most decisions to stay in the military are made around the kitchen table and not in the personnel office. To retain our trained and experienced military we must retain the family. The Defense Manpower Data Center reported in a survey of active duty Service members that 59% of our military are married. Additionally, that percentage increases to 72% for non commissioned officers and 73% for officers. As you know, these two groups possess the critical experience necessary for our professional armed forces. Over 70% of their spouses say they want to work or need to work. Military families are not unlike their civilian counterparts; they depend on two incomes, and like anyone else want to achieve their goals and aspirations.

In 2007, the RAND Corporation published a study; "Working Around the Military," in which they indicated that military spouses had more education than their civilian 'look alike' counterparts, yet on average are employed at lower rates and earn less. This is indicative of a mobile lifestyle, which does not support military spouses expediting their professional licenses, or else discourages them into taking lower paying positions below their training and certifications. Many end up going to work for a temporary service because the family depends on a dual income and there are too many complications to being able to transfer their professional credentials.

Military spouses do work hard to maintain their licenses and requirements to keep a state license current. Many maintain licenses in several states at the same time; just to be ready should they return to that state. This is a reaction to the challenges they have faced and it is very costly to them.

Many do select careers that are considered portable careers, but in reality even choosing one of these professions and in a high demand field, they still run into certification or licensure barriers. That is where policy changes, such as that represented in the current language of HB 2178 can help to provide an alternative for these barriers.

Clearly, military families face challenges unique to their mobile lifestyle. They should not have to sacrifice their personal goals as well. We need to help level the playing field so they can meet their families' financial needs and fulfill their aspirations. It's the right thing to do and it retains our experienced volunteer military.