



Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development

Comments on House Bill 2745
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Good afternoon Chairman Tarwater, Ranking Member Probst and Members of the House Commerce Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Tamara Ray and I am the Director of Military Employment Strategy for the Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas. In this role, I lead Home Base Wichita, a strategic initiative to deliberately and intentionally unite military-connected individuals to jobs and careers in the Wichita region. Military connected individuals are; transitioning service members, veterans, national guard members, reservists, and military spouses.

The partners of Home Base Wichita include; the Wichita Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Wichita Partnership, the Greater Wichita Veteran Advocacy Board, and the project is receiving funding support from City of Wichita.

Based on my experience as a veteran, military spouse, and now in my current position, improving access to professional licenses and certifications for military spouses will both support military families, but also the Kansas economy.

During my 22 years of active duty service, I witnessed many Airmen and their families relocate to new units and experience financial insecurity due to lack of employment opportunities for their spouses. This can have profound impacts on families who rely on dual-incomes to survive. According to a 2021 Blue Star Families Military and Veteran Families Financial Needs report, “More than two-thirds of active duty family respondents agreed that having two incomes was “vitally important” to their family’s well-being and yet spouse employment challenges are named as a perennial top issue for active-duty families”.

Despite resources, counseling, and employment assistance, there were still barriers to employment. A major barrier was spouses not having a particular state license or certification for their career field. The process to obtain one proved to be lengthy and cumbersome to complete. Many spouses would just give up causing continuous degradation to their financial status. This resulted in a domino effect causing financial stress, overdue bills, impacts to their credit availability, and often culminated in divorce.

As an active duty military leader, I can attest that at each of my four active duty locations, these issues took a front seat impacting the military’s ability to carry out the mission and the Airman’s combat readiness status. Many professions including; healthcare, legal, child care, and cosmetology just to name a few, require certification or licensure that must be maintained at state level.

Military members have cited shame, embarrassment, lack of knowledge of resources, and a desire to avoid future debt, as barriers to seeking assistance. Many members fear potential impacts to their career for lack of financial readiness. Those who cannot maintain financial readiness are separated from the military, affecting their family, their unit, and the Air Force.

Now, as a military spouse and member of the community supporting other veterans and spouses, I see how not having occupational licensing impacts Kansas. Many of the spouses and veterans I assist through Home Base Wichita have experience in a trade but lack the certification required eliminating them from high quality available jobs. I get requests daily for Commercial Drivers License (CDL), Computer Numerical Control (CNC), and Airframe and Powerplant (A&P) licenses just to name a few.

The jobs are there, the employers are there, and the employees are there. The only thing missing is the certification or license to match them. Too many cannot afford to pay for this training and left without recognition of their trade. This leads to transitioning service members and their families leaving our city and state to seek employment elsewhere.

The primary goal of Home Base Wichita is to be intentional and deliberate in making Kansas friendly for veterans and military families to put down permanent roots. Improving pathways to licensure, certifications and professional credentials to help military spouses enter the workforce will support the goals of Home Base Wichita.

Thank you for your attention and for allowing me to testify. I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.

With respect,

Tamara A. Ray