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OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1500 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-1500

Senator Mike Regan
Chair, Pennsylvania Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee

March 25, 2019
Remarks of
Harold E. Cooney
Northeast Regional Liaison
Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Military Community and Family Policy
Defense-State Liaison Office

Subject: Hearing on the Conversion of Military Credentials into Professional Certifications

Testimony

Chairman Regan and members of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, on behalf of the Department of Defense, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to present testimony regarding the conversion of military credentials into professional certifications.

My name is Harold Cooney and I am the Northeast Regional Liaison for the Department of Defense State Liaison Office, operating under the direction of Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, and the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Military Community and Family Policy. Our mission is to be a resource to state policymakers as they work to address quality of life issues of military families.

Pennsylvania is home to more than a million veterans, active-duty service members, spouses and family members. These individuals offer a unique set of skills, experiences and leadership abilities, yet many struggle to find and maintain employment. For veterans, translating their skills to the civilian workforce and marketing themselves to employers play a role. For military spouses, challenges stem from frequent moves and parenting responsibilities. Both groups face barriers and challenges with state occupational licensing regulations.

One of our priority issues this year is working with states to enhance the implementation of legislative efforts to support transitioning Service members, veterans and military spouses in obtaining professional licenses.

From 2011 - 2016, the Defense-State Liaison Office worked with states to provide overarching legislation to allow/require boards to evaluate military training, education and experience providing transitioning Service members credit towards achieving an occupational license.

During the same timeframe, we addressed licensure issues for military spouses using the common practices of endorsement and temporary licensure in order to address as many occupations through a comprehensive (rather than occupation-specific) approach. We also found that states were willing to institute policies and practices that could expedite the processing of applications for military spouses.

As an indicator of board implementation of licensing policies modified to support military spouses, we contracted with the University of Minnesota (UoM) in 2017 to review the outcome of state policy changes at the board level. UoM evaluated the actions taken by six boards in each of the 50 states to determine the level of implementation of the revised laws by occupational boards.

- 44% of boards were not accessible on the first attempt. Customer service representatives were most often not aware of the legislation specific to military spouses.
- Only about 40% of boards had information on websites specific to military spouse license and credential portability.

We believe similar results would be found concerning implementation of legislation and regulations related to professional licensing for transitioning Service members and veterans.

The Department of Defense is asking state policymakers to assess the actions of licensing boards to encourage implementation of changes to laws and regulatory policy. Future efforts to improve programs and policies could:

- Collaborate with occupational boards to prominently display information about accommodations for military spouses and veterans. For example, request that all occupational board websites contain a link to the legislation professional licensing benefits for veterans and military spouses. The link on the website will increase exposure and accessibility of this information for staff as well as military families.
- Broadly disseminate education materials to help occupational board staff improve their understanding of state legislation regarding professional licensing benefits for veterans and military spouses. Whenever possible, encourage occupational boards to identify a specific staff member who can serve as a point of contact for veterans and military spouses.
- Encourage occupational board executive directors to include questions that inquire about military status on all licensure applications, electronic or paper.
- Collaborate with occupational licensing boards to collect annual data regarding the number of veterans and military spouses that utilize their licensing benefits.

Interstate compacts are particularly encouraged, since these improve portability for all licensees, and do not create special exemptions for military spouses that are considered outside the standards for the occupation in the state. We are currently tracking four such compacts.

To begin looking for solutions to these problems, the National Conference of State Legislatures, National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, and The Council of State Governments, are launching a three-year project entitled *Occupational Licensing: Assessing State Policy and Practice*, with the goal of enhancing the portability of occupational licenses.

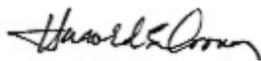
The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that the military trains people in skills applicable in at least 962 civilian occupations. Despite being well-prepared for civilian employment, veterans report that finding a job is the top challenge they face as they transition into civilian life. When job markets are regulated through licensing, veterans can be put at a disadvantage when competing for work with a similarly skilled person trained in the private sector. The challenge of finding a job – exacerbated by licensing regulations – contributes to the 70 percent of veterans who report significant difficulty making the transition back to civilian life. Spouses of active-duty military service members are greatly affected by state licensing regulations, as they typically must move multiple times during their careers. Their employment can be negatively affected by the time it takes to acquire a license; uncertainty about whether their license is “portable,” or can be transferred across state lines; and lack of temporary or provisional licensure options.

Military families often require two incomes to achieve their aspirations, similar to American families as a whole. Transitioning from active duty and frequent moves can inhibit the ability of veterans and military spouses to start and/or sustain a career. Differing licensing requirements can limit advancement or deter re-entry into the workforce at a new location. This often results in long periods of unemployment or underemployment and, therefore, loss of needed income to the family.

Governor Wolfe’s Executive Order 2017-03 and the subsequent report establish the baseline for action in the Commonwealth. They demonstrate a strong commitment to easing transitions into employment for veterans and military spouses.

The legislation currently proposed by Senators Bartolotta and Boscola would serve to document the progress made by the licensing agencies.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today. We are grateful for the tremendous effort that Pennsylvania has historically made to support our veterans, Service members and their families. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you might have.



Harold E. Cooney
Northeast Region Liaison (PA, CT, DE, MA, MD, ME, NH, NJ, NY, RI, VT)
571-309-7598
Harold.e.Cooney.civ@mail.mil