



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
OFFICE OF MILITARY AFFAIRS
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TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE GENERAL LAW COMMITTEE

GOVERNOR'S BILL No. 13

**AN ACT EXPANDING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
IN LICENSED OCCUPATIONS**

Good Afternoon Senator Maroney, Representative D'Agostino, Senator Witkos, Representative Cheeseman and members of the General Law committee. I'm Bob Ross, Executive Director of the Connecticut Office of Military Affairs. I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony on Governor's Bill No. 13: An Act Expanding Economic Opportunity in Licensed Occupations. I thank Governor Lamont for proposing this legislation.

I am charged by statute to serve as the advocate for service members and their families to other state agencies. It is in that role I appear here today to advocate for military spouses as we seek to improve quality of life for service members and their families stationed in or deploying from Connecticut. Today, I will focus on military spouses as mentioned in Sec. 8 of the proposed bill.

Military spouses represent a unique cohort in Connecticut's workforce. The military is predominately a male profession. This means that most military spouses, over 90%, are female. This is why I raised the issue at the very first meeting of the Governor's Council on Women and Girls. According to a Department of Defense report during the Obama administration, 35% of military spouses in the labor force work in professions that require state licenses or certification, and they are ten times more likely to have moved across state lines in the last year than their civilian counterparts. These spouses often relocate with their service member spouse several times during a military career. Because of these transitions, and the professional licensure obstacles they encounter from state to state, they experience severe employment challenges. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, military spouses have an unemployment rate of 16%, four times the national average. Among these spouses, 67% report that they had to quit their jobs and 71% report that they had higher education qualifications than their new position requires. This small cohort is experiencing economic disadvantages associated with military service.

This economic disadvantage is collectively creating a national security challenge. In military families, 77% view dual income as vital for their family well-being and 43% rank employment opportunity as a key factor when deciding to continue to serve or leave

military service. In many cases, families make the painful economic decision to endure long-term geographic separation between service members, spouses and children to retain spouse employment. These are adverse outcomes on a national level, leading to unacceptable levels of attrition in our professional all volunteer military.

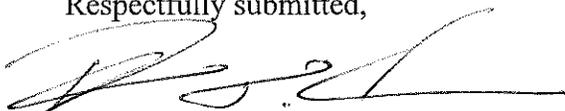
Recently, the Secretaries of the Navy, Army and Air Force jointly signed a memorandum to the National Governor's Association highlighting this problem. In their memo, the Secretaries urged Governors to eliminate or mitigate delays, costs and other employment barriers associated with military relocations between states. The issue is so important, the Secretaries also urged Department of Defense leadership to consider reciprocity of professional licenses, "when evaluating future basing or mission alternatives." In other words, military installations could experience growth or reductions, even closures, based in part on how well the state promotes and expands economic opportunity for military spouses in licensed occupations.

This bill takes a unique approach to addressing military spouse employment challenges. It provides *reasonable accommodation*. However, it does not single out military spouses in isolation from other newly arriving residents. It recognizes that due to the nature of military service, many military spouses may not establish actual legal residency in Connecticut, but will be residents in our communities for the years they reside here. We should be doing all we can to welcome licensed professionals and enable them to efficiently find meaningful employment, appropriate to their professional qualifications. That's something we should all want for all new residents, including military spouses.

Military spouses can bring a great source of talent to Connecticut's workforce. Our state will benefit from expediting employer access to this talent. We spend a great deal of time and resources on workforce development in Connecticut. Streamlining and expediting licensure for experienced and qualified professionals is an opportunity for state agencies to make positive contributions to private sector enterprises who need this talent.

The key message I always want to clearly send to service members and their families is that Connecticut is a great place to be stationed, a great place to raise a family, and a great place to retire. Our quality of life, superb public schools and universities, and the unique experience of living in coastal New England entices many military families to stay here after they retire. Removing obstacles to spousal employment will enhance the experience and quality of life for military families in Connecticut. And it will reinforce our message that military families are warmly welcomed and sincerely appreciated in our communities and workplaces.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Ross", written over a horizontal line.

Robert T. Ross