

For SB 2175 Military Members/Spouse Licensing Reciprocity

TO House Education Committee, March 3, 2021

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SB 2175 improves and enhances SB 2306 passed last session and together the bills are: 1) good law for fairness for military members and trailing military spouses in the service of our country, 2) important law for our military to retain a highly trained military force, 3) essential law to keep and attract missions at our Grand Forks and Minot Air Force Bases, and 4) good law for our workforce.

SB 2175 accomplishes 4 important objectives:

- 1) **Removes the ambiguity** from the 2019 law that the bill includes both military spouses AND military members in professional licensing reciprocity. Many military members also have professional licenses esp. in the areas of engineering and healthcare professions.
- 2) **Removes the requirement** that the military spouse have **professional practice in two of the last four years**. This requirement turned out to be unworkable for military members serving abroad where host nations do not recognize Stateside professional licensing, have jobs available, or do not offer work visas. They were being unfairly excluded through no fault of their own while serving our nation.
- 3) **Requires data collection annually** on military members/spouses to demonstrate to the Dept. Of Defense successful licensing reciprocity/portability, and collects data during the biennium to see if additional issues need to be addressed in an upcoming Legislative session. This should require no more than a half hour of reporting time for each of the licensing boards and commissions.
- 4) **Removes the concerns and objections of DOD** which ranks each state on licensing reciprocity/portability for military member and spouses. USAF Headquarters in the Pentagon reviewed **SB 2175** on Jan 11th and reported the bill removed the barriers and concerns they previously had which gave us a **yellow** rating (caution, some barriers exist) in 2020 and will move ND to **green** rating (no concerns or barriers). Removing the barriers and concerns enables new missions and mission enhancements at the Grand Forks, Cavalier and Minot Air Force bases as well as the National Guard where we compete nationally with other states.

The Air Force recruits airmen and retains military families. Our **Air Force** needs to **retain highly trained airmen** and **National Guard** members working with nuclear missiles, bombers, ISR, sensors, data analytics, cyber security, international communications, and maintenance on complex technical systems – these are highly trained specialists needed to secure and protect our nation. How do we retain essential airmen?

Airmen will stay in the military to serve our country, providing their spouses also have a rewarding career. ***Our airmen's commitment to their country should not conflict with their commitment to their family.*** Too frequently service members retire or leave the service

because the toll on their family is too heavy, not because they want to leave the military. This bill provides a remedy.

The critical need to retain highly trained military members is why the three U. S. Service Secretaries (Air Force, Army & Navy) sent a letter to all Governors on February 23, 2018 outlining ways state leadership can better support our service members. The letter stated: “**We will encourage state leadership to consider the quality of schools near bases and whether reciprocity of professional licenses is available for military families when evaluating future basing or mission alternatives.**”

Existing and future basing missions at Grand Forks AFB, Minot AFB and our National Guard will – in part - depend on licensing reciprocity and portability. This bill takes North Dakota from Yellow to Green on future basing decisions. North Dakota wants to support our military members and missions.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that 22% of all workers required a government license to do their job in 2019, while **35% of military spouses** in the labor force work in occupations requiring a license or certification.

The Grand Forks AFB welcomes about 450 new airmen each year, and Minot AFB welcomes about 1,500 new airmen – as their predecessors move to another assignment or promotion.

Military spouses attain more education than civilians of working age, as approximately 30% of the U.S. working age population has a college degree, while **40% of military spouses do.**

Nationally, 63% of military spouses report they encountered difficulties with licensing in their last move. That is from a 2016 survey by **Blue Star Families**, a national nonprofit aimed at helping military families who surveyed 8,390 families in 2016 and 10,192 families in 2018. Nationally 54% of airmen are married (69% of the officers and 51% of enlisted), and 20% of airmen are assigned overseas with many of their spouses stateside working and maintaining their families. In 2018, **70% encountered challenges in maintaining required licensure/certification.** *Finding a job is one of the top stressors of military families.*

A top stress for a military family is **financial stress, caused by problems in spousal employment.**

Last, but not least, our military is of vital importance to our state. The Military employs about 14,000 people and created another 3,874 indirect jobs in North Dakota. Annual payroll for military employees is approximately \$700 Million and indirect salaries totaled \$190 million The military also has direct expenses for construction, services, materials, equipment and supplies in the amount of \$270 Million. The total economic impact in North Dakota is estimated at about \$1.2 Billion. These figures illustrate how devastating a base closure, or a missed mission, would be for our economy.

Thank you for your favorable consideration.