

TESTIMONY OF
MAJOR JAY SHELDON
NORTH DAKOTA NATIONAL GUARD
BEFORE THE
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
18 JANUARY 2021
SENATE BILL 2175

Good afternoon Chairman Schaible, members of the committee, I am Jay Sheldon, Strategy and Policy Officer for the North Dakota National Guard. I am here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 2175.

Today I represent the Office of the Adjutant General and all of the military members and their families that today and in the future refer to North Dakota as “home”. As we strive to continue supporting the advancement of North Dakota as military friendly state this bill does two important things. It broadens the scope to include military members and it provides for an annual report.

We must remain competitive in order to retain our current military missions. As highlighted by a 2018 letter from the Secretaries of Army, Navy and Air Force clearly indicates, state’s support to its military families will be a factor in any future basing decisions. Retaining our current military footprint has been billion-dollar injection into our state’s economy over the past few years.

With two active-duty Air Force Bases, a large National Guard presence, along with Army, Navy and Marine Corps reserve units in our state, the 2019 North Dakota Military Economic Impact Analysis reported that there are over 11,000 serving military members in North Dakota with nearly 13,000 dependents, about 3% of the state’s population. This small segment of the population has a big impact and positions us to be a leader in providing a military friendly environment.

Annually about 1,900 transition into Minot and Grand Forks and approximately 300 Airmen exit the Air Force due to retirement with North Dakota being their final duty station. By including military members, you include individuals as they transition from a full-time military career to a civilian career and you include traditional (part-time) National Guard and Reserve members seeking employment in North Dakota.

Instead of military families departing North Dakota after their service, if the spouse is employed and the military member sees a smooth transition and opportunities for employment, we should strive to be the state that these families continue to call home. The ability to remain employed and gain employment encourages them to stay. Although the workforce shortage is not currently as severe as it was just a couple years ago, either of these groups could fill various skilled labor shortages around the state.

From the law passed last session a valuable document emerged, the Clear Report. This report was a result of the Department of Commerce and Workforce Development Councils role in conducting a survey as required in SB 2306. What we learned is that our licensing boards had been and continue to do a phenomenal job. At the time of the report 58 military spouses were granted occupational licenses and only one of them required a provisional license as result of the 30-day limit. This concluded that the timeliness of issuing licenses was obviously not a problem in North Dakota but led to a useful and obvious conclusion: that data and information sharing are important. Hence, the annual reporting requirement in SB 2175. The data generated from regular reporting will be useful for future policy makers.

Senate Bill 2175 goes beyond support to our military, by also providing a workforce recruitment and retention tool to fill critical jobs and grow North Dakota's economy. The bill does not ask professional licensure boards to blindly grant licenses. Instead, it provides consideration, given the unique circumstances involving military spouses and military members to reduce barriers to employment and encourages retention of military families in North Dakota.

I ask for your support of SB 2175 and will stand by for any questions that you may have.