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OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-1500

February 8, 2023

Senator Judy Lee
Chair, Senate Human Services Committee

Remarks of
Michelle Richart
Midwest Regional Liaison
United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office

Support of: SB 2182 – A BILL for an Act to amend and reenact section 50-11.1-02 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the definition of early childhood services.

Testimony

Chairwoman Lee and honorable members of the Senate Human Services Committee thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of the policies reflected in Senate Bill 2182. It is the Department's hope that the North Dakota will consider supporting this key issue as it pertains to our military service members and their families accessing family child care services.

My name is Michelle Richart. I am the Midwest Regional Liaison at the United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office, operating under the direction of Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. We represent the Department and establish relationships with state leaders across the country who are concerned for troops and their families' welfare by harmonizing state and federal law and regulation on policy problems of national significance. These are identified by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Military Departments, and the National Guard Bureau as areas where states can play a crucial role.

The Department of Defense recognizes the importance of providing military families with access to quality, affordable child development programs, and is committed to meeting the increased demand for child care across the nation. By exempting family child care providers from licensure and registration that is duplicative of the certification they receive from the military services, states like North Dakota have the opportunity to enhance the quality of life and economic security of both the providers and military families seeking qualified child care options.

Family child care workers provide military families with reliable and personalized care in a homelike setting on and off installations, and the majority of providers are spouses of currently serving members of the armed forces.¹ However, states require separate licensure and registration for some family child care providers serving families. This includes providers both on and off the installation.

¹ Licensure Exemptions for Military Family Child Care Providers, *United States Department of Defense*, <https://statepolicy.militaryonesource.mil/key-issue/licensure-exemptions-for-military-family-child-care-providers>

As parents, advocates, and state leaders, we assuredly share similar concerns regarding the care of nation's most precious commodity: our children. Accessing quality child care is an enduring challenge for civilians and service members alike, and the passage of the policies in SB 2182 will exempt from licensing requirements certain child care services administered by the federal government, on federal property or for the benefit of military families.

That is not to say standards are reduced. In fact, the standards set by the Department of Defense and military branches ensure strict oversight of service providers, to include background checks. Background checks for individuals who have regular, recurring contact with children and youth, including adult family members of family child care providers and any individual over the age of 18 living in a home where child care is provided, and persons who serve as substitute or backup providers, shall be conducted.² Monitoring of family child care providers is conducted on a regular basis, during all hours of operation, and those providers are expected to maintain information as it relates to their background checks, inspections, insurance, training records, and visiting records.

Family child care providers are also expected to complete 40 hours of training and orientation, which occurs prior to working with children. Stated orientation, upon completion, is then documented for each provider, and includes: developmentally appropriate activities and environmental observations; age appropriate guidance and discipline techniques; applicable regulations, policies, and procedures; child safety and fire prevention; child abuse prevention, identification, and reporting; nutrition; health and sanitation; and parent and family relations.

Support of our military spouses is also a key component of the DoDs support of family child care initiatives. Taking care of our people remains the top priority of the Department of Defense and is at the center of our National Defense Strategy.³ Military spouses provide the strong foundation upon which their loved ones in uniform stand, and both our communities and nation rely on their resilience. Military members are often forced to relocate to new duty stations every few years. To further expand employment opportunities for military spouses, the Department supports policies that will ease the burden for spouses who must go through the often challenging and frustrating process of relocating.

When moving with their service member, family child care providers do not have to complete additional training or another background check when they arrive at their new installation, unless their certification is due for renewal.⁴ The new installation commander would then grant such a provider certification upon completion of the required home inspection.

In conclusion, the Department of Defense strongly supports the policies articulated in Senate Bill 2182, increasing access to family child-care services. This change enhances the quality of life

² DODI 6060.02, "Child Development Programs (CDPs)", September 20, 2020

³ Terri Moon Cronk, Austin Outlines His Top Three Priorities on Defense, People, Teamwork, United States Department of Defense, March 5, 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2526532/austin-outlines-his-top-three-priorities-on-defense-people-teamwork/>

⁴ "Licensure Exemptions for Military Family Child Care Providers" <https://statepolicy.militaryonesource.mil/key-issue/licensure-exemptions-for-military-family-child-care-providers>

and economic security of providers and military families seeking qualified child care options.

The Department of Defense is grateful for the efforts North Dakota has historically made to support our uniformed service members and their families. We appreciate the opportunity to support the passage of the policies reflected in Senate Bill 2182 and are especially grateful to the Senate Human Services Committee for raising the issue.

Thank you for taking the time to read this written testimony and thank you for your continued support for the well-being of our service members and their families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michelle Richart".

MICHELLE RICHART
Midwest Regional Liaison
Defense-State Liaison Office