

TESTIMONY OF
MAJOR JAY SHELDON
TASK FORCE FOR MILITARY ISSUES IN NORTH DAKOTA
BEFORE THE
HOUSE GOVERNMENT AND VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
12 JANUARY 2023
HOUSE BILL 1109

Good morning, Chairman Schauer, members of the committee, I am Jay Sheldon, Strategy and Policy Officer for the North Dakota National Guard (NDNG) and administrator for the Task Force for Military Issues in North Dakota (TF MIND). I am here today to testify in support of House Bill 1109.

I would like to take a moment to explain TF MIND. It is a Governor's appointed task force chaired by the Lt. Governor with members from around North Dakota with a focus on Minot, Grand Forks, Fargo, and Bismarck, communities with the largest military footprint. The group normally meets twice a year and discusses issues that impact military members and their families in North Dakota. TF MIND has used a Department of Defense website that lists the top issues, heavily focused on occupational licensing and military children.

TF MIND supports the update to the definitions of "armed forces" and "uniformed services" in century code. Recent force structure changes require updates to ensure that states' definitions of military service align with federal law. North Dakota can minimize disruptions in benefits and services for eligible service members and dependents by clearly defining "armed forces."

North Dakota provides an array of programs and services to members of the armed forces and their dependents; however, eligibility depends on how the state defines "armed forces." Synchronizing our definition with United State Code will close gaps and ensure programs are available to those eligible.

Recently the United States Space Force was established as an independent branch of the uniformed services. With the conversion of the Cavalier Air Station to the Cavalier Space Station it is important that North Dakota include the Space Force in our definition.

Other states are starting to align their definition of armed forces with Title 10 United States Code, to include Space Force and the Coast Guard. We want North Dakota to be a leader in aligning our definition to ensure programs and benefits are available to those that qualify.

The change broadens support for the "armed forces" to include all of the "uniformed services," such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps and the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service who also wear the uniforms of the armed forces.

These changes, as previously stated, ensure all eligible service members and their family members receive access to applicable state benefits by aligning the definitions of "uniformed services" and "armed forces" match current force structure.

I ask for your support of HB 1109 and will stand by for any questions that you may have.