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## OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

1500 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-1500

January 29, 2024

**Rhode Island General Assembly  
House Committee on Corporations  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903**

**Rep. Joseph J. Solomon, Jr.  
Chair**

**Remarks of  
Melissa J. Willette  
New England Region Liaison  
United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office**

### **HB 7213, An Act Relating To Businesses and Professions – Rhode Island Physical Therapist Licensure Compact Act**

On behalf of the Department of Defense, I submit this written testimony in support of the policies reflected in HB 7213, as introduced, which addresses licensing issues affecting our service members and their families. Simply put, the purpose of the compact is to facilitate interstate practice of physical therapy, with the goal of improving public access to physical therapy services.

My name is Melissa Willette. I am the New England Region Liaison for the United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office, operating under the direction of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

Licensure issues for both our transitioning military members and their spouses have been a priority for the Department for several years, and the State of Rhode Island enacted its first compact in 2022 with the passage of the Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact. States are continuing to consider licensure compacts for several occupations in an effort to bolster their workforce. Our office is working across the country to approve sixteen occupational licensure compacts in 2024, and here in Rhode Island, we've begun work on several of those in this very committee.

The Physical Therapy Licensure Compact provides consistent rules that allow licensed members to work in other states through "privilege to practice policies" or to more easily transfer their license to a new state. The policies reflected in HB 7213 would achieve seven objectives to include: increasing public access to physical therapy services; enhancement of public safety; support of relocating military spouses; amplified information sharing among states; cooperation in regulation and greater accountability.

The Physical Therapy Licensure Compact will allow a member state to provide compact privilege to a licensee holding a valid unencumbered license in another member state, in accordance with compact rules. Under such compact privilege, the licensee is to function within the laws and regulations of the remote state and is subject to that state's regulatory authority. This is especially important to the spouses of our military service members.

A licensee who is active-duty military or is the spouse of an individual who is active-duty military may elect either their home of record, their permanent change of station, or their state of current residence, if different from their permanent change of station when applying. Upon completion of their application, the licensee would then be allowed use of the “privilege to practice” provision in the compact to work in any other member state without obtaining another license.

It’s important to note that forty four percent of married service members reported that their spouse’s ability to maintain a career impacts their decision to remain in the military and eighteen percent report spouse employment challenges as a reason for potentially choosing to separate from the military. As our military members and their families move from state to state, the ability for them to quickly gain employment and progress on their chosen career paths is very important.

In closing, let me say that we are grateful for the effort Rhode Island has historically made to support our military members and their families. We appreciate the opportunity to support the policies reflected in HB 7213, and especially thank Representative McGaw for bringing this important policy forward.

I’d be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding this provided testimony and can be reached at [melissa.j.willette3.civ@mail.mil](mailto:melissa.j.willette3.civ@mail.mil) or 703-623-2035.

Respectfully,

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