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OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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February 4, 2025

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

**Representative Joseph Solomon, Jr., Chair
Representative William O'Brien, Vice Chair**

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

Testimony: HB 5067, AN ACT RELATING TO BUSINESSES AND PROFESSIONS -- DIETITIAN LICENSURE COMPACT

Representative Solomon, Representative O'Brien and honorable members of the House Committee on Corporations the Department of Defense is thankful for the opportunity to support the policies reflected in HB 5067, which addresses licensing issues affecting our service members and their families. The purpose of this compact is to facilitate the interstate practice of dietetic care with the goal of improving public access to services, while preserving the regulatory authority of states to protect public health and safety through the current system of state licensure.

My name is Melissa Willette. I am the New England Region Liaison at the Defense-State Liaison Office. 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 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 central role.

Licensure issues for both our transitioning military members and their spouses have been a priority for the Department for several years. The Council of State Governments (CSG) has partnered with the Department of Defense (DoD), and The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) to support the mobility of licensed dietitians through the development of a new interstate compact. This compact will create reciprocity among participant states and reduce barriers to license portability that many of our military spouses face.

To address license portability for military spouses, states have turned to occupational licensure interstate compacts, which streamline relicensing between member states of a compact for all practitioners in an occupation and provide specific support for military spouses of relocating active-duty personnel.

Professional licensure has been an enduring problem for military spouses. Obtaining a license in a new state can be both time consuming and expensive, and military spouses often cannot adequately anticipate how to prepare for licensure in a new state due to the unpredictable nature of military moves. The short duration of military assignments, coupled with lengthy relicensing processes, can discourage military spouses from seeking relicensure, causing them to quit an occupation or causing military families to leave the military.

Military spouses are a cross-section of the American population, though a greater percentage of them are in licensed occupations than their civilian counterparts,¹ and they are significantly more mobile. Frequent moves and cumbersome licensing and certification requirements limit career options for military spouses. Removing these barriers, creating licensing reciprocity, and facilitating placement opportunities can help a military family's financial stability, speed the assimilation of the family into its new location, and create a desirable new employee pool for a state.

The Department of Defense is grateful for the efforts Rhode Island 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 HB 5067 and are especially grateful to the Committee for raising the legislation.

Thank you for your time and attention. I stand ready to answer whatever questions you may have and can be reached at melissa.j.willette3.civ@mail.mil or 703-623-2035.

Respectfully,

Melissa J. Willette
New England Region Liaison
Defense-State Liaison Office

¹ 34 percent of active duty spouses self-identified as needing a State issued license to work (2017 Survey of Active Duty (Active Component) Spouses, Tabulations of Responses; Office of People Analytics Report No. 2018-006, May 2018), compared to 30 percent of the civilian population (The Hamilton Project, Brookings Institute, https://www.hamiltonproject.org/charts/percent_of_occupations_requiring_a_license_by_state)