



**OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE**  
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**February 1, 2024**

**Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk**  
**Chair, House Committee on Health & Government Operations**  
**Room 241**  
**House Office Building**  
**Annapolis, Maryland 21401**

**Remarks of**  
**Christopher R. Arnold**  
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**United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office**

**Support of: HB 34 – AN ACT concerning Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact**

**Testimony**

Madame Chair and honorable committee members, the Department of Defense is grateful for the opportunity to support the policies reflected in House Bill 34, relating to the Interstate Social Work Licensure Compact. This policy meets the Department's fullest intent regarding military spouse employment and economic opportunities.

I am Christopher Arnold, the Mid-Atlantic Region 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. I thank you for the opportunity to address you today and for your support of our service members and their families.

Maryland has taken several important steps toward improving licensure for military spouses. Notably, we see interstate compacts for occupational licensure as an excellent method of assisting all practitioners in addition to providing reciprocity for military spouses.<sup>1</sup>

The Secretaries of the Military Departments have made the importance of military spouse licensure explicitly clear as they consider the availability of license reciprocity when evaluating future basing or mission alternatives. This consideration was codified by Congress as a requirement in the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act.<sup>2</sup> Notably, 10 U.S.C. § 1781(b) note requires the military services to produce annual basing decision scorecards at the state and

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Defense. *Military Spouse Licensure: State Best Practices and Strategies for Achieving Reciprocity*. November 2019. <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/military-spouse-licensure-report-2019.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Public Law No: 116-92, Section 2883.

installation level considering military family readiness issues including participation in interstate licensing compacts.<sup>3</sup>

Congress provided the Department authority to enter into a cooperative agreement with the Council of State Governments to provide grants to professions in order to develop compact law to be approved by States.<sup>4</sup> The Department has provided funding to seven professions, and expects to fund development of three additional compacts under the agreement.<sup>5</sup>

Occupational licensure compacts provide consistent rules for licensed members to work in other states. Common misinformation about compacts is that they either lower or raise the standards for the occupation, when in fact, compact states have the option to issue a “compact license” and also a “State-only license” to maintain their State’s standards. States have committed to using interstate compacts, which establish common understanding of competency and its measurement within the occupation, to resolve the interstate issue of license portability.

The Social Work Licensure Compact authorizes practitioners through a multistate license and uses a mutual recognition model.<sup>6</sup> Military spouse social workers who call Virginia home and are working inside and outside the state must now bear the time-consuming and costly expense of applying for single state licensure in every state where they seek to work.

Military spouses are a cross-section of the American population, although a greater percentage of them are in licensed occupations than their civilian counterparts,<sup>7</sup> and they are significantly more mobile.<sup>8</sup> Compacts can provide seamless reciprocity for military spouses in an occupation. Barriers to the transfer and acceptance of certifications and licenses that occur when state rules differ can have a dramatic and negative effect on the financial well-being of military families.

The Social Work Licensure Compact allows an active duty service member, or their spouse, to designate a home state where the individual has a current license in good standing. This state then serves as the individual’s home state for as long as the service member is on active duty,

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<sup>3</sup> *Id.* (h)

The secretaries must consider “*whether the State in which an installation subject to a basing decision is or will be located ... has entered into reciprocity agreements to recognize and accept professional and occupational licensure and certification credentials granted by or in other States or allows for the transfer of such licenses and certifications granted by or in other States.*”

<sup>4</sup> 10 U.S.C. §1784 (Public Law 116-120, Section 575).

<sup>5</sup> Through a cooperative agreement with the Council of State Governments, grants will allow selected professions to work with CSG’s National Center for Interstate Compacts to develop model interstate occupational licensure compact legislation, addressing license portability affecting transitioning military spouses, along with other practitioners in the profession. The seven selected professions are teaching, social work, cosmetology, massage therapy, dentistry/dental hygiene, school psychology and dietetic nutrition.

<sup>6</sup> <https://swcompact.org/>

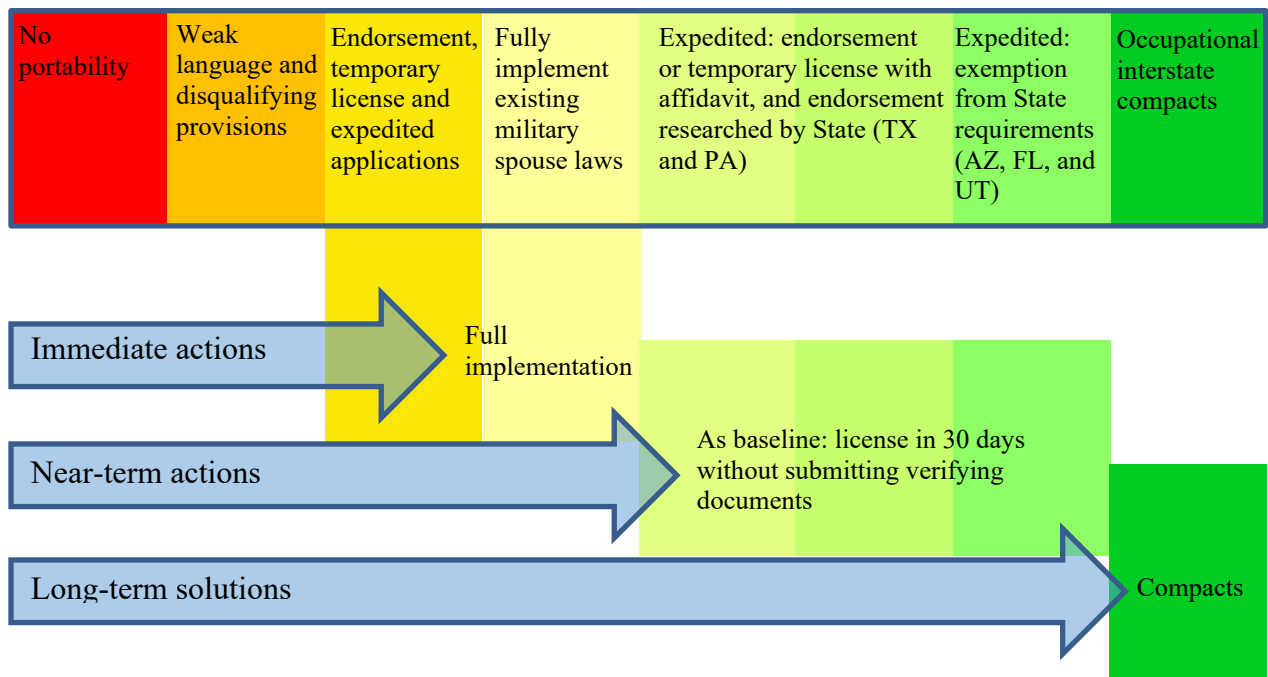
<sup>7</sup> 34 percent of active duty spouses self-identified as needing a State issued license to work (2017 Survey of Active Duty (Active Component) Spouses, Tabulations of Responses; Office of People Analytics Report No. 2018-006, May 2018), compared to 30 percent of the civilian population (The Hamilton Project, Brookings Institute, [https://www.hamiltonproject.org/charts/percent\\_of\\_occupations\\_requiring\\_a\\_license\\_by\\_state](https://www.hamiltonproject.org/charts/percent_of_occupations_requiring_a_license_by_state))

<sup>8</sup> “Military spouses are 10 times more likely to move across State lines than their civilian counterparts,” “Supporting Our Military Families: Best Practices for Streamlining Occupational Licensing Across State Lines,” U.S. Department of Treasury and U.S. Department of Defense, February 2012, page 7.

while adhering to the laws, rules and scope of practice in Virginia. The compact allows nurses to obtain multistate license to practice in thirty-five states and two territories, saving them from the cost of having to apply for an additional license in each state.

In addition to supporting the drafting of model compact laws for professions, 10 § U.S.C. 1784(h) authorizes DoD to support professions with developing database systems to make the compacts more efficient and operational. These database systems allow States to share information about practitioners using compact provisions to work in member States.<sup>9</sup>

The Department encourages States to engage in immediate actions to fully implement military spouse licensure laws, near-term actions to at least attain a baseline of getting military spouses a license in thirty (30) days based on minimal documentation, and removing substantially equivalent language; and long-term solutions for reciprocity through compacts:



Maryland has already enacted and joined the Audiology/Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact, the Licensed Professional Counseling Compact, the Nurse Licensure Compact, the Occupational Therapy Licensure Compact, the Physical Therapy Licensure Compact, and the Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact.

<sup>9</sup> The current effort to develop compacts through a cooperative agreement and to approve compacts is a collaboration between the federal government, state governments and non-governmental organizations representing professionals and state licensing boards. Through this collaborative effort, all practitioners within a profession will have greater mobility while sustaining the focus on assuring public safety through licensure. This is significant for the military community in that along with active duty military spouses receiving the benefit of compacts, active duty members, members of the reserve component, reserve component spouses, transitioning Service members and other Veterans benefit from the mobility provided through compacts.

In closing, we are grateful for the tremendous efforts that the Old Line State has historically made to support our service members and their families. We appreciate the opportunity to support these policies and grateful to the sponsor, Delegate Kerr, the many cosponsors, and the members of the Maryland House Veterans caucus for their leadership and dedication to supporting our service members and their families.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these issues. As always, as Mid-Atlantic Region Liaison, I stand ready to assist and answer whatever questions you may have.

Yours etc.,

**CHRISTOPHER R. ARNOLD**

Northeast Region Liaison

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