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**Maryland General Assembly
House Committee on Ways and Means
Room 131, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401**

**Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary
Chair**

**Remarks of
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United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office**

Support of: HB 292 (Child Care Providers - Registration and Licensing - Exemptions)

Testimony

Madame chair and honorable members of the Ways and Means Committee, the Department of Defense thanks you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the policies reflected in House Bill 292. The proposed approach would assist with meeting the demands of military communities for family childcare services, and we have enclosed a letter from some of our installation commanders to provide further edification on this important issue.

My name is Christopher Arnold and I am the Mid-Atlantic 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.

Taking care of our people remains the top priority of the Department of Defense and is at the center of our National Defense Strategy.¹ The Department established the Family Child Care program to expand child care availability and to assist in meeting the diverse needs of military families. Family Child Care providers offer military families reliable and personalized care in a homelike setting on and off installations, and nearly all providers are spouses of currently serving members of the armed forces.²

¹ 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/>

² "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>

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 service members relocate to new duty stations every few years, and the Department 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.³

Family Child Care providers are certified via the military departments and are the largest contributor to the military services' ability to deliver 24-hour and emergency child care needs.⁴ Additionally, some Family Child Care providers offer specialized care for unique mission-related needs in homes both on and off the installation.⁵

Once certified, Family Child Care providers must complete annual training and a competency based comprehensive professional development program similar to installation child development program personnel.⁶ 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.⁷

The Family Child Care program is designed to ensure the highest standards of quality and safety are met in family child care homes. The certification process is widely recognized as one of the most stringent in the country.⁸ Standards set by the Department and the military services ensure strict oversight of service providers, to include background checks, monthly inspections, and unannounced visits.⁹ Monitoring of Family Child Care providers is conducted on a regular basis, during all hours of operation, and providers are required to maintain information as it relates to their background checks, inspections, insurance, training records, and visitation logs.¹⁰

³ According to the Government Accountability Office, child care research suggests that quality child care is tied to positive outcomes for children, including improved cognitive, social, and language development. DoD has taken steps to create and maintain quality care, including by establishing programmatic and oversight requirements and developing new staff training. For example, while optional for most civilian centers, DoD requires its child development centers, school-age programs, and most community-based providers receiving DoD-subsidized fee assistance, to be nationally accredited. DoD has also recently implemented a new child care curriculum and research-informed online training program for staff at its child development centers.

⁴ Report to the Committee on Armed Services of the House of Representatives on In-Home Child Care Licensures, *United States Department of Defense*, 2022

⁵ In both the Air Force and the Army, these programs are designed to provide overnight, weekend, and holiday child care for those members assigned to work for more than 24 hours in the field.

⁶ DODI 6060.02, "Child Development Programs (CDPs)", *United States Department of Defense*, September 20, 2020.

⁷ "Licensure Exemptions for Military Family Child Care Providers," *United States Department of Defense*, 2023, <https://statepolicy.militaryonesource.mil/key-issue/licensure-exemptions-for-military-family-child-care-providers>

⁸ GAO-23-105518, "Military Child Care: DOD Efforts to Provide Affordable, Quality Care for Families," *Government Accountability Office*, February 2, 2023, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-105518>.

⁹ *See supra* at 6.

¹⁰ Family Child Care Providers are also required 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.

As military spouses relocate every two to three years, due to housing availability, they may end up living off base at their new duty station and be unable to continue with their businesses until they obtain a state license.¹¹ Many of our families rely on two incomes, and spousal unemployment is among the leading causes of decreased readiness and retention.¹²

By exempting Family Child Care providers from licensure and registration that is duplicative of the certification they receive from the military services, states such as Maryland have the opportunity to enhance the quality of life and economic security of both the providers and military families seeking qualified child care options.¹³ If permitted by their service's regulations, under House Bill 292, this approach would allow them to work immediately after being certified, inspected and approved by the new installation commander, to provide care to the children of military families, pursuant to Department of Defense Instruction 6060.02.¹⁴

According to a recent report, the Department currently needs 1,433 Family Child Care providers to meet the demands of military communities.¹⁵ But in fiscal year 2021, the Department reported having only 727 available providers, an almost 50% deficit, with 2,700 children receiving care in family child care homes.¹⁶

To further expand employment opportunities for military spouses, the Department supports policies that will ease the administrative burdens for military spouses who must go through the often challenging and frustrating process of relocating.¹⁷ The Department appreciates the ongoing efforts and support of the Old Line State regarding the Family Child Care program and looks forward to working together to ensure we address the challenges of military child care.

We appreciate the opportunity to discuss the policies reflected in House Bill 292 and are especially grateful to the bill sponsors, Delegate Edith Patterson, and Senator Dawn Gile, as well as to the members of the Ways and Means Committee, and the Maryland Military Installation Council for shepherding these important issues through the Maryland General Assembly.

¹¹ The military services have implemented certification transfer programs for Family Child Care providers who move from one installation to another due to a service member's permanent change of station. The provider's background checks and training transfer to the new duty station, and the installation grants certification upon completion of the home inspections.

¹² Rosemary Williams, et. al, "Military spouse unemployment," *Deloitte*, 2021, <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/public-sector/military-spouse-unemployment.html>

¹³ The military services' Family Child Care programs are intended to support the mission requirements of the installation and are for use only by active-duty military personnel, DoD civilians, reserve component military personnel on active duty or inactive duty training status, combat related wounded warriors, surviving spouses of military members who died from a combat related incident, those acting in loco parentis for the dependent child of an otherwise eligible member, eligible employees of DoD contractors, and others as authorized on a space available basis.

¹⁴ If a Family Child Care provider wanted to expand their scope of business beyond military dependents and outside the scope of the Department of Defense Instruction, the provider would subsequently obtain a state license.

¹⁵ "Report to the Committee on Armed Services of the House of Representatives on In-Home Child Care Licensures," *United States Department of Defense*, 2022

¹⁶ "Office of Military Family Readiness Policy, 2021 Child and Youth Program Annual Summary of Operations Report," *United States Department of Defense*.

¹⁷ "Addressing the Decreasing Number of Family Child Care Providers in the United States," *National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance*, September 2019, <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/addressing-decreasing-number-family-child-care-providers-united-states>.

As always, as liaison to the Mid-Atlantic, I stand ready to answer whatever questions you may have.

Yours etc.,

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