



Wes Moore | Governor
Aruna Miller | Lt. Governor
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DATE: February 21, 2024
BILL NO: House Bill 604
BILL TITLE: Families Serve Act of 2024
COMMITTEE: House Economic Matters
POSITION: Support

The Maryland Department of Commerce (Commerce) supports House Bill 604 – Families Serve Act of 2024.

Bill Summary:

House Bill 604 authorizes private employers in Maryland to offer preference in hiring to spouses of service members. It also requires an appointing authority of an executive branch agency to award a credit of ten points on any selection test to an eligible military spouse.

Background:

Maryland law currently authorizes employers to offer hiring preference for eligible veterans, the spouse of a service-disabled eligible veteran, or the surviving spouse of a deceased eligible veteran. Additionally, the State Personnel and Pensions Article currently requires an appointing authority of an executive branch agency to award a credit of ten points on any selection test to eligible veterans, the spouse of a service-disabled eligible veteran, or the surviving spouse of a deceased eligible veteran. This legislation will make eligible military spouses eligible for those same preferences. The intent is to address employment challenges associated with service members and their families that must relocate every 2-3 years due to the Department of Defense (DoD) Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders.

Rationale:

Due to frequent moves and to the sometimes lengthy timelines associated with obtaining an occupational license or certificate, military spouses often go through long periods of unemployment. This causes undue financial stress on the family and disrupts military readiness for that service member. The unemployment rate of active-duty military spouses is 21% - a rate which is higher than any other category. According to a Blue Star Families survey, nearly two-thirds of working military spouses are unable to keep their jobs, forcing them back into an unemployment cycle every 2-3 years. Occupations offering remote work and flexible time schedules have been found to alleviate these challenges. For example, military spouses in the state of Washington who work in state government can work remotely when they PCS. This provides for greater stability within the household, therefore enhancing military readiness within the force.

House Bill 604 will expand the availability of work for military spouses and place Maryland in a better light with military families nationally. Not only is the DoD increasingly placing greater emphasis on uniformed military quality of life to better serve the families and help with their

declining recruitment numbers, but quality of life also increasingly factors into future DoD basing decisions. Passage of this bill will improve Maryland's position to successfully sustain and attract new DoD missions, which equates to job creation and an increased tax base.

Commerce respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 604.