

## **Senate Bill 478, Families Serve Act of 2024**

Favorable: Written Testimony

Lindsay Livingston

Military Spouse

My name is Lindsay Livingston, and I fully support Senate Bill 478, the Families Serve Act of 2024. I am a native Marylander who grew up in Bowie, attended high school in Annapolis, college in Lanham, and held my first teaching job in Glenn Dale. I am a mother to three energetic boys and have been a military spouse for over 15 years. My husband is currently on active duty and has faithfully served in the Navy for over 20 years. Like many military families, multiple moves led us away from our familial support systems. Our family also endured 13 years of continuous sea duty, including several deployments, which came at a cost for our family. My husband has missed countless birthdays, anniversaries, the birth of our son, many first days of school, holidays, and other milestones. I consistently hold down the fort and put my dreams on hold so my husband can serve our country. My children and I are incredibly proud of my husband and his service to our country. We are proud to serve alongside him as a military family. Still, like so many other service members, my husband is able to best serve his country because he knows I am holding down the fort while he carries out the duties his country asks of him.

Currently, 21% of military spouses are facing unemployment. For most of my time as an active-duty military spouse, I have been part of this 21%. My experience aligns with the data on military spouse employment: it is difficult to find and sustain gainful employment between moves, solo parenting, and the lack of accessible childcare options. The gaps on my resume reflect decisions that were made due to a military move. I could not find employment due to these gaps and the lack of understanding from employers about my life and experiences as a military spouse. Military spouses are some of the strongest, most faithful, dedicated, adaptable, and resilient people I know- both in service to our country and in service to an employer who would hire us, despite our gaps in the paying workforce.

A few weeks ago, I was honored to meet Governor Moore, the First Lady, and Lt Governor Miller at a military spouse event in Annapolis, MD. At this event, I learned about the Families Serve Act of 2024. I stood in a room filled with Maryland governing officials and military spouses and heard the governing officials commit to actively serving military families and honoring their sacrifices. That night, I felt overwhelming pride in my home state. Often, military spouses feel overlooked, and the daily sacrifices we make so that our spouse can serve go unnoticed; this bill changes that narrative. This bill sends a direct message to military spouses that Maryland sees our sacrifices and wants to make a difference. The bill allows military spouses a better pathway to finding employment by expanding job opportunities. It also encourages employers to hire military spouses by allowing businesses to provide hiring preferences to military spouses. This bill could forever change a family's legacy by opening doors for military spouses that may not have been opened before and improving their economic opportunities.

By passing Senate Bill 478, the Families Serve Act, Maryland will communicate to military families and their service members that it is committed to supporting them. This bill supports military spouses, their families, and service members and is essential in supporting the Military. Military families and service members always remember how governing officials support them and honor their sacrifices. Passing this bill will encourage military families to stay in Maryland longer and consider calling it their home once they leave active duty. This bill addresses the 21% of unemployed military spouses by opening doors for them to find employment in Maryland. The bill incentivizes private businesses and state governments to establish hiring preferences for military spouses. This bill would have allowed me to find employment opportunities more easily in Maryland, significantly impacting my family's economic opportunities and improving our quality of life.

I fully support Senate Bill 478, the Families Serve Act, because it improves the quality of life for military families and service members by making it easier for military spouses to find employment and improves their economic opportunities. In passing Senate Bill 478, Maryland takes the next step in supporting military families and service members through legislative action, making Maryland the state of preference for military families.