



Blue Star Families

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Maryland Senate

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Testimony of Tom Porter

Vice President of Government Affairs

Blue Star Families

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Chair Smith Jr., Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and distinguished Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of SB 0413.

I am a retired Navy Officer and the Vice President of Government Affairs of Blue Star Families – the nation’s largest and fastest growing military family support organization, with nearly 275,000 members and serving more than 1.5 million military family members every year.

Since we founded in 2009, there has been a growing awareness of the need to respond to military families’ contributions, challenges, and sacrifices, especially the issues concerning military spouse employment.

Military spouse unemployment remains 3-4 times the national unemployment rate and even greater for active-duty spouse respondents of color (27%), which has not significantly changed in nearly a decade. Spouses who seek work often perceive reluctance from employers to hire them. More than half of active-duty spouse respondents (51%) agreed their military affiliation prevented them from receiving a promotion at some point in their career.



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Active-duty spouse respondents were also least likely to disclose their military affiliation in an interview compared to other respondent groups; 23% of spouse respondents were “not at all likely” to disclose their affiliation. Half of spouse respondents who had disclosed their military affiliation in an interview reported the employer expressed concerns about their ability to stay at the position long-term.

One Army spouse reported, she was explicitly told after she was passed over that “we see a future for you here, but not until you know for sure if you will stay in the area for more than a year. Come back when your husband leaves the service.”

Establishing military spouses as a protected class has the potential to empower both spouses and employers to openly discuss their distinctive requirements and collaborate to maintain stable employment opportunities for military spouses. Additionally, the government's recognition of the ongoing unemployment challenges faced by military spouses will prompt improved data collection, foster greater dialogue with military spouses, and encourage the development and incorporation of programs aimed at assisting this underrepresented and marginalized group.

Recognizing and supporting military spouses acknowledges their important role in supporting the nation's defense efforts by providing stability and continuity for military families, which ultimately contributes to the overall effectiveness and readiness of the military. I applaud the steps Maryland is considering here today, so we can all ***Do Our Part*** to preserve the All Volunteer Force.

While I only discussed military spouses, Blue Star Families supports the full definition of “military status.” By broadening the scope to add “military status” as a protected class is a step in the right direction to ensuring that our veteran and military families are not discriminated against. Adding these individuals as a legally



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protected class will finally recognize the existence of an issue and enable it to be openly acknowledged and tackled.

Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to present here today and to show my support for SB 0413. I am happy to answer any questions.