

Written Testimony for Leslie Becker in favor of SB0413

My name is Leslie Becker. I am the spouse of an active-duty service member, we currently reside in the state of Maryland. I submit this written testimony in support of Senator Gile's Bill, SB0413 to prohibit discrimination of military affiliated members, especially as it relates to military spouses. As a military spouse myself, I have experienced first-hand some of the hurdles spouses encounter as it relates to employment. Aware of this, I specifically sought out a company where this title is welcomed. I have spoken to countless spouses who have shared their personal woes with me and the unique challenges they encounter just because they are military spouses.

I am an independent woman, and I was so prior to meeting my husband, however on my husband's orders I am considered to be a "Dependent." What does that mean? For me it means that the government depends on me and my entire family moving to support my spouse's service to this Country. It means putting the needs of our government's security above my individual preference as to where to reside. It means sacrificing my professional career to support a cause much larger than me.

Military spouses are disproportionately women - statistics indicate over 90%. That disparately impacts a currently protected class, i.e. women. A unique aspect to being a military spouse is that we are likely the only population that are identified based on our spouse's career and are often discriminated against in the workforce because of who we fell in love with. Military spouses get unfairly questioned about gaps in their work history, short stays of employment, or are simply overlooked when applying for employment. I personally omitted that fact from my resume because of this stigma. As more companies offer remote work, it helps in job transferability, but in turn it leaves less opportunity for career advancements due to lack of visibility and the default nature of the military being a transient population.

The military provides base pay for each rank and years of service, but what they also recognize is Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA). More often than not, if a spouse is fortunate enough to retain their current employment, they do not benefit from such subsidies. My family moved to a location where the cost of our home in Texas was half of what it is in Maryland and our childcare expenses increased from 8k a year to almost 30K; yet, thankfully while I was able to keep my job, my salary stayed the same. With the increasing cost of living now, long gone are the days where a family can survive on one salary alone, especially not a military salary; and most families who want to maintain a lifestyle of not feeling like they are living paycheck to paycheck require two incomes. This often causes financial stress and disagreement in the home and many families choose to either separate from their marriage or separate from the service. This is one factor that contributes to the dire retention issues our military is facing today.

I am employed by one of the best recognized companies that supports military spouses. However, when I requested that they reinstate a salary accommodation for military spouses, one senior executive, albeit speaking on behalf of himself, admitted "I don't care that you are

a military spouse, spouses are not a protected class” and so, “I won’t do anything for you.” Sadly, he is correct. He does not have to do anything for me. Most companies won’t either, unless required to do so by a Bill like this one. It is that kind of closed-mindedness that makes this Bill so necessary to protect anyone who is a veteran, military spouse, or military family member from being discriminated against. My ask is that we show solidarity and protect the people willing to protect our freedom. Please consider supporting this Bill and protecting military spouses and family members from discrimination.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Leslie Becker