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Delegate Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk
Chair, House Government Operations Committee
241 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Remarks of
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Support of: HB 45 – AN ACT concerning Dentist and Dental Hygienist Compact

Testimony

Madame Chair and honorable committee members, the Department of Defense is grateful for the opportunity to support the policies reflected in Maryland House Bill 45, which will improve access to care and allow military personnel and spouses to more easily maintain their certifications when relocating.

For the Department, maintaining high standards in occupational and professional licensure is non-negotiable. The Dentist and Dental Hygienist Compact aligns with this ethos, offering a beacon of stability and excellence reinforcing the Department's unwavering commitment to those who serve our nation.

I am Christopher Arnold, the Mid-Atlantic Region 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 to harmonize state and federal law and regulation on policy problems of national significance. I thank you for the opportunity to address you today and for your support of our service members and their families.

The Dentist and Dental Hygienist Compact uses a mutual recognition model that provides practitioners with a compact authorization through a privilege to practice.¹ The ability to practice a profession in different States without the need for multiple licenses is crucial for warfighters and their families, especially considering their frequent relocations (permanent change of station, or "PCS") relative to civilian counterparts.² Other than an interstate compact, there are no actions a State government can take to support residents of their State who are currently stationed in a different State obtain a license.

¹ <https://ddhcompact.org/>

² "Military spouses are 10 times more likely to move across State lines than their civilian counterparts," *Supporting Our Military Families: Best Practices for Streamlining Occupational Licensing Across State Lines*, U.S. Department of Treasury and U.S. Department of Defense, February 2012, page 7.

Interstate licensure compacts have been instrumental in expanding spousal employment opportunities, and easing the burden on military spouses who must navigate the challenging process of transferring their professional licenses or credentials with each PCS move.³ The streamlined licensure process reduces costs associated with recertification and lost income due to employment gaps, benefitting both military families and increasing force readiness and retention.

The Secretaries of the Military Departments have made the importance of military spouse licensure explicitly clear as they consider the availability of license reciprocity when evaluating future basing or mission alternatives.⁴ Notably, 10 U.S.C. § 1781(b) note requires the military services to produce annual basing scorecards considering military family readiness issues as a function of combat effectiveness.⁵

The Department's commitment to interstate compacts is rooted in addressing the significant burden of occupational relicensing that disproportionately affects military spouses. With an annual 14.5% of military spouses moving across State lines compared to 1.1% for civilian spouses, the need for streamlined licensure processes is critical.⁶

Approximately 34% of military spouses in the labor force require full licensure, and 19% of them face challenges maintaining their licenses.⁷ A 2023 study showed consistent evidence that compacts were proven to significantly improve employment outcomes and increase labor force participation by 5% and the probability of employment by 8% for military spouses.⁸

Congress provided the Department authority to enter into a cooperative agreement with the Council of State Governments to provide grants to professions in order to develop compact law to be approved by States.⁹ The Department has provided funding to ten professions, including Dentistry, and two additional compacts are currently under development.¹⁰

³ Shakya, Shishir, Sriparna Ghosh, and Conor Norris. "Nurse licensure compact and mobility." *Journal of Labor Research* 43, no. 2 (2022): 260-274.

⁴ 10 U.S.C. § 1781b (Public Law 116-283, Section 2883).

⁵ Notably, §2883(h) requires the Department and each of the military services to produce annual basing decision scorecards at the state and installation level considering military family readiness issues, including interstate portability of licensure credentials.

The secretaries must consider "whether the State in which an installation subject to a basing decision is or will be located ... has entered into reciprocity agreements to recognize and accept professional and occupational licensure and certification credentials granted by or in other States or allows for the transfer of such licenses and certifications granted by or in other States." (*Id.* (b))

⁶ Corry, Nida H., Rayan Joneydi, Hope S. McMaster, Christianna S. Williams, Shirley Glynn, Christopher Spera, and Valerie A. Stander. "Families serve too: military spouse well-being after separation from active-duty service." *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping* 35, no. 5 (2022): 501-517.

⁷ Brannock, Mary K., and Nicole A. Bradford. "Barriers to licensure for military spouse registered nurses." *Journal of Nursing Regulation* 11, no. 4 (2021): 4-14.

⁸ Kim, Joy J., Michael M. Joo, and Laura Curran. "Social Work Licensure Compact: Rationales, expected effects, and a future research agenda." *Clinical Social Work Journal* 51, no. 3 (2023): 316-327.

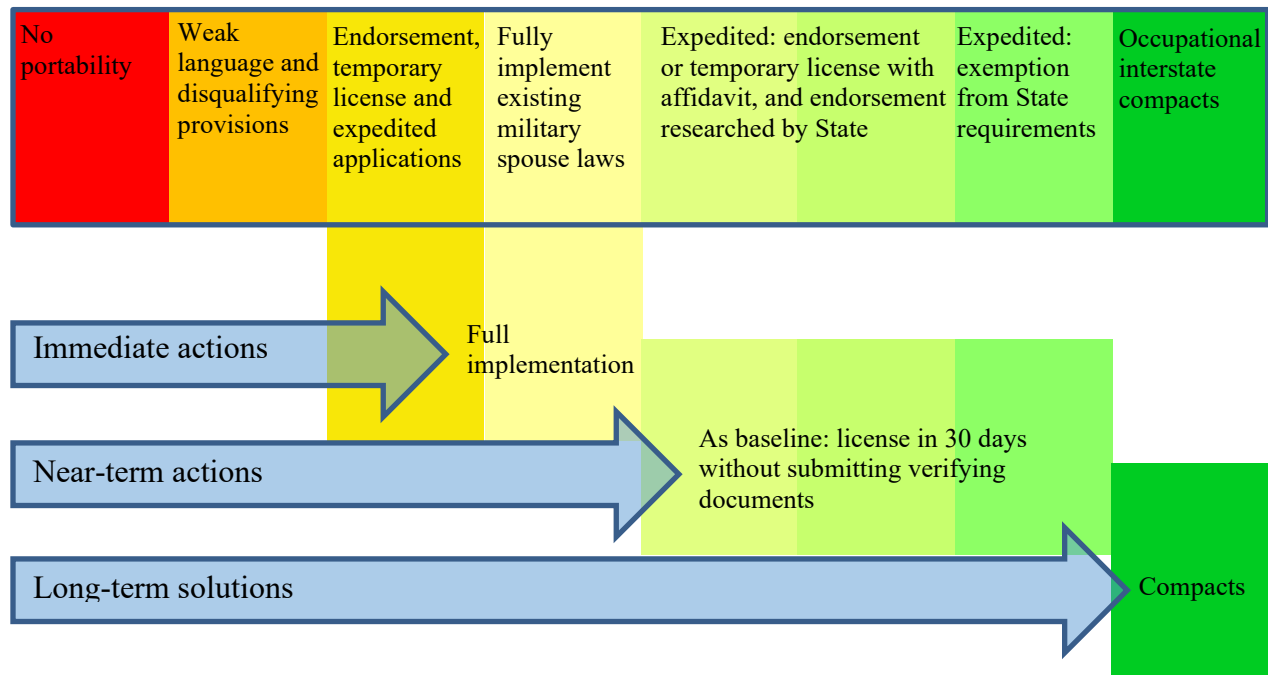
⁹ 10 U.S.C. §1784 (Public Law 116-120, Section 575).

¹⁰ Through a cooperative agreement with the Council of State Governments, grants will allow selected professions to work with CSG's National Center for Interstate Compacts to develop model interstate occupational licensure compact legislation, addressing license portability affecting transitioning military spouses, along with other practitioners in the profession.

In addition to supporting the drafting of model compacts laws for professions, federal law authorizes DoD to support professions with developing database systems to make the compacts more efficient and operational.¹¹ These database systems allow States to share information about practitioners using compact provisions to work in member States.¹²

Occupational licensure compacts provide consistent rules for licensed members to work in other States, such as Maryland residents presently domiciled in other states while accompanying their military spouse on active duty. Common misinformation about compacts is that they either lower or raise the standards for the occupation, when in fact, compact states have the option to issue a “compact license” and also a “State-only license” to maintain their State’s standards.¹³

The Department advocates that States should pursue multiple approaches to reciprocity simultaneously. Available alternatives can be categorized as being more immediately attainable, achievable within the near-term, or obtainable in the long-term:



In closing, we are grateful for the tremendous efforts that Maryland has historically made to support our service members and their families. We appreciate the opportunity to support these policies and are grateful Delegates Bagnall and Stein for sponsoring this important legislation.

¹¹ See *supra* at 10.

¹² The current effort to develop compacts through a cooperative agreement and to approve compacts is a collaboration between the federal government, state governments and non-governmental organizations representing professionals and state licensing boards. Through this collaborative effort, all practitioners within a profession will have greater mobility while sustaining the focus on assuring public safety through licensure.

¹³ Livanos, Nicole. "The Path to Passage: Massachusetts' Journey to Joining the Nurse Licensure Compact." *Journal of Nursing Regulation* 15, no. 4 (2025): 60-63.

As always, as Mid-Atlantic Region Liaison, I stand ready to assist and answer whatever questions you may have.

Yours etc.,

CHRISTOPHER R. ARNOLD

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