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Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
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Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chairperson

Remarks of
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Support of: Senate Bill 263

Testimony

Madame chair and honorable members of the Ways and Means Committee, the Department of War is grateful for the opportunity to support the policies reflected in Senate Bill 263, relating to various military family education requirements. The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children provides opportunities for assistance during transition, but does not address advance enrollment timing or procedures, or school placement stability, necessitating this important legislation.¹

I am Christopher Arnold, the Mid-Atlantic Region Liaison at the United States Department of War's Defense-State Liaison Office, operating under the direction of Under Secretary of War for Personnel and Readiness. I thank you for the opportunity to address you today and for your support of our service members and their families.

Maryland's current advance enrollment law helps minimize disruptions in education during transitions. However, a recent study published by the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Pennsylvania State University as part of the DOD's efforts to identify and assess the educational experiences and achievement of K-12 military-connected children found not every school district allowed for remote registration.² Parents of students with special needs also reported facing various challenges relating to their enrollment options and placement stability.³

¹ Sharmila Mann. Ben Erwin. "Response to Information Request." *Education Commission of the States*. December 2020. Retrieved from https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/State-Information-Request_Military-Child-Enrollment-1.pdf

² Karre, Jennifer, Kristin K. Brawley, Meghan Baker, Keith Aronson, and Daniel F. Perkins. "State Implementation of Four Initiatives to Support Military-Connected Students." (2023). https://militaryfamilies.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/clearinghouse_report_speakmc_initiatives_20240220rev.pdf

³ *Ibid.*

Study participants recognized that advance enrollment overwhelmingly reduces stress on families, helps schools be more prepared, decreases out-of-school time, and increases student access to courses they need or want.⁴ Most acknowledged improvements are necessary to enforce policies, and increase parent and school awareness.⁵

As with most statewide K-12 education policies that set a baseline level of support, specific guidelines not prescribed within the language of the state policy are left up to districts for local implementation. The policies reflected in House Bill 596 address this challenge by allowing the military orders that are accepted as proof of residency for the purpose of enrollment in a public school by children of members of the armed forces to be transmitted remotely, rather than requiring a military family to travel to the school district in person, which disrupts the military mission.⁶

Military families are at a disadvantage when it comes to the enrollment options available to their children due to military-directed reassignments. Uniformed service members and their families have limited housing options when moving to a new location as part of a permanent change of station. As a result, school and district options for military children can also be limited. Many military families must move from temporary to permanent housing at some point after school has started, or move from permanent to temporary housing prior to moving out of state on military orders. The policies in House Bill 596 guarantee school placement stability, allowing military students to remain in their school placement for the duration of the school year despite a change of residence.

Maryland has already demonstrated leadership in supporting military families by being the first state to create a Department of Veterans and Military Families and include its Military Interstate Children's Compact (MIC3) State Council leadership on the state's military affairs coordinating body, the Maryland Military Installation Council. This representation has helped ensure military family perspectives are considered in education policy implementation.

Senate Bill 263 builds on this foundation by codifying specific protections for military children with special needs. The policies in the bill are also made accessible for all military families, in accordance with the DoW's recommendations stemming from the Penn State report.⁷

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Approximately 185,000 U.S. military children move between schools annually. Military service members are routinely reassigned to new duty stations in the summer, due to mission and training requirements. As a result of these summer moves, they may potentially miss their child's school registration and other important application dates that occur in the spring. Long-term negative impacts include having to shift their planned courses of study, which may require them to take courses in summer school, or even force them to graduate later than their peers.

Service members typically receive official military orders detailing their upcoming assignment 90 days to 6 months prior to their move. Allowing military families to enroll their children in school, register for classes and apply for specialized programs at the same time as their peers, prior to physically arriving to their location, will help to facilitate their uninterrupted educational progress and smooth integration into their new communities, and relieve unneeded stress during their transition between locations.

⁷ This bill clarifies that military-connected students with special needs are included in the already-existing advance enrollment policy in Maryland. In does not change the law, it simply clarifies it.

Military children are largely adaptable and demonstrate both flexibility and resilience during permanent change of station (PCS) transitions.⁸ However, for children with disabilities, such moves can be difficult, not only because of the importance of routine and stability in treatment, but also because they often have coordinated care teams (e.g., therapists, specialists, educators) that need to be reestablished by their family with every relocation.⁹

Military children will change schools an average of 6–9 times between kindergarten and 12th grade.¹⁰ For military families of children with disabilities, this cycle can be especially overwhelming as the burden to ensure continuity of care tends to fall on the family, at a time when those service members may be dealing with a variety of other military-connected stressors.¹¹

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) sets the minimum special education requirements that all states must follow to provide a free and appropriate education while allowing states flexibility to determine many specifics. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protects qualified individuals from discrimination based on their disability, including students in public education, who must have reasonable accommodations in place.

Delays in implementation of the support to military children can create a loss of educational opportunity and contribute to learning gaps. These losses can be magnified with each military move, greatly impacting child identification, eligibility determinations and receipt of services under IDEA or Section 504.

States can ameliorate this issue in the education arena by ensuring policies are in place to support military children who need access to special education or accommodations for their disabilities in the public education setting.

Another study conducted in 2020 found that 51% of active-duty families with a child in special education had trouble transferring their child's IEP to their new school.¹² Another study conducted in 2021 found 31% of military families indicated that their children with disabilities went without services for more than 60 days following a military move.¹³ And 42% reported that

⁸ Masten, A. S. (2013). Afterword: What we can learn from military children and families. *The Future of Children*, 23(2), 199-212. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23595627>.

⁹ Rous, B. S., & Hallam, R. A. (2012). Transition services for young children with disabilities: Research and future directions. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 31(4), 232-240. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121411428087>.

¹⁰ Bradshaw, C. P., Sudhinaraset, M., Mmari, K., & Blum, R. W. (2010). School transitions among military adolescents: A qualitative study of stress and coping. *School Psychology Review*, 39(1), 84–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02796015.2010.12087792>.

¹¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2022). *Special education: DOD programs and services for military-dependent students with disabilities*. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-105015.pdf>.

¹² Blue Star Families. (2020). 2020 Military family lifestyle survey: Comprehensive report. https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BSF_MFLS_CompReport_FULL.pdf

¹³ Barnhill, J., Picchini Schaffer, A., Consedine, M., DeVoss Mahany, C., & Shuman, A. (2022). Military children in special education: The real, perceived, and unknown barriers to accessing a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). Partners in Promise. <https://thepromiseact.org/wp-content/uploads/Partners-in-PROMISE-2022-Survey-Findings-FINAL.pdf>.

their Individualized Education Plan was not implemented once they arrived at their new duty location.

Recent Department of War analysis of military family support programs has particular relevance for Maryland's military families. A 2025 report to Congress found that without consistent implementation of the Military Student Identifier (MSI) across all State Education Agencies and Local Education Agencies, it is not feasible to collect reliable information about military children with special education needs in public schools.¹⁴ The Department's analysis also highlighted that school districts often postpone special education evaluations until their own response to intervention process has been implemented, even when children transfer with an existing evaluation in progress.¹⁵

Senate Bill 263 clarifies in statute that evaluations must be conducted expeditiously, even when they occur during summer recess or intermediate periods. This is consistent with a November 2022 letter issued to all state directors of special education by the U.S. Department of Education, strongly encouraging school districts to expedite their evaluations of "highly mobile children", which included military connected children.¹⁶

We appreciate the opportunity to discuss the policies reflected in Senate Bill 263, and are especially grateful to the bill patron, Senator Brooks, the Veterans Caucus, as well as to the members of Committee for considering this important issue.

As always, as liaison to the Mid-Atlantic region, I stand ready to answer whatever questions you may have.

Yours etc.,

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Defense-State Liaison Office

¹⁴ U.S. Department of War, U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2025). *Recommendations for the Improvement of the Military Interstate Children's Compact*. Forthcoming.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Education. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/Letter-to-State-Directors-of-Special-Education-on-Ensuring-a-High-Quality-Education-for-Highly-Mobile-Children-11-10-2022.pdf>