



Key Message

Recent force structure changes require updates to ensure that states' definitions of military service comport with federal law. States can minimize disruptions in benefits and services for eligible service members and dependents by clearly defining "armed forces."

Discussion Points

1. States provide an array of programs and services to members of the armed forces and their dependents; however, eligibility depends on how the state defines "armed forces."
2. The United States Space Force was established as an independent branch of the uniformed services on Dec. 20, 2019.
3. Definitions of military service and uniformed service have varied widely between states and even within a state's own statutory framework.
4. States are starting to align their definition of armed forces with Title 10 United States Code, to include Space Force and the Coast Guard. But states are inconsistent in defining or using terminology throughout the entire state code or law.
5. States are also starting to broaden support for the "armed forces" to include all of the "uniformed services," as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps, and the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service also wear the uniforms of the armed forces.
6. A consistent approach to aligning state definitions of members of the armed forces and uniformed services will ensure that military families are equally represented under all state laws defining "military service," "military retiree" and "veteran."
7. States can ensure all eligible service members and their family members receive access to applicable state benefits by seeking to align every use of the definitions of "uniformed services" and "armed forces" to match current force structure.



Title 10 United States Code, Section 101 states that the term "armed forces" means Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Space Force and Coast Guard. It identifies the "uniformed services" as the armed forces, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps and the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service.