



U.S. Department of War

Working With State Policymakers to Support Military Families

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Background

The Defense-State Liaison Office, or DSLO, collaborates with state policymakers to develop laws and policies aimed at improving the quality of life, well-being and readiness of service members and their families. Each year, the DSLO focuses on key priorities affecting the military community that are identified through input from military families, War Department components and military community stakeholders. To support these priorities, the Military State Policy Source website provides background information, the status of current and previous state policy priorities and official War Department data on military community demographics.

Purpose

Many issues affecting military families are best addressed at the state level. In recognition of this, the undersecretary of war for Personnel and Readiness established the Defense-State Liaison Office in 2004 as a state government relations program. The DSLO helps policymakers understand important issues and unintended barriers created by state policies. The office accomplishes this work through education, relationship-building and direct assistance.

Track Record

Since 2012, the DSLO has assisted state policymakers in enacting more than 1,450 bills. These bills address a wide range of issues, including occupational licensure, employment, military-to-veteran transition, consumer protection, family law, childcare, child protection, voting, education, healthcare and state judicial systems.

What We Do

The DSLO has regional liaisons strategically located across the United States. These liaisons oversee state and territorial relations and interstate policy initiatives for the Office of the Secretary of War. They support state policymakers by providing educational resources, identifying and sharing best practices and offering expert testimony in support of relevant legislation.

Visit our website to access information about the 2027 State Priorities, track the status of legislation across states and connect to official data from the War Department.

Learn more at statepolicy.militaryonesource.mil.



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2027 State Policy Priorities

Ensuring Military Family Economic Stability

Occupational Licensure Interstate Compacts: Thirty-five percent of military spouses require an occupational license to work in their chosen profession. Licensure compacts create seamless licensure portability for all members of a profession, including military spouses and service members. By adopting licensure compacts, states can improve military family financial readiness.

Military Spouse Employment Preference: Military spouses in the civilian workforce have a 20% unemployment rate, which adversely impacts military family economic security. States can support military families by enacting state laws that permit state and local governments and private industry to offer hiring and procurement preferences for military spouses.

Military Clause in State Family Leave Laws: When service members receive mobilization orders for stateside missions, deployment orders for overseas missions or require long-term care for combat injuries, their families face challenges that civilian leave policies might not address. States can ensure equitable access to family leave benefits for eligible relatives of military service members who must activate, deploy or train away from home for extended periods by revising policies to cover the full range of qualifying assignments and activation types.

License Issuance and Reporting Uniformity: Although federal law requires states to recognize out-of-state credentials, service members and military spouses can still face employment barriers if they do not hold an in-state license for the state where they work. States can close this gap by issuing in-state licenses within 30 days and mandating annual data reporting to expose administrative delays, track why applicants are denied, and hold the licensing process accountable.

Supporting Military Children

Solutions for Military Homeschoolers: Military families homeschool their children at nearly twice the rate of civilian families and face unique challenges associated with military life. State policies that streamline homeschool requirements, expand access to educational resources such as extracurricular activities and sports, and clarify federal requirements for Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps, or JROTC, eligibility can contribute to greater stability for military families, which supports retention efforts.

State Exemption for Military-Certified Family Childcare Homes: In many cases, in-home childcare providers certified by the military and who live off a military installation must also be licensed by the state, even when only caring for eligible military children. By exempting in-home childcare providers certified by the military from state licensure requirements, states can improve access to family childcare for military families.



State Support of Military Families With Special Education Needs

Needs: Highly mobile children, including those from military families, are more likely to experience recurring educational disruptions and challenges accessing accommodations and special education services provided under federal law. States can assist military families by enacting policies that ensure timely establishment of special education and related services upon relocation.

Education Policy Implementation Enhancements: When military parents lack transparent access to existing state policies intended to support their children, they're left to navigate complex systems on their own during critical transition periods. States have a valuable opportunity to further support military families by clarifying requirements in policy and statute, enhancing communication efforts and streamlining access to information on state and local education websites.

Open Enrollment Flexibility: Military-directed moves frequently disadvantage military families navigating school enrollment options for their children. States can assist by increasing military-connected students' access to schooling options, allowing them to remain in their current school placement despite a relocation from temporary to permanent housing, and including them within existing enrollment prioritization systems.

Securing the Safety of Our Military Families

Concurrent Juvenile Jurisdiction: Military installations subject to exclusive federal jurisdiction often handle juvenile offenses through the federal system, which has no established juvenile justice system. Adopting policies that facilitate concurrent jurisdiction between the state and military installations opens the door to the state juvenile justice system and resources, offering improved opportunities for rehabilitation tailored to address juveniles.

State Response to Military Interpersonal Violence: Interpersonal violence is a pattern of harmful behavior in which one person uses various forms of abuse to assert power and control over another. States can further protect victims of interpersonal violence by increasing accessibility to civilian protection orders for victims and mandating reciprocal information sharing between military and civilian law enforcement authorities.