

Georgia Should Welcome Military Spouses

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Chairman Payne, Vice Chair Harbison, and all distinguished members of the Senate Veterans, Military, and Homeland Security Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify on occupational regulation for military spouses in Georgia. I am the assistant director of the Knee Regulatory Research Center at West Virginia University. The main takeaways of my comments are the following:

1. Military Spouses face a unique hurdle due to state-based licensing laws.
2. Research shows that occupational licensing restricts geographic mobility by 7 percent.
3. Recognizing out-of-state licenses for military spouses is an excellent way to help members of the armed forces and their families.

First lady Michelle Obama originally called attention to the difficulties facing military families back in 2011. States responded in a number of ways, including streamlining licensing requirements for military spouses moving into the state. Georgia passed a reform in 2017, but unfortunately, it gives board much more discretion than most states. There are nearly 42,000 military spouses in Georgia, many of whom are unable to work because of issues transferring their license to the state.¹

Military spouses face unique challenges from state-level licensing laws. Because state licensing boards oversee the profession, someone moving to a state must reapply for licensure, demonstrating that they have met the necessary requirements. While this makes sense, it also adds another hurdle to the difficulties of moving, which can dissuade professionals from relocating entirely. We estimate that licensing laws reduce geographic mobility for the average worker by 7 percent.²

While the typical professional has a choice to move, military spouses have no such luxury. As a result, the choice for military spouses is whether to work or not after a service member's Change of Station Order. For military spouses, it typically takes between 6 and 9 months to obtain a license after a move.³ This presents a significant hardship because military spouses move every

¹ Military State Policy Source. (2023). "Georgia Military Legislation and Policies."
<https://statepolicy.militaryonesource.mil/state/GA>

² Janna E. Johnson and Morris M. Kleiner, "Is Occupational Licensing a Barrier to Interstate Migration?," *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 12, no. 3 (2020): 347–73.

³ US Department of Defense. (2019). "Military Spouse Licensure: State Best Practices and Strategies for Achieving Reciprocity."

two years on average. Many find the time and effort is not worthwhile, which is why military spouses are more likely to be unemployed.⁴ Compounding this problem, military spouses are more likely to work in licensed professions than civilians.⁵

Georgia already has a military spouse licensing recognition law in place; however, there is much room for improvement. The process can be difficult to navigate for military spouses and still allow delays in relicensure.⁶ What can seem simple and straightforward to someone working at a licensing board who understands the process can be overwhelming to a spouse who needs to suddenly uproot their family and deal with all of the difficulties of moving to a new state—especially because boards retain such discretion over accepting a military spouse’s license.

That is why HB 880 is so important. The bill will require licensing boards will allow military spouses to begin working immediately, instead of waiting 9 months or more for the licensing board’s approval. Employers would still verify that the spouse has a license in good standing in their home state and licensing boards could investigate any worker that abuses their license, to protect consumers.

Occupational licensing sets minimum education and training requirements to ensure that professionals possess the necessary skills for the job. Thankfully, this bill is designed in a way that does not sacrifice quality, while taking concrete steps to help military spouses and their families. While this may seem like a minor change, it can have a large impact on military spouses, their families, and patients across the state.

Given the difficulties facing military spouses, forcing them to complete arbitrary hurdles to begin working is especially costly. Allowing military spouses to bring their license with them will help them work without unnecessary delays. This is no silver bullet to make the lives of military families easy, but HB 880 is a commonsense reform to help. We ask service members and their families to make considerable sacrifices for us. Let’s not make their lives any harder than they have to be.

⁴ Lim, Nelson, and David Schulker. (2010). “Measuring underemployment among military spouses.” RAND Corporation.

⁵ Brannock, M. K. and Bradford, N. A. (2021). “Barriers to licensure for military spouse registered nurses.” *Journal of Nursing Regulation*, 11(4): 4–14.

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