



MANPOWER AND
RESERVE AFFAIRS

**OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1500 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-1500**

January 24, 2025

**New Hampshire General Court
State-Federal Relations and Veterans Affairs Committee
107 North Main Street
Concord, NH 03301**

**Representative Michael Moffett, Chairman
Representative Skip Rollins, Vice-Chairman**

**Remarks of
Melissa J. Willette
New England Region Liaison
United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office**

Chairman Moffett, Vice Chairman Rollins and honorable members of the Committee, the Department of Defense is grateful for the opportunity to support the policies reflected in HB 64. It is our hope New Hampshire will implement this policy and in turn further enhance their support for military families in The Granite State. Our service members hold a crucial role in protecting the interests of the United States both at home and abroad and ensuring our overall national security. Through the implementation of these changes, states can ensure service members are ready to support the military mission because New Hampshire is supporting their family members, creating an environment for military families that enhances recruiting, resilience, readiness, and retention.

My name is Melissa Willette, and I am the New England Region Liaison at the United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office. We represent the Defense Department and establish relationships with state leaders across the country who are concerned for service members and their families' welfare by enhancing state laws and regulations on policy problems of national significance.

These are identified by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Military Departments, and the National Guard Bureau as areas where states play a crucial role in our nation's support for military families and subsequently our national security.

Military spouses bring distinct talents to the workforce. HB 64 has the opportunity to create stronger pathways to employment for military spouses and help address a unique challenge faced by our military families. Due to the high demands of military service, a majority of our families relocate to a new duty station every two to three years. These rapid rates of relocation often hinder the employment and career potential of military spouses, which in turn have long term consequences for both the spouse and family. According to a 2021 Department of Defense survey of Active Duty spouses, 48% of respondents stated that finding employment was one of the most critical problems

they experienced during permanent change of station (PCS) moves.¹

Undue stress, whether financial or other, has potential to disrupt the overall readiness of our military units at the local level.

Military spouses and family members play critical roles behind the scenes in supporting our service members. The result of that commitment affects their own ability to pursue employment and establish their own careers, which is highlighted by the unemployment rate of this demographic. Military spouses are unemployed at a rate of 21%; a rate that is significantly higher than their civilian counterparts. But like their civilian counterparts, our military families rely on two incomes to meet their basic needs. Offering employment preference may be the difference maker when looking at ways to reduce this stubbornly high unemployment rate.

This policy also has the opportunity to not only benefit our military families, but also the employers actively looking to recruit talent. For some employers, providing a military spouse preference will assist with hiring goals, enhance talent amongst their workforce, and support the local military community.

According to a 2022 DoD Demographic report, the average age of active duty military spouses is 32 years old, and 49% of those individuals have bachelor's degrees.² HB 64 is a proactive step to support the economic stability and career advancement of these highly skilled and dedicated individuals. Hiring preference would not only be a well-deserved recognition of the sacrifices made by military families, but it would also be a sound economic investment in New Hampshire's workforce. When military spouses are able to secure stable and fulfilling employment, they are more likely to contribute to their communities. This, in turn, can lead to increased economic growth, reduced poverty rates, and a more resilient workforce.

Simply put, HB 64 offers a framework to serve our military families.

We thank the Committee for considering this important legislation and are especially grateful for the tremendous efforts New Hampshire has historically made in supporting our service members and their families. We also thank the bill sponsor, Rep. Terry Roy, for his continued advocacy and support.

Sincerely,

Melissa J Willette
New England Region Liaison
(CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT)
Defense-State Liaison Office

CC:

House Committee on State-Federal Relations and Veterans Affairs
Rep. Terry Roy
Department of Military Affairs and Veterans Services

¹ <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/data-research-and-statistics/survey-findings/spouses-survey/>

² <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/data-research-and-statistics/military-community-demographics/>