



MANPOWER AND
RESERVE AFFAIRS

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MEMORANDUM FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY (MANPOWER AND
RESERVE AFFAIRS)
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY (MANPOWER AND
RESERVE AFFAIRS)
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE (MANPOWER
AND RESERVE AFFAIRS)
DIRECTOR, MANPOWER AND PERSONNEL (J1), JOINT STAFF

SUBJECT: DoD State Priorities Supporting Service Members and Families for 2026

The Department of Defense-State Liaison Office (DSLO) works with state policy makers to foster strategic alignment between DoD and state governments on issues that impact warrior development, military family readiness, economic well-being, and quality of life. Our focus is particularly on areas where military service creates unique challenges compared to civilian counterparts.

The United States' security posture requires a force that is ready, capable, and properly supported. To achieve this, the Department must develop aligned and mutually beneficial relationships with states that address both existing and emerging needs of our military community. This alignment recognizes the interdependent nature of federal and state authority while respecting each state's unique governance approach. When military families are stable and supported, Service members are focused on lethality and readiness with the commitment our nation requires.

During 2026, the Department will focus on eleven priorities for warrior development, readiness, and military family well-being where States can make significant contributions:

Ensuring Military Family Agility, Opportunity and Stability

- **Military Exigency Clause in Family Leave Laws (*New*):** States can ensure family leave laws include provisions for military-specific needs like deployments, training, and transitions. This enables readiness by reducing family stress during critical mission periods.
- **Military Spouse Employment Preference (*Approved 2024*):** Military spouses in the civilian work force have a 20% unemployment rate, which adversely impacts military family economic security. States can assist in bolstering military families by enacting state laws that permit state and local governments and private industry to offer hiring and procurement preferences for military spouses, recognizing the need to combat military spouse unemployment rates and supporting the financial well-being of military families.

- **Military Community Representation on State Defense Councils (*Approved 2024*):** The unique needs of military families may go unheard without representation on state-level advisory bodies focused on the defense community. States can establish statewide military defense-focused councils that consider military family readiness and dedicate one or more seats to members of the military community.
- **Occupational Licensure Interstate Compacts (*Approved 2017*):** 35% 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.

Supporting the Warfighter on the Homefront

- **Education Policy Implementation and Information Enhancements (*New*):** States have a valuable opportunity to facilitate improved local implementation of policies designed to support military-connected children and ensure families are empowered with the knowledge they need by clarifying requirements, enhancing communication efforts, and streamlining access to information on state and local education websites.
- **State Solutions for Military Homeschoolers (*New*):** 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 participation requirements for Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) can contribute to greater stability for military families, which supports retention efforts..
- **State Support of Military Families with Special Educational Needs (*Approved 2024*):** Highly mobile children, including military children, are more likely to experience recurring educational disruptions and challenges accessing special education services, particularly those who need access to special education and related services. States can assist military families by ensuring timely establishment of services upon relocation and reducing procedural burdens.
- **State Exemption for DoD Family Child Care Homes (*Approved 2023*):** In many cases, in-home child care providers who live off a military installation must be licensed by both the state and the Defense Department, even when only caring for eligible DoD-affiliated children. By exempting in-home child care providers certified by the DoD from state licensure requirements, states can improve access to family child care for military families.
- **Open Enrollment Flexibility (*Approved 2022*):** Military families can be disadvantaged in school enrollment options for their children due to military-directed moves. 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.

Upholding Warrior Standards and Force Integrity

- **State Response to Military Interpersonal Violence (*Approved 2023*)**: 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 enhancing statutes that increase accessibility to civilian protection orders for victims and mandating reciprocal information sharing between military and civilian law enforcement authorities.
- **Concurrent Juvenile Jurisdiction (*Approved 2022*)**: 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 installation opens the door to the state juvenile justice system and resources, offering improved opportunities for rehabilitation tailored to address juveniles.

To accommodate the new priorities on this list, we consolidated several previous education issues and moved previously approved priorities to the emeritus status. The DSLO continues work on the emeritus issues on an ad hoc basis, or as requested by states:

- **Remote Driver's License and Vehicle Registration Renewal (*Approved 2024*)**: Forty-three states now allow Service members and their families to remotely renew driver's licenses and vehicle registrations when Service members are assigned out of state, and there is one more state with active legislation.
- **Legal Protections for Military Families (*Approved 2024*)**: Twelve states have included military dependent safeguards in other areas of law where veterans are protected.
- **Defining Armed Forces in State Policy (*Approved 2023*)**: Forty-three states have clearly defined "armed forces" in state policy, which includes the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Space Force and Coast Guard, and there are five more states with active legislation.
- **Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting (*Approved 2013*)**: Federal law requires the Defense Department to request reports of child abuse and neglect involving military families when such incidents occur off a military installation. Thirty-six states have assisted military authorities by enacting state laws that require child protective service entities to report such cases to the military at the onset of their investigations.

State officials consistently seek validation from commanders on the importance of these issues. Our approach recognizes that effective policy implementation requires DoD and states to build solutions that work for both military families and state governments.

Please urge your senior leaders and installation commanders to work with the DSLO Regional Liaisons in their respective states to support these priorities. In doing so, leaders should remain mindful of 18 U.S.C. § 1913, which the Department of Justice has interpreted to prohibit the use of appropriated funds for “grass roots” lobbying efforts involving encouragement of the public to contact legislators in support of a particular action. Applicable law does not prevent DoD civilian employees or Service members from communicating factual information to state legislators with respect to relevant state-level legislation.

Thank you for your commitment to supporting the DoD State Priorities for 2026. If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Sarah Stein, Director, DoD Federal and State Legislative Resource Office, at 703-614-7128 or sarah.k.stein4.civ@mail.mil. Discussion Points, Best Practices, and the status of all of the DoD’s priorities in each state can be found at <https://state.policy.militaryonesource.mil>.

William G. Fitzhugh
Performing the Duties of the Assistant Secretary
of Defense for Manpower and Reserve
Affairs

cc:

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