



June 3, 2020

Mr. Nathan James
Director of Legislative and External Affairs
Tennessee State Board of Education
5th Floor, Davy Crockett Tower
500 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Mr. James,

We are writing in response to your letter of inquiry dated May 22, 2020 which we received via email on Tuesday, May 26. To provide context, an overview of the Commission and specific examples were provided where relevant.

Overview

In 2006, the United States Department of Defense (USDOD), in collaboration with the National Center for Interstate Compacts, the Council of State Governments, and a variety of federal, state and local officials; as well as national stakeholder organizations representing education groups and military families drafted the model compact language adopted by the State of Tennessee in 2010.

The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children is one of over 200 operational compacts utilized across the nation, and the fourth compact adopted by all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The Compact's purpose, with oversight by the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (the "Commission"), is to address key transitional issues encountered by military children when they experience interstate moves as a direct result of their parent's frequent reassignments.

Commission Dues

In 2018, pursuant to MIC3 Rules, Section 2.104(a), the dues formula was increased for the first time by the Commission since its inception. Under Section 2.104(b), variables considered when revising the dues formula include: the population of the states; the number of student's subject to the compact within each state; and the volume of student transfers between states. Based on the most recent information available at that time, the number of student's subject to the compact within each state was steadily decreasing. An analysis of MIC3 dues from fiscal years 2017, 2018 and 2019 indicated that the number of dependents had decreased 2-3% annually resulting in a similar decrease in the Commission's budget during this time.

According to the 2017-2019 Defense Manpower Data Center, Active Duty Family File on Children Ages 5-18, the State of Tennessee experienced a reduction in military dependents residing in the state.

Table with 6 columns: FY, Total Mil Dep, TN Mil Dep, Commission Dues, % Total Dues, Dues Formula. Rows for 2018, 2019, and 2020.

The nationwide reduction of dependents resulted in a decrease in revenue, while membership more than doubled and the need for support by states increased. In 2009, there were 24 member states, and by 2014,

membership increased to 50 states plus the District of Columbia - including five Ex-Officio (non-voting) organizations. Annual dues collected from member states provide a variety of services, at no additional expense, for states, school districts, and military families. Expenses include: supporting the administration of the Compact; the Annual Business Meeting and associated travel costs for Commissioners; free resources such as marketing collaterals, the website and training. At the same time, the Consumer Price Index indicated an increase of 14.5% from 2008 to 2018, reducing the purchasing power of Commission funds during the same period. For these reasons, the Commission approved the first dues increase by the Commission in ten years.

Question #1: “During the era of COVID-19, we may be called upon to justify the spending of our taxpayer funds by explaining the features and benefits of our financial investment in (the Commission). To date, what has the State of Tennessee received from (our) membership dues?”

Consistency and Reciprocity – The Compact replaces widely varying policies and practices that affect transitioning military students and supports uniform treatment for military-connected students as they transfer between member states. While the Compact is not exhaustive in its coverage, it does address several key issues encountered by military families: eligibility, enrollment, placement and graduation. Bottomline, the Compact encourages flexibility and understanding for transitioning students.

- This framework provides a mechanism for Commissioners, state, and local education authorities to discuss common concerns, and find solutions to cases covered by the Compact.
- The Compact ensures there are at least two points of contact – the Compact Commissioner and the Military Family Education Liaison – in each state to address issues for military families. Prior to implementation of the Compact, there was no consistency among states in this area.
- Because Tennessee is a member state, students transitioning in and out of Tennessee public schools are afforded protections in accordance with the Compact Rules.

Governance and Legal Assistance – The Commission is governed by a model language that was used as the framework to adopt the Compact into legislation by all states and the District of Columbia. The Commission follows a specific set of rules and bylaws to conduct its business and ensure compliance among states, since not all issues can be resolved at the local and state level. The enforcement provisions of the Compact allow for the National Office to intercede, mediate issues, and assist the states in finding equitable solutions. Assistance is available and can be requested on issues such as: clarification of rules and bylaws, state statute interpretation, legal questions, and annual state dues payments. The Commission has a legal advisor on retainer to provide legal opinions and other assistance.

Since 2016, the State of Tennessee, has:

- requested and received legal advisories on [*Does the Compact Require Grade Point Average Recalculation*](#) (ref #1-2019, dated 10/10/2019) and [*Does the Compact allow for districts and schools to share student information with their State Compact Commissioner in order to resolve a case?*](#) (ref #1-2018, dated 6/21/2018).
- requested two rules clarifications on graduation requirements and education placement.
- five cases were referred by the National Office to the State of Tennessee regarding students moving to Tennessee.
- co-facilitated a workgroup at the 2016 ABM which provided tactical input on the Commission’s first Strategic Plan.

Annual Business Meeting (ABM) – The Commission conducts an annual meeting, usually held in the Fall which provides experienced and recently appointed Commissioners an opportunity to meet and

provide input on issues facing their states, attend workshops and training sessions, vote on rules and bylaws changes that may have an impact on their state, gain ideas and listen to best practices on how to manage Compact issues and implement the Compact in their state. Funding for this meeting is covered for each state commissioner as part of the state's annual membership dues.

- The State of Tennessee has been an active participant having attended every meeting since 2011. As a former member of the Training Committee, Commissioner Deanna McLaughlin co-facilitated annual training; and briefed on various topics such as effective state councils.
- Commissioner McLaughlin has also attended several training sessions developed by the Commission or by other state commissioners.

Training and Resources – Training and resource materials are available for states through the National Office which includes briefings, presentations and assistance at state council meetings. The National Office, upon request of a Commissioner, prepares presentations and other professional development material that is used to train educators and military families at the state and local level. The Commission also maintains a website, video library, printed and digital publications for use by member states.

- As a former member and Vice Chair of the Public Relations and Training Committee (PRTC), Commissioner McLaughlin supported the launch of a new website in October 2017.
- In 2018, the PRTC developed the [MIC3 Compact Summary](#) video; and updated collaterals (parent guides and brochures) utilized for training new commissioners, school and military personnel, and parents.
- Commissioner McLaughlin has provided annual updates to ensure the [MIC3 Tennessee state webpage](#) is current. This information is vital to military families as it presents a one-stop location for assistance in their relocation to another state.
- In 2019, the State of Tennessee requested 60 MIC3 enamel pins for 3 training sessions, and in March 2020, requested free guides and brochures for a presentation.

Question #2: “What COVID-19 related information, best practices, and tools for military connected children have been provided by (the Commission)?”

The pandemic has impacted both military and civilian students, and with over 75% of our state commissioners employed full-time in the education field, they are mitigating the impact daily. Fortunately, member states have excellent websites which include COVID-19 related education guidance, tools and resources for families. Since March 27, this information has been disseminated weekly to Commissioners and Ex-officio members in the [State Department of Education and Public Instruction COVID-19 Information and Guidance on School Closures and Reopening](#), and a copy is shared on social media and posted on www.mic3.net. On May 4, Commissioner McLaughlin requested links to the *Tennessee Department of State - Division of Publication, Emergency Rules and FAQ* be added. This was subsequently included in the May 11 update.

In addition, we've attached the *Guidance Regarding the COVID-19 Pandemic (Corrected)* which was disseminated to Commission and Ex-officio members on April 9, 2020 to provide information regarding working with families and students during the pandemic.

Question #3: “I can imagine (the Commission) has saved funds due to the current travel restrictions and open staff position. Is (the Commission) observing a hiring freeze like state governments across the country?”

Mr. Nathan James

Page 4

June 3, 2020

While the posting closed at the end of March, the pandemic resulted in the closure of the Commission office which prevented the vacancy to be filled. With the Commission office closed until September, maintaining operations is paramount during these challenging times. The Commission is confident the position will be filled as soon as it is feasible. Despite the extension of the [USDOD Stop Movement Order to June 30](#), the Pentagon recently announced it will allow more than 30,000 families to move during this time. We anticipate that once the Stop Movement Order is lifted, the organization and its Commissioners will be very busy helping a much greater number of families make these challenging transitions, which will occur in the same period of time and shall likely occur as the school year convenes. The Commission stands ready to assist when needed.

Question #4: “What is the projected savings for (the Commission) in fiscal year 2020?”

The Commission is projected to end the current fiscal year \$20,000 (3%) under budget. However, this is an estimate at this time.

Question #5: “What is the projected spend savings for (the Commission) in fiscal year 2021?”

With the continued impact of the pandemic on states, districts, schools, and military services, there are too many variables to make an accurate projection at this time. The Executive and Finance Committees continue to monitor the situation as the impact of the pandemic on Commission operations is unknown.

Question #6: “Has (the Commission) considered returning a portion of the funds savings back to states for their use within their own (State Councils)? Our Commissioner and State Council have a budget of zero dollars and many times pay out of pocket expenses incurred by the volunteer positions that they serve in to include creative funding to fund the Purple Star program.”

The Finance Committee has discussed this possibility in prior years. The Committee agreed the best fiscal practice is to maintain an operating balance in order to forestall the need for future dues increases.

While you have done a tremendous job to implement the Compact and support military children, we share in your disappointment that the state legislature is unable to provide financial resources to your State Commissioner or Council. While some state commissioners are fortunate to receive annual budget allocations to cover dues and other expenses, in many states like Tennessee, the Compact is an unfunded mandate. Due to this, several state commissioners have worked with their networks and community partners to secure funding. We strongly encourage you to continue working with your state officials and partners to emphasize the value of your work to secure funding support. If desired, the Commission could provide a letter of support to highlight the importance of your efforts from a national perspective.

It should be noted that the Purple Star School program, which you mentioned specifically, is not a program of the Commission, but rather of each state individually. Although the Commission has considered the adoption of such a nationwide program in the past, it was determined that since such programs are not directly connected to resolving transitional issues for students and therefore do not require interstate coordination, they would be best left to each state to develop and operate its own program individually.

In summary, as a highly engaged member state, and having sought frequent advisory and resource support from the organization, we hope the State of Tennessee can see the value of its “financial investment” in the Commission. By providing 2% of the annual cost of the Commission’s administrative budget, the State of Tennessee’s contribution as the 12th highest military dependent impacted state is fair and

Mr. Nathan James

Page 5

June 3, 2020

equitable to the 49 other member states and the District of Columbia. Having explained the many benefits you receive through membership on the Commission, we must emphasize that the most important is your ability to address educational concerns for and give support to the over 11,000 military-connected students residing in the State of Tennessee. Ultimately, your membership demonstrates commitment to successful educational transitions for military students and their families.

Again, we appreciate your inquiry and hope we have provided clarity regarding your questions. Should you have additional concerns, please contact us at john.kaminar@arkansas.gov or laura.anastasio@ct.gov.

Sincerely,



John I. Kaminar (AR)
Chairman and Arkansas Commissioner



p.p.
Laura Anastasio (CT)
Vice Chair and Connecticut Commissioner

c: Commission Member States and the District of Columbia

Commission Ex-officio Members:

- Military Child Education Coalition
- Military Impacted Schools Association
- National Federation of State High School Associations
- National Military Family Association
- U.S. Department of Defense

Deanna McLaughlin, Tennessee Commissioner

MIC3 Tennessee State Council Members

- COL Jeremy Bell, USA Garrison Commander, Fort Campbell, Kentucky
- Bernard Childress, Executive Director, Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association, State Council Vice-Chairman
- Dr. John Combs, Superintendent, Tipton County Schools
- Senator Dolores R. Gresham, Tennessee State Senate
- James Bo Griffin, Director of Schools, Millington Municipal Schools
- Dr. Ted Horrell, Superintendent, Lakeland School System
- Millard House, Director of Schools, Clarksville-Montgomery County Schools
- Dr. LaDonna Killen McFall, Director of Schools, Roane County Schools
- Tammy Mason, Director of Schools, Arlington City Schools
- Deborah Munis, Military Family Education Liaison
- Courtney Rogers, Commissioner of Veteran Services, Tennessee Department of Veteran Services
- CAPT Alonza Ross, USN Commanding Officer, Naval Support Activity Mid-South

Attachment