



U.S. Department of Defense

# 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 well-being of military families. Each year, the DSLO focuses on key priorities. To support these priorities, the Military State Policy Source website provides background information, official Defense Department data and updates on relevant activities across states.

## Purpose

Many issues affecting military families are best addressed at the state level. In recognition of this, the undersecretary of defense 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 program accomplishes this work through education, relationship-building and direct assistance.

## Track Record

Since 2012, the DSLO has assisted state policymakers in enacting at least 1,275 bills. These bills address a wide range of issues covering occupational licensure, employment protection, military-to-veteran transition, consumer protection, family law, child care, child protection, voting, education, health care, 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 Defense. 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 2026 State Priorities, track the status of legislation across states and connect to official data from the Defense Department.

Learn more at [statepolicy.militaryonesource.mil](https://statepolicy.militaryonesource.mil).



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## 2026 State Policy Priorities

**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 assist in bolstering military families by enacting state laws that permit state and local governments and private industries to offer hiring and procurement preferences for military spouses. These efforts recognize the need to combat military spouse unemployment rates and support the financial well-being of military families.

**Military Clause in State Family Leave Laws:** States can ensure that family leave laws include provisions for military-specific needs such as deployments, training and transitions. This enables readiness by reducing family stress during critical mission periods.

**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 retirements, expand access to educational resources such as extracurricular activities and sports, and clarify participation requirements for Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps, or JROTC, can contribute to greater stability for military families, which supports retention efforts.

**State Exemption for DOD Family Child Care Homes:** 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.

**State Support of Military Families With Special Educational Needs:** 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.

**Education Policy Implementation and Information Enhancements:** 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.



**Open Enrollment Flexibility:** 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.

**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 enhancing statutes that increase accessibility to civilian protection orders for victims and mandating reciprocal information sharing between military and civilian law enforcement authorities.

**Military Community Representation on State Defense Councils:** 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.