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OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-1500

March 5, 2025

**Maine State Legislature
Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333**

**Senator Donna Bailey, Senate Chair
Representative Kristi Mathieson, House Chair**

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

Support: LD 416 - An Act to Enact the Dietitian Licensure Compact

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services; the Department of Defense is thankful for the opportunity to support the policies reflected in LD 416, which addresses licensing issues affecting our service members and their families.

My name is Melissa Willette, and I am the New England Region Liaison at the Defense-State Liaison Office, operating under the direction of Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. We represent the Department and establish relationships with state and local leaders on issues currently impacting our service members and their families.

Licensure issues for both our transitioning military members and their spouses have been a priority for the Department for several years. The Council of State Governments (CSG) has partnered with the Department of Defense (DoD), and The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) to support the mobility of licensed dietitians through the development of a new interstate compact. This compact will create reciprocity among participant states and reduce barriers to license portability that many of our military spouses face.

To address license portability for military spouses, states have turned to occupational licensure interstate compacts, which streamline relicensing between member states of a compact for all practitioners in an occupation and provide specific support for military spouses of relocating active-duty personnel.

Professional licensure has been an enduring problem for military spouses. Obtaining a license in a new state can be both time consuming and expensive, and military spouses often cannot adequately anticipate how to prepare for licensure in a new state due to the unpredictable nature of military moves. The short duration of military assignments, coupled with lengthy relicensing

processes, can discourage military spouses from seeking relicensure, causing them to quit an occupation or causing military families to leave the military.

Military spouses are a cross-section of the American population, though a greater percentage of them are in licensed occupations than their civilian counterparts, and they are significantly more mobile. Frequent moves and cumbersome licensing and certification requirements limit career options for military spouses. Removing these barriers, creating licensing reciprocity, and facilitating placement opportunities can help a military family's financial stability, speed the assimilation of the family into its new location, and create a desirable new employee pool for a state.

The Department of Defense is grateful for the efforts Maine has historically made to support our uniformed service members and their families. We appreciate the opportunity to support the passage of the policies reflected in LD 416 and are especially grateful to the Committee for their deliberation.

I thank you for your time and stand ready to answer any questions you may have. I can be reached at melissa.j.willette3.civ@mail.mil or 703-623-2035.

Respectfully,

Melissa J. Willette
New England Region Liaison
Defense-State Liaison Office