



MANPOWER AND
RESERVE AFFAIRS

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

1500 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-1500

May 4, 2023

**Maine State Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04330**

**Senator Donna Bailey, Chair
Representative Anne Perry, Chair**

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

Testimony in Support of LD 1749, An Act to Establish the Physical Therapy Licensure Compact

On behalf of the Department of Defense, I am testifying in support of the policies reflected in LD 1749, as introduced, which addresses licensing issues affecting our service members and their families. Simply put, the purpose of the compact is to facilitate interstate practice of physical therapy, with the goal of improving public access to physical therapy services.

My name is Melissa Willette. I am the New England Regional Liaison for the United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office, operating under the direction of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. Each liaison represents the Department in their individual region, and works with state officials, policy makers, and stakeholders regarding issues that affect military service members, veterans and their families.

Licensure issues for both our transitioning military members and their spouses have been a priority for the Department for several years, and the State of Maine enacted its first two compacts in 2021 with the passage of the Occupational Therapy Licensure Compact and the Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact. States are continuing to consider licensure compacts for several occupations in an effort to bolster their workforce. Our office is working across the country to approve fourteen occupational licensure compacts in 2023, and here in Maine, we've begun work on two of those in this very committee: the Physical Therapy Compact, and the Audiology and Speech Language Pathology Compact.

Occupational licensure compacts provide consistent rules that allow licensed members to work in other states through "privilege to practice policies" or to more easily transfer their license to a new state. The policies reflected in LD 1749 would achieve seven objectives to include: increasing public access to physical therapy services; enhancement of public safety; support of relocating military spouses; amplified information sharing among states; cooperation in regulation and greater accountability.

The Physical Therapy Compact will allow a member state to provide compact privilege to a licensee holding a valid unencumbered license in another member state, in accordance with compact rules. Under such compact privilege, the licensee is to function within the laws and regulations of the remote state and is subject to that state's regulatory authority. This is especially important to the spouses of our military service members.

A licensee who is active-duty military or is the spouse of an individual who is active-duty military may elect either their home of record, their permanent change of station, or their state of current residence, if different from their permanent change of station when applying. Upon completion of their application, the licensee would then be allowed use of the "privilege to practice" provision in the compact to work in any other member state without obtaining another license.

It's important to note that forty four percent of married service members reported that their spouse's ability to maintain a career impacts their decision to remain in the military and eighteen percent report spouse employment challenges as a reason for potentially choosing to separate from the military.¹ As our military members and their families move from state to state, the ability for them to quickly gain employment and progress on their chosen career paths is very important.

In closing, let me say that we are grateful for the tremendous efforts that Maine has historically made to support our military members and their families. We appreciate the opportunity to support the policies reflected in LD 1749, and especially thank Senator Brenner for bringing this important policy forward.

Should you have any questions, I would be happy to answer those at this time.

Sincerely,

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¹ "The Military Spouse Experience: Current Issues and Gaps in Service", June 3, 2021
https://militaryfamilies.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Military-Spouse-Experience_Current-Issues-and-Gaps-in-Service_3June2021.pdf