



OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-1500

February 5, 2025

Maine State Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Education
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Senator Joseph Rafferty, Senate Chair
Representative Kelly Murphy, House Chair

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

LD 31 – An Act Regarding School Enrollment for Military-Connected Students

Chairman Rafferty, Vice Chair Murphy and honorable members of the committee; the Department of Defense is grateful for the opportunity to support the policies reflected in LD 31, which aims to increase access to flexible enrollment options for military families with school-age children.

My name is Melissa Willette, and I am the New England Region Liaison at the United States Department of 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 leaders across the country who are concerned for troops and their families' welfare by harmonizing state and federal law on policy problems of national significance. These are identified by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Military Departments, and the National Guard Bureau as areas where states can play a crucial role.

Military families are at a disadvantage when it comes to enrollment options available to their children, due to the timing of military directed moves. Military families move frequently and change school systems upwards of ten times prior to graduation. In addition to planned Permanent Changes of Station (PCS) moves across state lines, military families often experience additional subsequent relocations from temporary to permanent housing due to limited availability of military or community housing at the time of their arrival.

LD 31 expands on previous efforts Maine has made to support military families by enhancing flexibility and improved access to existing state and district open enrollment policies. With approximately 1700 active-duty service members, and 1300 active-duty children attending school in Maine, this committee has an opportunity to have a highly impactful and positive effect on the educational experiences of military children and families.

We thank the committee for considering this important legislation and are especially grateful for the tremendous effort Maine has historically made in supporting our service members and their

families. We thank the Chair for taking up this legislation, the bill sponsor, Senator Farrin, for his past and current advocacy on behalf of military families, and the co-sponsors, Senators Daughtry, Haggan and Stewart for their support.

At this time, I'd be happy to answer any questions or concerns members of the committee may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

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