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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  
Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333**

**Senator Craig Hickman, Senate Chair  
Representative Laura Supica, House Chair**

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

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and honorable members of the Committee, the Department of Defense is grateful for the opportunity to support the policies reflected in LD 665, An Act Regarding the Use of Military Protective Orders in Protection from Abuse and Protection from Harassment Proceedings.

My name is Melissa Willette. 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 and local leaders on issues negatively impacting our service members and their families. These policies 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.

Our service members are central to protecting the interests of the United States both at home and abroad and ensuring our overall national security. Through the implementation of interpersonal violence policies at the local level, states can empower victims, deter offenders, and create an environment for military families that enhance both resilience and readiness – without having to navigate separate legal systems.

If a victim can swiftly convert a Military Protective Order (MPO) into a temporary protection from abuse order, we are helping to ensure consistent safety across jurisdictions, which is crucial for a population that relocates often.

Violence and harmful behavior extend well beyond an individual victim, as the effects of violence directly impact our service members, their families, the units to which they are assigned, and our greater national security. The Department of Defense is committed to a coordinated community response regarding reports of violence, and there are several ways a state may implement statutory changes on the local level, to include recognizing MPOs as evidence when seeking to obtain a

temporary protection from abuse order.

A Military Protective Order is an order issued by a commanding officer to protect a victim of alleged abuse, harassment, or threats; and that order restricts the actions and movements of the service member who is alleged to have committed harmful behaviors. These orders are typically issued in situations involving domestic violence, sexual assault, harassment, or other threats to safety, and they are meant to prevent further harm and ensure the safety of victims.

Military protective orders are not recognized or enforced off installations, therefore, military commanders in the state have limited authority over service member actions that occur off an installation. Explicitly allowing Military Protective Orders to be introduced as evidence when a victim is seeking to obtain a temporary protection from abuse order will provide victims of violence or harmful behavior greater access to protections, services, and victim advocacy efforts that would not have been available through a standard military protective order on installation. Additionally, victims may not have to relive their trauma twice: once when obtaining a military protective order, and again with seeking to obtain a civilian protective order or restraining order.

Simply put, these policy changes have the potential to enhance the mission-readiness of our force. A service member's ability to perform hinges on stability, and unresolved threats of violence can sap their concentration, physical well-being, and trust in their surroundings; directly impacting unit cohesion and mission success.

We thank the Committee for considering this proposal and are especially grateful for the tremendous efforts Maine has historically made in supporting our service members and their families. We also thank the bill sponsors Rep. Morgan Rielly, Senator Hickman and Representative Supica for their support.

Should you have any questions, I can be reached at [melissa.j.willette3.civ@mail.mil](mailto:melissa.j.willette3.civ@mail.mil) or 703-623-2035.

Respectfully Submitted,

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