



1212 New York Ave. N.W.
Suite 900
Washington, D.C. 20005
202-525-5717

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Testimony from:
Marc Hyden, Director of State Government Affairs, R Street Institute

In SUPPORT of HB 914, “Military Spouses; licensed in other states to practice certain professions; obtain a license by endorsement to practice in this state; provide”

February 19, 2020

House Government Affairs Committee

Chairman and members of the committee,

My name is Marc Hyden, and I am a Georgia resident and the director of state government affairs for the R Street Institute—a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization. Our mission is to engage in policy research and outreach to promote free markets and limited, effective government in many areas, including occupational licensing reform, and that’s why HB 914 is of special interest to us.

Georgia is home to an extraordinarily large population of active military personnel—over 61,000 reside in the Peach State at any given time.¹ This buttresses Georgia’s economy, but it also comes with challenges, because on average servicemembers are relocated about 10 times as frequently as civilians.² This creates an air of uncertainty for military members, and it can be economically devastating for their spouses.

Roughly 53 percent of servicemembers are married,³ and between 35 and 50 percent of those spouses work in industries that require occupational licenses.⁴ This means that with every move, in addition to finding new jobs to provide for their families, military spouses must labor to obtain new occupational

¹ “Military Active-Duty Personnel, Civilians by State,” *Governing*, September 2017.
<https://www.governing.com/gov-data/public-workforce-salaries/military-civilian-active-duty-employee-workforce-numbers-by-state.html>.

² Jessica Dickler, “Military families face financial hurdles,” *CNN Money*, March 27, 2017.
<https://money.cnn.com/2012/03/27/pf/military-families>.

³ “2016 Demographics Profile of the Military Community,” U.S. Dept. of Defense, 2016.
<https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2016-Demo-graphics-Report.pdf>.

⁴ See, e.g., Council of Economic Advisers, “Military Spouses in the Labor Market,” Executive Office of the President, May 2018. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Military-Spouses-in-the-Labor-Market.pdf>; “Military Spouse Study Finds High Number of Female Spouses Underemployed,” *Syracuse News Health and Society*, Feb. 11, 2014. <https://news.syr.edu/blog/2014/02/11/military-spouse-study-finds-high-number-of-female-spouses-underemployed-15198>.

licenses, which can be time-consuming and costly. Often they must take additional exams, pursue further education and pay for the privilege of being allowed to work.

This process makes life unnecessarily difficult for our servicemembers' families. Nationally, 35 to 40 percent of military spouses are underemployed,⁵ and their unemployment rate is a staggering 16 percent.⁶ Couple this with the fact that servicemembers are largely paid paltry sums, and it becomes clear how difficult it is for military spouses to survive and support their families.⁷ This increases the likelihood that military spouses will be forced to seek taxpayer-funded assistance following such moves.

Georgia lawmakers attempted to address this in 2015, but the legislation didn't go far enough. It gave Georgia licensing boards the option to recognize out-of-state licenses of military spouses who are transferred to Georgia, but they are not required to do so. What's more, the law was written in a confusing way, requiring out-of-state licensees to "substantially meet or surpass" Georgia's licensing requirements in order to be recognized. In many ways this phrasing is semantically null.

In an attempt to rectify this, Representative Heath Clark's bill follows the framework found in other states, which requires state licensing boards to provide expedited licensure by endorsement to military spouses with out-of-state licenses in good standing, provided they have relocated here due to a military transfer. However, they still must meet the majority of Georgia's licensing requirements, thus ensuring they are qualified to work here. I applaud this effort because it will help military spouses get back to work and provide for their families while reducing reliance on taxpayer-funded assistance and benefiting Georgia's economy.

Thank you for your time,

Marc Hyden
Director, State Government Affairs
R Street Institute
(404) 918-2731
mhyden@rstreet.org

⁵ "Military Spouses in the Workplace," US Chamber Foundation, June 2017.

<https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Military%20Spouses%20in%20the%20Workplace.pdf>.

⁶ Betsy Klein, "Ivanka Trump spotlights military spouses' employment challenges," CNN, Aug. 2, 2017.

<https://www.cnn.com/2017/08/02/politics/ivanka-trump-military-spouses-employment/index.html>.

⁷ Caitlin Foster, "Military pay: This is how much US troops are paid according to their rank," *Business Insider*, Feb. 15, 2019. <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-much-military-service-members-make-2019-2>.