

Testimony by Mark San Souci, February 18, 2013

Alaska House Labor & Commerce Committee on HB 84

Mister Chair and committee, thank you for this opportunity to express Department of Defense support for the veterans credit House Bill 84. My name is Mark San Souci, Department of Defense Regional Liaison for Military Families for the Northwest, working for the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Family & Community Policy. I'm sorry I can't be there in person today, but since DoD has frozen its travel budget, I hope to be able to visit for future hearings on this issue.

Last year this committee passed this same legislation sponsored by Rep Thomas, as HB 282....passing the full house unanimously on February 1st. Unfortunately, it languished on the senate floor on April 15th and Sine Die came and went without final passage...

Two years ago, the Department of Defense began supporting efforts in the states to ask states to give separating Service members credit, so that they may not be held back from finding employment or finishing a degree.

As of September 2012, 736 thousand Veterans were unemployed and the jobless rate for post-9/11 veterans was 9.9 %, with young male Veterans (ages 18 to 24) experiencing an unemployment rate of 18.1%.

In the past two years, 25 states enacted new laws to help grant our veterans credit towards licensing and/or academic credit. So far for the 2013 session, there are 24 bills in 18 more states resembling the one before you today that we ask you to support.

It is important to reemphasize that you know we are not asking for direct licensure if it is not equivalent. In cases where the regulatory agency or board determines partial credit but it saves time and expense and helps get them there, even if not completely, that is what we seek. We only seek credit where credit is due.

A couple of other points to consider: You and I have *already* paid for this veteran's training within the DoD schools and with years of experience while serving our Nation with our *federal* tax dollars.

Also, the more credit given to a veteran towards licensing or a degree or certification, the more school slots can be made available to civilians, especially in programs where may be waiting lists to get in.

The Department of Defense is doing its part, working feverishly with the US Department of Labor to link service transcripts of military occupations with civilian to private sector licensure requirements, while also asking state regulatory authorities in six pilot states - WA, IL, MD, NY, VA, and CO, to review select military occupations to determine whether the training and experience are sufficient to be useful in rendering licensing credit in a given occupation.

The Department of Defense recognizes that if we are going to ask credentialing bodies to evaluate military training and experience, we have to make it easier for them to do so, minimizing any fiscal impact.

First, there are currently different Service transcripts that record the training, experience, and education received by Service members. We are working with the Services and with credentialing organizations to see how we can better standardize the information and make it more understandable to non-military audiences.

Second, since some credentials require an individual to have completed an approved or accredited training program, we are determining which credentials related to military occupations require training program approval or accreditation and identify methods of facilitating this.

Finally, a key aspect of providing accrediting and credentialing agencies the ability to assess military training is making the training programs of instruction (POIs) available to them for review. Currently, the Services each have their own policies and procedures related to development and maintenance of POIs and there is no centralized location for agencies to access them. Ensuring POIs have some degree of standardization and are more easily accessible to accrediting and credentialing agencies and educational institutions will make it easier for them to assess whether the military training courses meet their criteria.

For federally-regulated occupations, steps have recently been put in place to overcome these obstacles. The recently enacted Veteran Skills to Jobs Act of 2012 now requires federal agencies that issue licenses to consider any veteran trained in the same field to have received instruction enough to meet federal requirements. This means that the various federal agencies, which issue between 80 to 100 licenses relevant to military training, can now issue veterans qualifying licenses without the veteran having to re-qualify on the civilian side.

Some of the licenses include air-traffic controllers, aircraft mechanics and technicians, flight engineers, hospital corpsmen, ship or boat captains, radio operators, ship engineers, and the like...

And finally, DoD has just announced the Joint Service Transcript, the JST...a common “purple” transcript generic to all the military services meant to ease the burden of translating one service’s coding and descriptions of courses and training from another on the evaluation of academic transcripts, on February 4th, and available on March 1st! The JST will be an official transcript tool that validates and documents the recommended college credits for professional military education, training courses and occupational experience of service members and veterans. This unified and standardized document will make it easier for institutions to review and articulate these credits as appropriate.

As you very well know, Alaska is home to thousands of veterans, and is a desired location for separating and retiring military members when choosing where to live after leaving the military. A 2012 Defense Manpower Data Center

Study reported that Alaska had 1,231 military separate or retire back to Alaska in Fiscal Year 2012.

At around 1,231 annually, we can expect that highly qualified ex-military people will continue to enjoy Alaska's quality of life, and many will continue to choose Alaska when transitioning into civilian careers.

We ask this committee and this legislature in Alaska to join the other states and rising now in session and considering this help for our veterans, along with those that did it in 2012.

Thank you for taking up this issue, and for your consideration. I stand by for any questions you may have.