



THE STATE  
of ALASKA  
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

## Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs

Office of the Commissioner

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February 2, 2018

The Honorable Chris Tuck, Chair  
Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs  
Alaska House of Representatives  
Alaska State Capitol, Room 204  
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Chair Tuck:

I write to offer three frames of reference through which to view the testimony provided Thursday on military service member and military spouse occupational licensing in Alaska.

First, the military component perspective. Secretary of the Air Force Deborah James spoke at the Association of Defense Communities National Summit last summer. She explained the vital role communities play in base viability by meeting the needs of military service members. In her words: "We recruit airmen, but retain families." In other words, family needs are the biggest determinant of whether a service member chooses to remain on active duty until retirement. Those service members who leave because of family needs constitute a tremendous loss to the organization and the nation in terms of the cost of training, real world experience, and maximizing readiness.

As she explained, those critical family needs are straightforward. When a service member is assigned to a new base, s/he asks three questions: What is the housing like in which my family and I will live? What are the schools like for my children? Can my spouse find meaningful employment?

A community that does not have positive answers to these three questions creates family stressors that hurt retention. In turn, this creates a disincentive for the military to invest in and grow military force structure at bases where the answers to these questions are hurting retention. Of note, optimizing military spouse occupational licensing presents a means to address one of these questions with minimal public or private sector funding compared to the other issues.

Second, the business perspective. On Tuesday, the Anchorage Economic Development Corporation released its 2018 Economic Forecast. Of note from polling business owners, the lack of skilled/professional workers was identified as the fourth highest barrier to business growth next year, with 59 percent of the respondents identifying it as a problem. Optimizing military spouse and military education-based occupational licensing provides a cost effective way to fill at least part of this gap.

Finally, the veterans' perspective. When service members prepare to leave the military at the end of their terms of enlistment or at retirement, they attend formal transition assistance program (TAP) briefings and classes. The TAP provides assistance with resume writing, interview practice, and job-hunting. In classes in Alaska in which I have conducted mock interviews, 30-40 percent of attendees stated their wishes to remain in Alaska after separation from the military. Far fewer actually do. The overwhelming reason is the lack of confirmed employment. Optimizing military spouse and military education-based occupational licensing assures all career paths appropriate to their education and training are available to these new veterans and their spouses.

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Numerically, the Alaska veteran population is growing by about five percent, or 3,500 per year. Virtually all of these new veterans are within their work life expectancy. Appropriate occupational licensing enhances our ability to retain them as Alaskans.

I hope this information is useful. Thank you for your efforts to engage our service members and their families in all aspects of life here in Alaska. Please let me know if I may be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert A. K. Doehl". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robert A. K. Doehl  
Deputy Commissioner