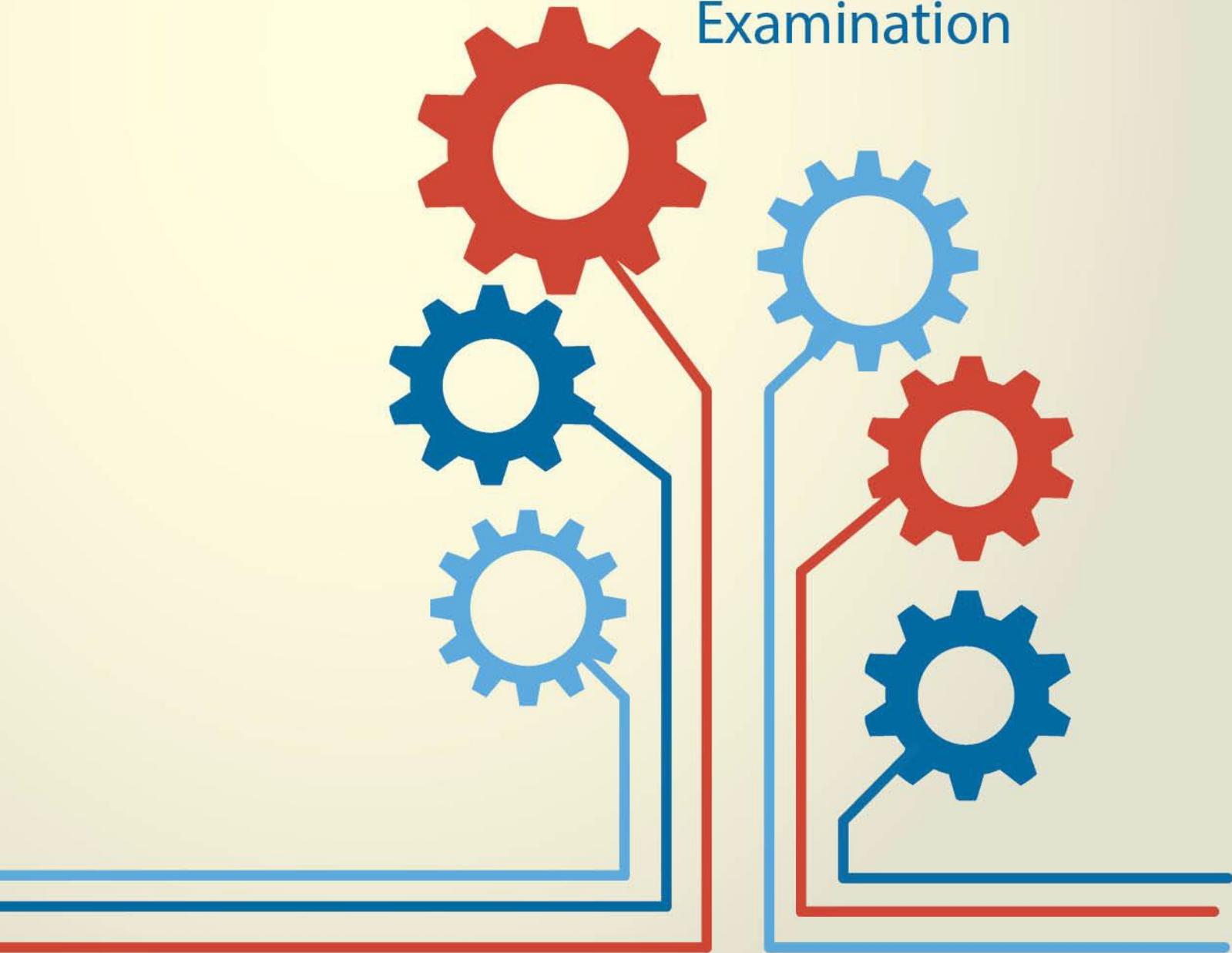


# Military Spouse Licensure Portability Examination



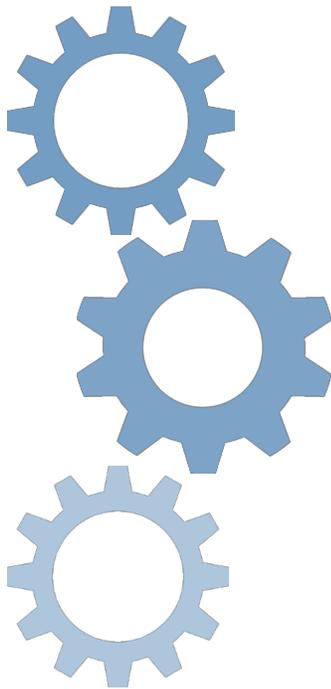
November 2017

## Submitted by:

The Center for Research and Outreach (REACH)  
The University of Minnesota

The Center for Research and Outreach (REACH) at the University of Minnesota supports the DoD-USDA Partnership for Military Families, utilizes a multi-disciplinary approach integrating both Research and Outreach to support those who work with and on behalf of military families. REACH provides empirical research that identifies and addresses key issues impacting military families and the programs that serve them.

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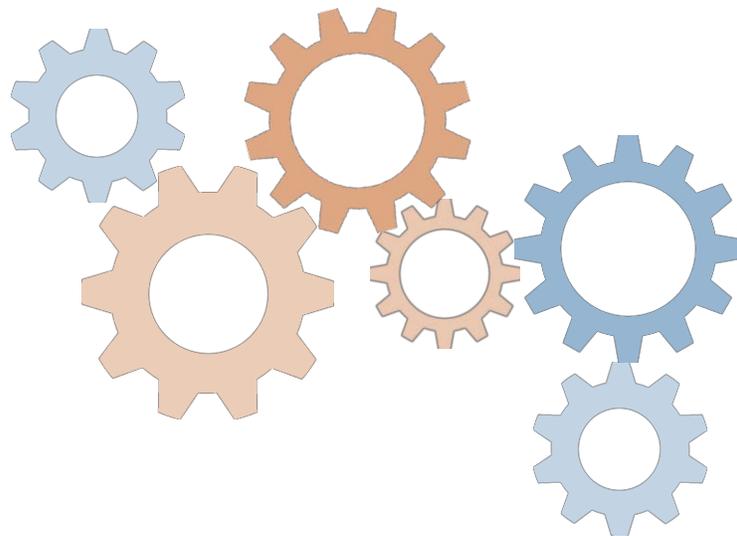


Developed in collaboration with the Department of Defense's Office of Family Policy, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture under The University of Minnesota Award No. 2016-48788-25895.

# Military Spouse Licensure Portability Examination

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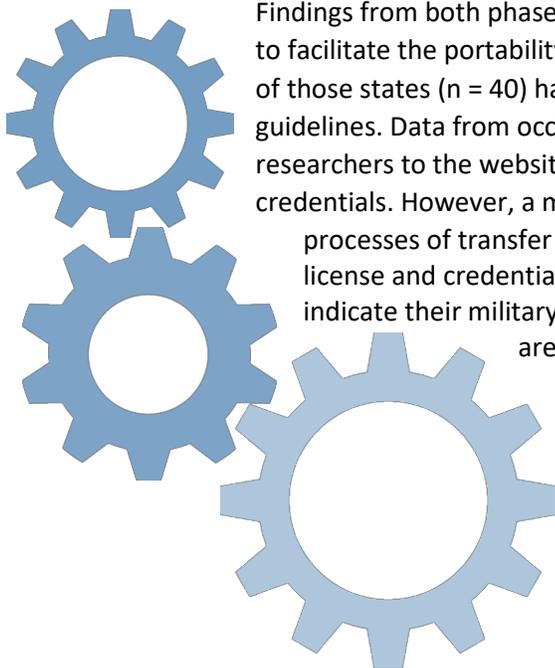
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## Executive Summary

The well-being of military spouses can significantly impact Service members. Moreover, military spouses' well-being is influenced by several factors, such as their career options and mobility of employment. Since many military spouses work in careers that require licenses or credentials, it is important to understand how they can maintain their licensure as they navigate the many changes (e.g., multiple relocations) military families experience. To facilitate the transfer of licenses and credentials for military spouses, the Department of Defense (DoD) proposed three best practices guidelines to encourage states to facilitate licensure by endorsement, temporary or provisional licensing, and expedited application processes. To increase understanding of how these guidelines have been implemented across the United States, the DoD developed the Military Spouse Licensure Portability Examination (MSLPE) project. The Center for Research and Outreach at the University of Minnesota worked in collaboration with the Defense State Liaison Office (DSLO) on two main MSLPE project goals: review current state legislation on the portability of licenses and credentials for military spouses and interview six occupational boards in each state to assess how these best practices are implemented.

To achieve the project's goals there were two phases. During the first phase, the Center for Research and Outreach research team reviewed enacted state legislation that could apply to military spouse licensure portability. This legislation was examined in order to determine how each state addressed the best practices guidelines compiled by the DoD from their work with states. During the second phase, six occupational boards were contacted either via telephone or email to inquire about the process specific to military spouses who are new residents and fully licensed in their previous jurisdiction. The second phase also included a detailed review of occupational board websites and supplemental information (e.g., license applications).



Findings from both phases indicate that most states (n = 48) have enacted legislation to facilitate the portability of licenses and credentials for military spouses and most of those states (n = 40) have implemented at least two of the best practices guidelines. Data from occupational board staff interviews revealed that staff directed researchers to the website to find answers to questions about transfer of licenses and credentials. However, a majority of the websites did not contain information about processes of transfer specific for military spouses, and most applications for license and credential transfers did not contain questions that allowed spouses to indicate their military status. Based on the project's findings, recommendations are offered that center around continued advocacy for military spouse licensure portability at state level; collaboration with lawmakers to encourage the inclusion of all three best practices; and training of occupational board staff to increase their knowledge of state legislation regarding military spouse licensure portability.

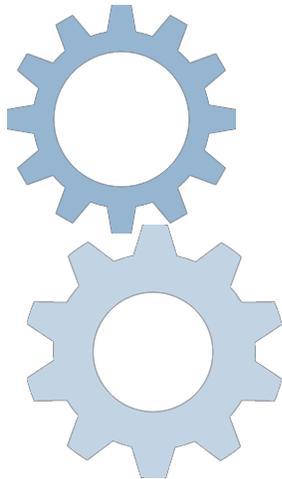
## Military Spouse Licensure Portability Examination

Healthy family adjustment and functioning contribute significantly to military operational readiness of Service members (Schneider & Martin, 2000). Moreover, the adjustment and functioning of military families is often influenced by the well-being of military spouses (Green, Nurius, & Lester, 2013). Given the impact of the well-being of military spouses on overall family functioning, it is important to identify what influences spouses' well-being. An area that is often identified as a stressor for military spouses that can impact their well-being is experiences with employment (Castaneda & Harrell, 2008). For example, during a permanent change of station, military spouses experience considerable changes in multiple areas of their lives without much time to prepare. They can experience alterations within their family, their partners' military careers, and their own careers. For the 50 percent of military spouses who work in careers that require state licensure or credentials, it may be difficult to acquire licensure or credentials that will allow them to pursue their career in a new state (Maury & Stone, 2014). Over 40 percent of these military spouses have had difficulty with portability of licensure or credentials after a permanent change of station, which has been identified as a factor that contributes to employment gaps and underemployment within military families (Maury & Stone, 2014). Gaps in employment and underemployment lead to additional stress and financial strain that could also impact military spouses' health and well-being (Lim & Schulker, 2010) as well as Service members' military readiness (Segal, Lane, & Fisher, 2015). Successful legislation that facilitates the portability of military spouse licensure and credentials can offer military spouses the opportunity to maintain employment during geographic relocations and mitigate financial stress for military families (Kersey, 2013). Therefore, it is essential to gain a deeper understanding of the legislation that governs the portability of military spouse licensure and credentials in each state and how that legislation is implemented.

### Current Project

To increase support for military families who relocate due to official military orders, the Department of Defense (DoD) submitted, *Supporting our Military Families: Best Practices for Streamlining Occupational Licensing Across State Lines*, that identifies three best practice guidelines each state could implement to ease the transfer of licenses and certificates for spouses of Active Duty Service members. These best practices consist of recommendations to facilitate license transfer by encouraging states to offer licensure by three types of transfer options: endorsement, temporary or provisional licensing, and expedited application processes (Department of Defense, 2012). Licensure by endorsement refers to occupational boards not requiring an examination for military spouses to transfer their licenses. Spouses are eligible for licensure by endorsement if they currently possess a license from a previous jurisdiction with similar requirements as the board's requirements in the current jurisdiction. Guidelines on temporary or provisional licensure are to grant spouses permission to practice in the current jurisdiction while they submit supplemental application materials and/or meet additional requirements. Expedited application processes allow spouses' applications to be prioritized so that they may begin employment as soon as possible after they submit their completed applications (Department of Defense, 2012).





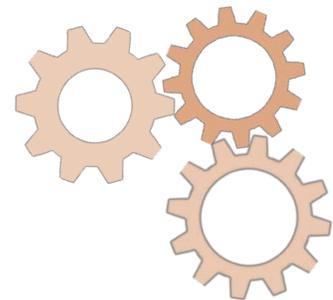
After five years of states enacting legislation to address the best practices for military spouse license portability, there is a need to review legislation and survey occupational boards to better assess the extent to which the best practices guidelines are being met in each state. Although there is variability as to how licensing agencies manage transfers of licenses or credentials for military spouses (e.g., Tex. Occ. Laws ch. 55 §001-009, 2015), it remains unclear how licensing and credentialing boards implement the legislation and what information and support are available to military spouses to ensure the transfer of licenses or credentials is completed in a timely and efficient manner.

To facilitate the understanding of how the guidelines have been implemented, the DoD developed the Military Spouse Licensure Portability Examination (MSLPE) project. The Center for Research and Outreach at the University of Minnesota worked in collaboration with the Defense State Liaison Office (DSLO) to meet the project's overarching goal of determining the strength and effectiveness of states' legislation in removing impediments to the portability of licensure and credentials for military spouses experiencing geographic relocation. From this broad goal, smaller goals and objectives were identified to execute the grant.

### Goals and Objectives

The primary goal of this project is to collect and synthesize pertinent data on current legislation and practices of state-level occupational boards regarding licensure portability for military spouses. A secondary goal is to offer recommendations based on the collected data that can be applied to state, regional, and national efforts to ease the transfer of military spouses' licenses and certifications. To meet this goal, there were three objectives that guided the direction and activities: examine the current legislation in each state that applies to military spouse licensure portability; collect data from occupational boards as to how the legislation is implemented; and offer recommendations based on these findings. To accomplish these objectives, there were two phases.

During the first phase, the state legislation regarding military spouse licensure portability from all 50 states and Washington D.C. was reviewed. During the second phase, data from occupational staff interviews, websites, and other sources were collected to identify the process for transferring out-of-state licenses and credentials for military spouses. As determined by the DoD, the following occupational boards were contacted: Cosmetology, Dental Hygiene, Massage Therapy, Mental Health Counseling, Occupational Therapy, and Real Estate Commission.



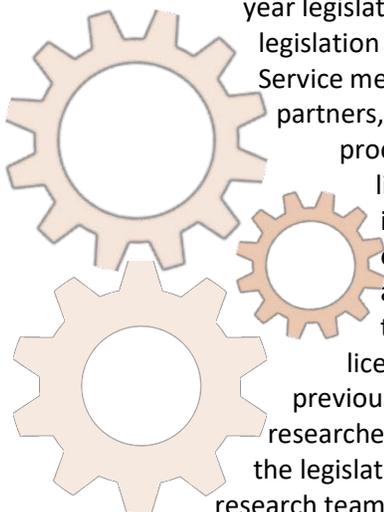
The DoD selected these six occupations by excluding those with considerations impacting the review of the implementation of changes in law and then selecting those identified as having increased applicability for military spouses. Occupations were excluded from the review process if there were other initiatives that impacted license portability (such as compacts for nursing and physical therapists) or if there were no improvements made in law that would have required implementation (such as teacher certification). Occupations were selected from the remaining potential list of candidates if the occupation was listed by a number of sources as being an occupation with growing market potential or increased applicability for military spouses (to include military spouses pursuing academic qualifications

in the occupation through the DoD My Career Advancement Account). In order to collect comprehensive and accurate data, thorough procedures were developed to facilitate systematic review of legislation, scripted calls with occupational boards, and detailed reviews of occupational board websites.

## Methods

To address the aforementioned objectives of the MSLPE project, the Center for Research and Outreach's research team conducted every facet of the research activities. Each phase of the project had a different focus that was accompanied by a different set of methods and procedures.

**Phase One.** During the first phase of the project (November 2016 to January 2017), two research scientists separately reviewed enacted state legislation that could apply to military spouse licensure portability. This legislation included states that created new legislation specifically aimed at military spouses and states with existing legislation about transferring licenses and credentials for new residents. State legislation was examined in order to determine how each state addressed the identified best practices guidelines, either with legislation prior to or since these best practices guidelines. Specifically, two research scientist separately reviewed legislation to assess and code the following variables: (1) year legislation was enacted; (2) spouses' Service members' status to benefit from the legislation (e.g., Active Duty, National Guard or Reserves, Veterans, or deceased Service member); (3) definition of type of legal union (e.g., married, domestic partners, etc.) needed to benefit from license portability accommodations; (4) process of transfer (e.g., transfer of license via endorsement, temporary license, and/or expedited procedures); (5) requirements of supplemental information with application (e.g., background check, continuing education requirements); (6) timeline of temporary license, as applicable; (7) length of time spouses have to benefit from the bill from the time of relocation (e.g., 30 days, six months, etc.); and (8) temporary license granted by new state or spouses allowed to practice occupation with previous state's license, if applicable. Upon reviewing each state separately, the researchers discussed their findings together to ensure they interpreted and coded the legislation similarly. When differences occurred, these were discussed by the research team and a representative from the DSLO to resolve the discrepant codes. Also during Phase One, the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) was contacted to better understand what the organization has identified as concerns of military spouses regarding portability of licenses and credentials.



The in-depth reviews of state legislation and informal interview with a representative from MOAA allowed the research team to better understand the details of the legislation and concerns of military spouses regarding employment, respectively. Furthermore, these data were used as a basis to generate questions for occupational board staff for the second phase of the project.

**Phase Two.** During the second phase of the project (April to June 2017), the first step was an initial thorough review of occupational boards' websites and supplemental materials (e.g., online applications) of each state and Washington D.C. This review yielded important information about each board's rules and regulations related to portability of licenses and credentials. The second step involved contacting each board either via telephone or email to inquire about the process to transfer licenses or credentials

specific to military spouses who are new residents and fully licensed in their previous jurisdiction. The research team reviewed the websites and supplemental materials and conducted the interviews. Each researcher was trained on a pre-approved script that was used when contacting boards (see Appendix A for script used for phone calls and emails) and all states and the District of Columbia were contacted.

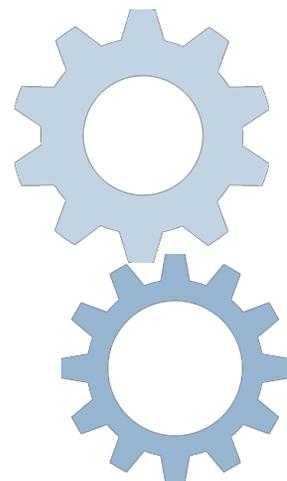
## Results

As expected, there were numerous notable findings from the reviews of state legislation and the interviews with staff at occupational boards. In the following sections, trends and patterns are presented to help inform stakeholders (e.g., military personnel, legislators, service organizations) of rules and policies related to military spouse licensure portability. In addition, a brief summary of each occupational board's process of transferring licenses and credentials are located in the appendix of this report (see Appendix B).

**Interview with MOAA representative.** Military spouses often consult with MOAA for resources and information about advocacy and efforts that may improve their lives. When military spouses encounter issues with transferring their professional licenses to different states, MOAA often encourages them to do their own research on what the process of transfer is in their new state. Further, MOAA recommends that spouses reference the legislation on military spouse portability of licensure when inquiring about their new state's requirements. According to MOAA, many spouses have reported that state occupational boards are not aware of the legislation or interpret the legislation very conservatively, such as not allowing for substitutions of requirements (e.g., substituting work experience for education requirements) needed in applications for license transfers. MOAA indicated that it can be burdensome for spouses who have to do their own research and advocate for themselves to transfer their licenses to a new state. Further, MOAA indicates that many spouses maintain licenses from previous states because they are concerned that their family may be moved to a state where they already lived and they do not want their previous licenses to expire. Important advice from MOAA for military spouses who will be transferring their licenses secondary to a PCS is: request and maintain multiple copies of all information (e.g., college transcripts, documentation of supervised hours) in case there will be multiple upcoming moves.

**Legislation.** Reviews of state legislation were conducted over three months and served as the basis for many of the questions posed during the interviews with staff at occupational boards. Of note, Connecticut, Iowa, Montana, Pennsylvania, and Washington D.C. do not have any enacted legislation that is specific to portability of licensure for military spouses. However, Connecticut and Montana have enacted general legislation that is consistent with one of the three and all three of the best practice guidelines, respectively. Iowa, Pennsylvania, and Washington D.C. have policies about transfers of licenses and credentials that are determined by occupational boards. Further descriptions regarding these distinctions can be found in the state report summaries (Appendix B). The following is a summary of findings from the state legislation reviews:

- About half of the states (including Washington D.C.; n = 24) have legislation specific to military spouses that encompasses all three of the best practices guidelines (i.e., licensure by endorsement, temporary licenses, and expedited licenses): Alabama, Arkansas,



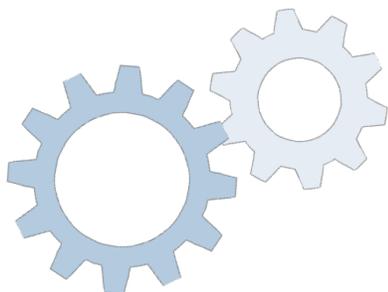
California, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Montana, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia and Washington.

- Approximately a quarter of the states (n = 16) have legislation that proposes two of the best practices guidelines for military spouses portability: endorsement and temporary – Delaware, Florida, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Wisconsin, and Wyoming; temporary and expedited – Alaska, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, New York, and West Virginia; and endorsement and expedited - New Mexico.
- A minority of states (n = 8) have legislation that proposes one of the best practices guidelines for military spouses portability: endorsement – Arizona, Connecticut, Nevada, New Hampshire, and Utah; and temporary - Michigan, Missouri and Nebraska.
- Legislation in California and Oregon include domestic partners as eligible to benefit from bills regarding military spouse licensure portability.
- Most state legislation specify that military spouses must submit proof of Service members' military status in order for spouses to benefit from the bill. State legislation from the following states also include spouses of Veterans and/or deceased Service members as eligible to benefit from bills regarding military spouse licensure portability: Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, New Mexico, and Vermont.

Even though all states and Washington D.C. have legislation or occupational board policies that support new residents' portability of occupational licenses and credentials from previous states and jurisdictions, most states (n = 48) have also enacted legislation specific for military spouses. Furthermore, over half of the states with enacted legislation (n = 40) have included at least two of the best practice guidelines to lessen or remove impediments for spouses.

Among the 48 states that have enacted legislation specific to military spouse licensure portability, there is a diverse range of language used to describe how occupational boards are either required or encouraged to facilitate portability of licenses and credentials for spouses. The wording of legislation is crucial and has implications not only for the occupational boards' rules regarding portability, but the experiences of military spouses. One phrase that was frequently observed during the review of state legislation is "substantially equivalent" when describing education requirements military spouses need to transfer their licenses. Although using this phrase allows each board to determine the necessary requirements to meet before issuing licenses, due to its ambiguity, the phrase is also likely to lead to a lack of clarity for military spouses about the experience or information they must possess.

Another common use of language among state legislation is the use of "shall" or "may" to describe the extent to which occupational boards are directed to remove barriers for military spouses. Legislation in most states (n = 35) use "shall" or "must" in describing how occupational boards should facilitate licensure portability, while seven states use "may" and four states use both "shall" and "may." Examples of the variability of language include legislation from Nebraska, which indicates occupational boards *shall* issue temporary licenses while legislation in Alaska indicates boards *shall* expedite the issuance of licenses, but *may* issue temporary licenses. The wide variability in language among the states may have contributed to the considerable range of processes of transfer for spouses relocating to various states.



**Interviews.** Interviews of staff at occupational boards (Cosmetology, Dental Hygiene, Massage Therapy, Mental Health Counseling, Occupational Therapy, and Real Estate Commission) were conducted over three months. Six occupational boards were contacted in 50 states and Washington D.C., totaling 306 initial contacts (via telephone and email) to boards around the country. Although staff at most boards were able to be contacted during the initial phone call or email correspondence, 44% of boards (n = 135) were not accessible on the first attempt and required at least one follow-up attempt. Out of 306 occupational boards, three boards never returned phone calls or emails for an interview: Mental Health Counseling Board in Oklahoma and the Dentistry and Cosmetology Boards in Washington D.C. The following is a list of notable observations from the data collected from occupational board staff, websites, and other supplemental materials (see Appendix B for each state report):

- Occupational board staff routinely directed researchers to the website at the onset of the phone call or in response to emails for researchers to find answers to their interview questions.
- All occupational boards had information about obtaining a license on the website; however, only about 44% (n = 135) had information specific to military spouse license portability.
- There was a wide variation among which occupational board staff answered interview questions. For many occupational boards, the customer service representative who answered the board's phone calls indicated they could provide answers about the process for military spouses to transfer their licenses; while at other boards the phone calls or emails were forwarded to licensing or credentialing specialists, supervisors/managers, or board directors to answer questions.
- As expected, licensing or credentialing specialists, supervisors/managers, and board directors were frequently aware of their state's legislation regarding military spouse licensure portability. Customer service representatives were most often not aware of the legislation specific to military spouses.
- Cosmetology boards had the fewest requirements to transfer licenses from another state in that they usually only required proof of a previous license and proof of schooling and/or a minimum number of hours in training. Cosmetology boards typically do not require state-specific exams and had the shortest period of time between submitting a completed application and issuing a license.
- Real Estate Commissions had the most requirements to transfer licenses from another state in that they did not typically accept reciprocal licenses and most states require completion of state-specific pre-licensing coursework as well as a state jurisprudence exam.
- Most occupational board websites and staff did not indicate how military spouses should identify themselves in order to benefit from accommodations to their license applications. However, numerous staff stated that they believed spouses would call the board as the primary way to identify themselves. Few boards had applications (electronic or paper) where spouses could indicate their military status. Therefore, many occupational boards may not be aware of how many military spouses apply for licensure.

Occupational board staff interviews revealed several common procedures (e.g., staff routinely referenced their board's website and customer service representatives were often the staff to answer interview questions), but also a wide variability of licensure requirements that military spouses will likely encounter as they relocate to different states. The data that were gathered from the review of state legislation and the staff interviews have important implications for future policies and programs that could support military spouse licensure portability.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Licensure and credential portability is a national issue for many professionals across numerous disciplines (e.g., Kels & Kels, 2013). For military spouses, licensure and credential portability continues to be a concern because of the impediments that exist as spouses attempt to reengage in employment after a relocation due to military orders (Department of Defense, 2012). In order to determine if best practices guidelines identified by the DoD have been addressed by states across the country, the Center for Research and Outreach assessed the current state legislation and occupational boards' practices. Notable findings from the review of state legislation indicate that most states (n = 48) have enacted legislation to facilitate the portability of licenses and credentials for military spouses and more than half of those states (n = 40) have implemented at least two of the best practices guidelines. Moreover, findings from the interviews of occupational board staff revealed that most staff directed researchers to the website to find answers to questions about transfer of licenses and credentials. However, a majority of the websites did not contain information about processes of transfer specific to military spouses. Further, most applications for license and credential transfers did not contain questions that allowed spouses to indicate their military status. There are several recommendations based on the findings presented in this report. Recommendations that are specific to occupational boards in each state are offered in the individual state reports (see Appendix B).



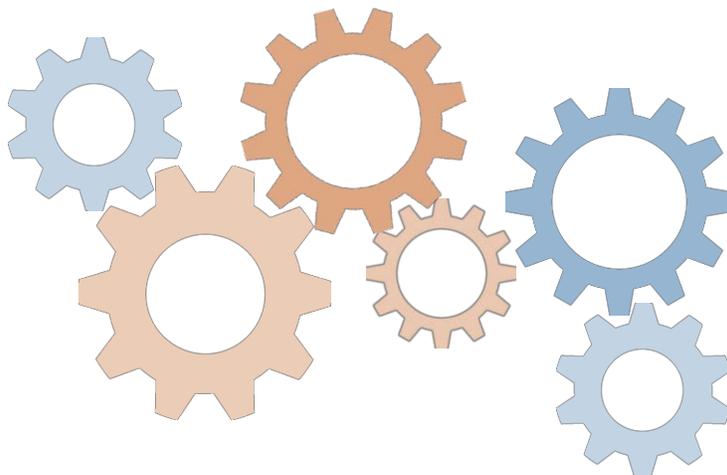
Future efforts to improve programs and policies could:

- Collaborate with occupational boards to prominently display information about accommodations for military spouses who are transferring their licenses and credentials due to relocations. For example, request that all occupational board websites contain a link to the legislation on portability of licensure for military spouses. The link on the website will increase exposure and accessibility of this information for staff as well as military families.
- Broadly disseminate education materials to help occupational board staff improve their understanding of state legislation regarding portability of military spouse licensure and their ability to support military spouses during the application process. Whenever possible encourage occupational boards to identify a specific staff member who can serve as a point of contact for military spouses.
- Encourage occupational board executive directors to include questions that inquire about military status on all licensure applications, electronic or paper, especially for applications to transfer licenses and credentials from another jurisdiction.
- Continue to advocate, including in collaboration with MOAA and other national military service organizations, for military spouses who maintain licenses in previous states by encouraging accommodations in continuing education requirements to facilitate their ability to maintain active licenses.
- Develop trainings for professionals who work with military families on the best practices guidelines for military spouse licensure portability, the relevant legislation that has been enacted, and ways to support spouses who are transferring their occupational licenses or credentials.

- Collaborate with occupational licensing boards to collect annual data regarding the number of military spouses that utilize different process of transfer (endorsement, temporary licenses, and expedited licenses).
- Advocate for inclusion of all three best practices guidelines among state legislation that addresses two or fewer guidelines.
- Continue to support lawmakers who are introducing bills in states that have not yet enacted specific legislation that addresses the portability of licensure for military spouses.

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## Appendix A - Script for Interviews with Occupational Boards

### **Introduction**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ from the University of Minnesota and I am calling to better understand the process by which military spouses can transfer their \_\_\_\_\_ (name of the license issued by the board you're calling) license. Is there someone I may speak with who might be able to talk to me about this topic?

Hello Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_, thank you for your time. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am calling from University of Minnesota on behalf of the Defense -State Liaison Office at the Department of Defense. The goal of this office is to help improve states' policies and systems to help military families. We're gathering information about how occupational licensing boards across the country support military spouses as they transfer their professional licenses when their spouses are reassigned to \_\_\_\_\_ (name of the state). May I ask you some questions about this process?

### **Process of Transfer**

(Ask only for states that have separate legislation for military spouses' licensure portability)

Are you aware that in \_\_\_\_\_ (name of state) there is legislation that supports the portability for military spouses?

Do you have a unique process or point of contact for military spouses?

Do you allow for licensure by:

1. **Endorsement** –allowing for options that accommodate gaps in employment for military spouses with active licenses from another state;
2. Issue **temporary licenses** - allowing a military spouse with a current license to secure employment while completing state requirements or while awaiting verification for an endorsement;
3. **Expedite** procedures for approval to provide opportunity for spouses to obtain an endorsed or temporary license.

What is the average length of time it takes to get a license transferred once spouses have moved?

Are there any exceptions to the process of transfers of licenses that you inform spouses about?

Are you aware of any employers not accepting temporary licenses?

If spouses need to show credentials that are substantially equivalent, how is “substantially equivalent” determined by the board?

### **Eligibility Based on Service Member Status**

1. What status does the military member need to be for the military spouse to be eligible? Active Duty, National Guard/Reserves, Veteran, **deceased**, or any status as long as they are a member of the Armed Forces.
2. Length of time to benefit from the process of transfer (i.e., license endorsement, temporary license, and/or expedited license) based on:
  - a. Service member’s status (e.g., Active Duty vs National Guard/Reserves, deceased)
  - b. How long Service member or spouse have resided in that state (e.g., how many months have lived in the state)

## **Supplemental Information**

1. What additional information do spouses need to provide besides an application and marriage license?
  - a. Current experience
  - b. Past Experience
  - c. Copies of previous licenses

## **Temporary License – when applicable**

1. How long is a temporary license valid?
2. Is there an option to renew temporary license before being issued a permanent license?
3. Is the temporary license provisional?
4. Does the new state issue the spouse a temporary license or is the temporary license consist of just accepting the old state's license?

## **Potential Questions to Gather Additional Information for Reports *(if there is time)***

What do you suggest spouses do to make the transfer of their licenses easier?

Do you know of any local resources to help spouses with this process?

Are you aware of any new legislation or upcoming changes in policies about portability of licensure for military spouses?

Do you have any information about how many military spouses in the last year have transferred their licenses because of a permanent change of station?