

Washington State Military Spouse Listening Tour Emerging Legislative Recommendations

To inform actions and recommendations in response to Governor Inslee’s Executive Order 19-01, the Director of the Washington State Department of Veteran’s Affairs (WDVA), Alfie Alvarado-Ramos, and the Commissioner of the Washington State Employment Security Department (ESD), Suzi LeVine, conducted a statewide listening tour with military spouses at Washington State’s six main military bases during the summer of 2019. Many ideas and recommendations that were raised by spouses and community partners are relevant to legislators.

To make the report easier for both federal and state legislators, the summary below extracts those relevant ideas and recommendations. The full report and other highlights of the tour can be found [here](https://www.dva.wa.gov/about-wdva/washington-state-military-transition-council-wsmtc) (<https://www.dva.wa.gov/about-wdva/washington-state-military-transition-council-wsmtc>). This summary does not constitute recommendations from WDVA and ESD. Rather, it amplifies ideas that came up during the sessions, and reflects stories and situations shared by spouses and service members. The teams at WDVA and ESD are available for any further questions, and can also connect you with spouses and members of the Washington State Military Transition and Readiness Council.

Key military spouse employment challenges identified during the listening sessions include employer relationships and bias, job search support, credential portability and childcare. Ideas and recommendations include:

- **EMPLOYMENT TAX CREDITS.** Expand the Work Opportunity Tax Credit “WOTC” to military spouses¹.
- **EMPLOYMENT CONTRACTS.** Release military spouses from employment contracts without penalty when their families receive Permanent Change of Station “PCS” orders.
- **PROTECTED CLASS.** Add military spouses as a protected class under non-discrimination statutes².
- **INSTALLATION ORIENTATIONS.** Incentivize service members to bring spouses to base orientations^{3, 4, 5}. Institutionalize incentives so that they don’t end when a supportive base commander departs.
- **FEDERAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FUNDING.** Add military spouses to Federal Jobs for Veterans State Grants “JVSG” funding⁶.
- **WORKFORCE INNOVATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES ACT (WIOA) CATEGORY.** Call-out and prioritize military spouses as a WIOA category rather than the current classification of “dislocated worker” and “displaced homemaker,” which is both derogatory and inapplicable when a spouse has not worked at their service member’s previous posting.

- **INFORMATION SHARING.** To reduce the time finding a job in a new location, and reach spouses either prior to PCS or upon arrival at a new location, authorize more data-sharing between DOD, installations, and state workforce agencies, including:
 - Sharing private military spouse contact information with receiving installations prior to PCS.
 - Sharing military spouse demographic information with receiving installations and state veterans and workforce development agencies prior to PCS.
- **NAVIGATORS.** Expand credential and job search navigator services for military spouses⁷.
- **CREDENTIAL ACCELERATION.** Make it easier to use and obtain licenses, certifications, and other credentials after a PCS, including:
 - Promoting interstate compacts and reciprocity agreements, particularly where there are nationally accepted professional credential standards^{8, 9, 10};
 - Supporting provisional licenses and temporary practice permits that allow military spouses with a credential from another state to work while completing additional Washington State license or certificate requirements^{11, 12, 13}.
- **CHILDCARE RESOURCES.** Increase the availability of military family childcare, including:
 - Prioritize Federal funding for military family childcare¹⁴.
 - Ensure childcare availability for non-traditional hours and drop-in care.
 - Increase federal childcare tax credits for military families.
 - Offer an employer childcare tax credit.
 - Increase wages of on-base and off-base childcare workers.
 - Combine funding for childcare and housing¹⁵.
- **HOUSING ALLOWANCE.** Increase the military Basic Allowance for Housing “BAH” at installations in areas with high housing costs and/or low housing stock availability.
- **MILITARY SPOUSE DEFINITION.** While not specific to any of the above topics, spouses and support organizations also advocated for creating an expansive statutory definition of military spouse that includes any person who was previously married to a service member during their time of active duty¹⁶.

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- ¹ U.S. Congresswoman McMorris Rogers co-sponsored bi-partisan legislation (HR 2912) in May 2019.
 - ² EO 19-01 directs state cabinet agencies to remove military spouse bias in state employment.
 - ³ The U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Army have experimented with granting service members an additional day of leave if their spouses attend orientation and gets signed attendance certificates.
 - ⁴ Attendees discussed a range of requirements tethered to spouse participation, including: (1) requiring service members to obtain signed verification that they have shared employment program information with their spouses; and (2) making moving services, Basic Allowance for Housing “BAH”, and/or other benefits contingent on sharing military spouse contact information (e.g., e-mail addresses) and participation in orientation.
 - ⁵ Attendees also discussed improving overall military family PCS support so spouses can focus on attending orientation and obtaining employment.
 - ⁶ Includes expanding the mandate of veteran employment representatives (Local Veterans Employment Representatives and Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program Specialists) to include military spouses.
 - ⁷ Both the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) and Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) offer customized credential navigator services for military spouses. The Washington State Employment Security Department has a designated military spouse navigator stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord.
 - ⁸ DOH participates in interstate compacts for physical therapists. A nursing compact is currently under consideration by the Washington State Legislature.
 - ⁹ While OSPI does not have any formal interstate compacts or reciprocity agreements, it generally grants credit for other states’ credentials and national teaching certificates.
 - ¹⁰ While the Washington State Department of Licensing (DOL) does not have any formal interstate compacts or reciprocity agreements, it generally accepts nationally recognized credentials.
 - ¹¹ DOH offers temporary practice permits for several health care professions.
 - ¹² OSPI offers expedited certificates for emergency substitute teacher and conditional teacher at a District’s request.
 - ¹³ DOL offers a provisional certificate for security guards and is considering one for private investigators.
 - ¹⁴ U.S. Senator Murray has proposed funding through the National Defense Authorization Act.
 - ¹⁵ The Washington State Department of Commerce is exploring policy options that would combine housing and childcare strategies and funding.
 - ¹⁶ EO 19-01 established an expansive definition of military spouse: “...any person currently or previously married to a military service member during the service member's time of active, reserve, or national guard duty...”