

# 2019 MILITARY SPOUSE LISTENING SESSIONS REPORT

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Washington State Military Transition and Readiness Council  
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# LEADERSHIP, STAFF, AND CONTRIBUTORS



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## INTRODUCTION

*"I had considered leaving the military because my wife couldn't pursue her career."*

- Petty Officer Myers

There is increasing recognition across the nation that the lack of support for military spouse careers creates national security and economic risks, as well as demonstrates an unpatriotic lack of respect towards military families. Military spouses face significant career disruptions resulting from permanent change of station "PCS" moves every 18-36 months, and related support for their active duty service members. Because military families often experience multiple moves over the course of a service member's military career, spouses frequently endure chronic unemployment and underemployment. In fact, active duty spouses have a 24% unemployment rate<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, 56% of military spouses report being underemployed<sup>2</sup>, and military spouses earn 26.8% less on average than their non-military spouse peers<sup>3</sup>.

Increased household stress negatively impacts force readiness by distracting service members from their duty and mission. For many spouses, participation in the world of work is critical to their identity, and inability to retain a job and pursue a career can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. This, combined with the need for most families to generate two incomes to survive, results in many service members choosing to leave the military rather than re-enlist. Research indicates that 43% of service members and spouses rate equal career opportunities for spouses as a significant factor in deciding whether to continue military service<sup>4</sup>.

Even when the service member does re-enlist, there are other negative economic impacts. Lack of spousal employment continuity commonly results in stunted career progression with subsequent lost wage potential, reduced retirement savings, and related hardships.

Additionally, many military families who rely on a single military paycheck can only make ends meet by utilizing SNAP (food assistance) and other federal and state social service benefits. The net effects of these hardships not only negatively impact military spouses and families, they drain the economic vitality of the communities where military families reside by expending resources that wouldn't be necessary if military spouses could obtain living wage jobs and careers at the same rate as their non-military counterparts.

These circumstances not only impact our current national security, but also our future security as well. Given that 79-86% of new military recruits are the children and relatives of current or past service members<sup>5</sup>, familial satisfaction is critical to achieving recruiting objectives. At the same time, Washington State will have 1.4 million<sup>6</sup> jobs to fill over the coming years, and is working hard to develop talent sources to fill that talent pipeline.

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<sup>1</sup> Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) (2018). The 2017 Survey of Active Duty Spouses: Tabulation of Responses

<sup>2</sup> Blue Star Families (2018). 2018 Military Family Lifestyle Survey

<sup>3</sup> Council of Economic Advisors (CEA) (2018). Military Spouses in the Labor Market

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Chamber Foundation Hiring our Heroes (2017). Military Spouses in the Workplace: Understanding the Impacts of Spouse Unemployment on Military Recruitment, Retention, and Readiness

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Defense Joint Advertising, Market Research, and Studies (JAMRS) (2018). New Recruit Survey Wave 1 Findings (October 2012–March 2013)

<sup>6</sup> Beginning with the 2017 projections cycle, ESD created a new Washington state specific alternative occupational method to the BLS separations method. The objective was to also track job openings due to workers transferring within occupations.

Military spouses have been enduring the indignity of employment challenges for decades. However, with the U.S. Department of Defense's shift in focus from transition to retention, and with a dearth of talent to meet the labor force needs in the state, there is renewed and heightened effort and energy to tackle this longstanding issue.

In response to these challenges and opportunities, Governor Jay Inslee signed Executive Order 19-01 on May 13, 2019, which extended Washington State's support for veterans and transitioning service members to include military families. The Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs "WDVA" and Employment Security Department "ESD" subsequently collaborated with military partners to host listening sessions with military spouses at each of Washington's six major military installations:

- Joint Base Lewis McChord – July 11, 2019
- Fairchild Air Force Base – August 29, 2019
- Coast Guard Base Seattle – September 6, 2019
- Naval Air Station Whidbey Island – September 16, 2019
- Naval Base Kitsap – September 18, 2019
- Naval Station Everett – October 7, 2019

The purpose of the listening sessions was to get feedback, input, insights, and local context from spouses on barriers and solutions to military spouse employment. All sessions were facilitated by Alfie Alvarado-Ramos, WDVA Director, and Suzi LeVine, ESD Commissioner. The session at Fairchild Air Force Base was also facilitated by Lisa Brown, Director of the Washington State Department of Commerce.

The primary participants for each session were spouses of current and former active duty service members. Attendees also included several current and former active duty service members, staff and leadership from state and military workforce development organizations, military installation leadership, leaders from local workforce and economic development organizations, and legislative and congressional staff. Additionally, elected officials attended two sessions. Attendees identified and discussed several key challenges and best practices impacting military spouse employment:

- Employer relationships and bias
- Job search support
- Credential portability
- Childcare

The following readout enumerates these key challenges and best practices, amplifies stories from specific participants, shares ideas that emerged, and identifies potential next steps for consideration.

## CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS

The following are the issues and recommended solutions raised by attendees:

### KEY CHALLENGES

#### Employer Relationships and Bias

*Julianne, a spouse at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island and registered nurse, shared that she is unable to sign a nursing contract with an employer because, if she withdraws before the term of the contract is fulfilled because her family PCS's to another location, she will be subject to a hefty fine of \$2,000-\$5,000.*

*Ali, a spouse at Joint Base Lewis McChord, shared that, while previously stationed in Mississippi, she got to a point after being unemployed for five months where her family "couldn't afford to exist." So she asked about a job at a local food establishment whose national chain advertises as a military family friendly employer. Despite having ample experience, the store manager turned her away, saying "we just lost two military spouses, we've already contributed."*

*Several representatives from both Walmart and Microsoft attended the NAVSTA Everett listening session. Representatives shared that both companies actively work with military spouses to support job transfers when their families receive PCS orders.*

These examples demonstrate the challenges obtaining employment when spouses arrive at new installations. Common themes raised by attendees include:

1. Employer refusal to consider spouses because of anticipated short-term employment.
2. Employer rejection of applications based on with disrupted work histories filled with short-term employment.
3. Employment contracts with financial penalties if a spouse leaves early due to a PCS.
4. Lack of employer awareness concerning military spouse skills and experience, as well as military life and culture.
5. Losing professional networks whenever a spouse leaves a community.
6. Forgoing health, retirement, or other benefits to obtain employment.
7. Consistent underemployment in part-time low-wage positions below the spouse's education and experience level.

Attendees noted that these challenges are particularly acute at installations in small rural communities where employers tend to favor local lifetime residents.

## Job Search Support

*Rebekah worked in the workforce development field in South Carolina. When she learned that her active duty air force spouse would PCS to Washington State, she proactively reached out to find a comparable job in the Washington workforce system. Rebekah noted that Washington State "was extremely flexible during the interview process. I was able to interview on the phone for my job while still living in South Carolina. Most jobs I applied for ahead of the move wanted me in person to do the interview which was not possible." As a result, Rebekah was able to start her new job just a few days after." Washington State is now one of 10 states participating in a pilot where Military OneSource will refer individuals from across the globe to WorkSource staff.*

*In multiple sessions, spouses were surprised to hear about the job search support and services offered on-base and in the community. Several base commanders shared that service members are not consistently passing along relevant information to their own spouses – especially when deployed. One military spouse engagement expert shared a Marine Corps initiative that dramatically increased information flow to spouses: when families did orientation events ("Links"), commanding officers gave the service members an extra day off if they brought their spouse and got a signed certificate for attending.*

These examples demonstrate the issues and challenges surrounding access to effective job search support services. Common themes raised by attendees include:

1. Lack of awareness of WorkSource and installation employment services.
2. Lack of comparable funding to services for transitioning service member and veteran.
3. Being forgotten under the umbrella of veteran employment programs<sup>6</sup>.
4. Not wanting to be associated with the 'unemployment office' stigma<sup>7</sup>.
5. Being classified under the Workforce Opportunities and Innovations Act "WIOA" as 'displaced home makers'<sup>8</sup>.
6. Failure to receive installation employment program information<sup>9</sup>.
7. Lack of access to spouse contact information<sup>10</sup>.

Attendees noted that these challenges are particularly acute for younger spouses who require more support. The challenges are also more difficult for families who live off base or are assigned to installations in rural communities, for whom the challenges of obtaining timely information and support are amplified.

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<sup>6</sup> Several attendees shared that they had attended career events marketed for both veterans and military spouses. However, when they arrived, employers and support services were focused exclusively on veterans.

<sup>7</sup> Several attendees noted that they thought WorkSource services were only for low-skilled job seekers and positions.

<sup>8</sup> Workforce development professionals noted that military spouses are frequently determined to be unqualified for services because they have not recently left a paid job.

<sup>9</sup> Several attendees shared that spouse career information is typically provided through a service member's chain of command. However, service members often fail to convey the information to spouses.

<sup>10</sup> Installation spouse employment programs don't receive spouse's direct contact information when a military family receives PCS orders. Consequently, programs must rely on spouses to contact them when the family arrives.

## Credential Portability

*Blancha, a spouse at Fairchild Air Force Base, was ready to start her teaching career when her husband transitioned. Their plan was for her to provide a second income and be the family breadwinner during his transition using the GI Bill funded education she had obtained during his many deployments. However, she has not been able to find a teaching position because her out-of-state certification and endorsements were not recognized. "It's extremely heartbreakin," she says. Her husband is also affected, telling her "I'm so sorry I did this to you." Blancha emphasizes, "We're survivors. We get it done." Despite the fact that we're desperate for teachers, she has officially left the field of education. "Honestly, it's not worth it."*

*Tina, a spouse at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, obtained her PhD in psychology in Louisiana. However, she has not been able to practice as a psychologist since they transferred to Washington State because Washington does not recognize the specific degree and supervised work experience under which she was licensed in Ohio. As a consequence, they have decided to put off having children until both can be secure in their careers. Her husband had also considered leaving the service.*

*Representatives from the Washington State Dept. of Health and Office of the Superintendent of Public instruction shared that both have designated staff who provide credential navigator services to veterans and military spouses. However, many military families are not aware of these services, and aren't provided additional services if they don't self-identify.*

These examples demonstrate the challenges with renewing professional licenses, certifications, and other credentials when moving to a new state. Challenges in Washington State are particularly acute with health care licenses and teaching certifications. Common themes raised by attendees include enduring:

1. Duplicative documentation, testing, and review processes before being able to continue work in a profession.
2. Excessive expenses involved in re-credentialing<sup>11</sup>.
3. More complex credentialing standards in Washington than in other states.
4. Failure of Washington to accept out of state education credits and supervised work experience.
5. Unclear and/or inconsistent agency credentialing requirements and information<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Attendees noted significant expenses related to required additional education and supervised work experience.

<sup>12</sup> While attendees shared a range of challenges in Washington State, national stakeholders have noted that Washington is a leader in developing best practices. Many spouses have indicated that they were unaware of support services provided by credentialing agencies. This is particularly true of spouses who are new to the state.

## **Childcare**

*Both Evangeline at Everett Naval Station and Camelia at Joint Base Lewis McChord brought their infants to the sessions, epitomizing the challenges that spouses with children face. Both want to focus on job opportunities, but can't obtain quality child care that allows them to do so.*

*Julianna, at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, shared that "Child care here is desolate." Not only can she not get into on-base childcare, but there is limited availability of off-base childcare that will support different nursing shifts. "I want my career...and I have a substantial resume," she says. However, lack of accessible childcare when and where she needs it severely limits the opportunities she can pursue.*

*Many spouses expressed concern about childcare provider wages. Attendees at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island shared that the pay for district para-educators is higher and the requirements are lower than for the on-base childcare providers. This makes it is very difficult to find qualified staff, further contributing to the dearth of support.*

These examples demonstrate the impact of childcare availability on military spouse employment. Attendees noted that military spouses frequently serve as primary care providers (and often as single parents) while service members are deployed or performing other military duties. Common themes included:

1. Lack of local family childcare support when families PCS to a new installation.
2. Low childcare availability (both on-base and off-base).
3. Long childcare waitlists (many spouses shared that the waitlist timing was longer than the timeline to when they expected to PCS again).
4. High childcare costs, particularly for families with multiple children.
5. Lack of available childcare outside of traditional civilian work hours.
6. Lack of drop-in childcare to support participation in career workshops, career events, interviews, and related activities.
7. Low wages and high childcare worker qualification requirements, reducing availability.

## **RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS**

Attendees discussed several possible programmatic, policy, and legislative options. This list is a synthesis of what was discussed. The appendices enumerate even more detailed recommendations that emerged. This summary does not represent a final determination by the State of Washington or partners regarding priorities or direction.

### **1. Improve public-private partnerships**, including:

- Convene an employer roundtable to discuss military spouse employment issues and share best practices<sup>13</sup>.
- Enlist community partners to develop training, resource materials, and certification programs for employers on military spouse employment issues, best practices, the benefits of hiring military spouses, and military family culture<sup>14</sup>.
- Engage local childcare providers, military family services, and other community-based organizations to develop strategies for increasing the number of available childcare slots.

### **2. Remove employment barriers**, including:

- Promote flexible work<sup>15</sup> and portable career opportunities<sup>16</sup> among employers.
- Expand employment tax credits to military spouses<sup>17</sup>.
- Release military spouses from employment contracts without penalty when their family receives PCS orders.
- Add military spouses as a protected class under non-discrimination statutes<sup>18</sup>.

### **3. Improve military spouse outreach and participation**, including:

- Improve awareness of employment services before and after a PCS
- Improve credential services / navigator marketing and outreach.
- Increase and enhance military spouse career events<sup>19</sup>.
- Ensure spouse participation in orientations.

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<sup>13</sup> Leadership of the Washington State Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zone “MSEEZ”, sponsored by the U.S. Chamber Foundation, has expressed support for sponsoring a military spouse employer roundtable.

<sup>14</sup> The Society for Human Resource Management “SHRM” has partnered with the PsychArmor Institute and NBC Universal to provide a ‘Veterans at Work’ training and certification program, and has expressed interest in developing a similar program around military spouse employment.

<sup>15</sup> I.e., fast ramp-up periods, remote work, flexible schedules, dual-work arrangements, etc.

<sup>16</sup> Attendees discussed working with national employers with telephone customer service operations to develop portable career training programs. Several national employers, including Hilton, have developed model programs.

<sup>17</sup> Congresswoman McMorris Rogers co-sponsored bi-partisan legislation (HR 2912) in May 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Executive Order 19-01 directs state cabinet agencies to remove military spouse bias in state employment.

<sup>19</sup> Events should include spouse coaching, navigator services, and childcare.

**4. Enhance military spouse career support services**, including:

- Add military spouses to federal grant funding (i.e., Jobs for Veterans State Grants “JVSG”)<sup>20</sup>.
- Call-out and prioritize military spouses as a WIOA category.
- Expand state navigator services to military spouses<sup>21</sup>.

**5. Support license and credential portability**, including:

- Promote interstate compacts and reciprocity agreements<sup>22,23,24</sup>.
- Support 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<sup>25,26,27</sup>.
- Appoint military spouses to licensing boards.

**6. Increase childcare support**, including:

- Prioritize Federal funding for military family childcare<sup>28</sup>.
- Ensure childcare availability for non-traditional hours and drop-in care.
- Increase childcare tax credits & create employer tax credit.

Again, a detailed list of attendee recommendations is included in the Appendix.

## **CONCLUSION**

Recognizing and honoring the service of military spouses contributes to national security, prosperity, and integrity. We can achieve these ends by ensuring that every military spouse who wants a career has the opportunity to experience the dignity of work. By first listening and now taking action, we aspire to make Washington State the place where all military spouses feel supported, empowered, and respected!

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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<sup>20</sup> This would include expanding the mandate veteran employment representatives (Local Veterans Employment Representatives and Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program Specialists) to include military spouses.

<sup>21</sup> Both the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) offer customized navigator services for military spouses.

<sup>22</sup> DOH participates in interstate compacts for physical therapists. A nursing compact is currently under consideration by the Washington State Legislature.

<sup>23</sup> While OSPI does not have any formal interstate compacts or reciprocity agreements, it generally grants credit for other states’ credentials and national teaching certificates.

<sup>24</sup> While the WA ST Department of Licensing (DOL) does not have any formal interstate compacts or reciprocity agreements, it generally accepts nationally recognized credentials.

<sup>25</sup> DOH offers temporary practice permits for several health care professions

<sup>26</sup> OSPI offers expedited certificates for emergency substitute teacher and conditional teacher at a District’s request.

<sup>27</sup> DOL offers a provisional certificate for security guards, and is considering one for private investigators.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Senator Murray has proposed federal legislation.

## Appendix: Detailed Attendee Recommended Solutions

### 1. Employer Relationships and Bias

#### PROGRAMATIC

- **BUILD AND EXPAND EMPLOYER PARTNERSHIPS:** Collaborate with employers to support military spouse employment, including: (1) convene an employer roundtable to discuss military spouse employment issues and share best practices<sup>29</sup>; (2) develop additional opportunities to bring employers onto military installations for exposure to spouse employment programs<sup>30</sup>; and (3) engage nation-wide employers that have existing military spouse employment programs, or have the capacity to build programs<sup>31</sup>.
- **BUILD AND EXPAND PROFESSIONAL AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION PARTNERSHIPS:** Collaborate with professional and community organizations to support military spouse employment, including: (1) enlist community partners to develop employer training, resource materials, and certification programs<sup>32,33</sup>; (2) leverage the connection between installation commanders and local chambers and elected officials to promote military spouse employment; and (3) engage business, union, apprenticeship, and military spouse groups to address military spouse employment issues<sup>34</sup>.
- **EXPAND FLEXIBLE WORK OPPORTUNITIES:** Promote flexible work and portable career opportunities for military spouses, including: (1) collaborate with employers to identify jobs that support flexible and portable work<sup>35</sup>; (2) collaborate with employers and other partners to sponsor military spouse training programs linked to portable jobs;

#### POLICY AND LEGISLATION

- **ADOPT EMPLOYMENT TAX INCENTIVES:** Expand the Work Opportunity Tax Credit “WOTC” to military spouses<sup>36</sup>.
- **ADOPT PROTECTED CLASS STATUS:** Add military spouses as a protected class under non-discrimination statutes<sup>37</sup>.
- **RELEASE FROM EMPLOYMENT CONTRACTS:** Release military spouses from employment contracts without penalty when their family receives PCS orders.

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<sup>29</sup> Leadership of the Washington State Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zone “MSEEZ”, sponsored by the U.S. Chamber Foundation, has expressed support for sponsoring a military spouse employer roundtable.

<sup>30</sup> Including streamlining installation access protocols.

<sup>31</sup> Walmart representatives shared that local facilities are encouraged and have authorization to make direct appointments of military spouses who relocate from other states.

<sup>32</sup> Topics should include military spouse employment issues, best practices, benefits of hiring military spouses, and military family culture.

<sup>33</sup> The Society for Human Resource Management “SHRM” has partnered with the PsychArmor Institute and NBC Universal to provide a Veterans-at-Work training and certification program, and has expressed interest in developing a similar program around military spouse employment.

<sup>34</sup> E.g., turnover costs and mandatory-length employment contracts.

<sup>35</sup> I.e., fast ramp-up periods, remote work, flexible schedules, transfers, dual-work arrangements, etc.

<sup>36</sup> Congresswoman McMorris Rogers co-sponsored bi-partisan legislation (HR 2912) in May 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Executive Order 19-01 directs state cabinet agencies to remove military spouse bias in state employment.

- **ADOPT EMPLOYMENT PREFERENCES:** Implement military spouse preference programs, including: (1) create a preference for state government jobs<sup>38</sup>; (2) eliminate limitations on use of preferences for federal government jobs<sup>39</sup>; (3) create a preference for apprenticeship program participation<sup>40</sup>; and (4) adopt an allowance for private sector ‘permissive preference’<sup>41</sup>.
- **ADOPT UNIFORM DEFINITION:** Create statutory definition of military spouse that other legislation can reference<sup>42</sup>.
- **IMPLEMENT EMPLOYER RECOGNITION:** Create an employer recognition campaign for hiring military spouses<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Executive Order 19-01 directs executive cabinet agencies to remove military spouse employment barriers.

<sup>39</sup> Executive Order 13473 allows Federal agencies to directly appoint certain military spouses without using traditional competitive examining procedures. A spouse must use this benefit within two years of relocation, and forgoes the benefit if she or he declines a job offer after relocating to the installation.

<sup>40</sup> Washington State provides preferences to veterans in apprenticeship programs, but not military spouses. Other programs directed at women and women veterans may have positive impacts on military spouses.

<sup>41</sup> RCW 73.16.110 offers liability protection to private employers who implement a hiring preference program for veterans and spouses of honorably discharged veterans who have a service connected permanent and total disability.

<sup>42</sup> Executive Order 19-01 established a model definition for military spouse.

<sup>43</sup> Both Washington State’s YesVets program and the U.S Department of Labor’s Medallion program offer similar employer recognition for hiring veterans. Executive Order 19-01 provides for a similar military spouse program.

## 2. Job Search Support

### PROGRAMATIC

- **ENHANCE MARKETING:** Improve direct outreach and communications to military spouses, including: (1) develop additional communication channels to connect spouses with local installation career programs, WorkSource offices, and non-profit partners; (2) enhance use of social media to connect and communicate with spouses; (3) enhance use of local print, radio, and TV media to communicate with spouses; (4) enhance use of private military spouse and family social groups and networks; (5) target advertisements at common gathering places<sup>44</sup>; (6) market the full range of WorkSource services available to military spouses, including services for entry-level, professional, and executive job seekers; (7) enhance use of military spouse peer mentors to connect and communicate with military spouses<sup>45</sup>; and (8) target outreach to younger spouses and spouses of junior enlisted service members.
- **DEVELOP UPSTREAM CONNECTIONS:** Enhance connections with out-of-state partners, including: (1) continue to develop partnership with Military OneSource's Spouse Education and Career Opportunities "SECO" program, to connect spouses with local services prior to a PCS; (2) focus outreach to and partnership efforts with bases and base-adjacent American Job Centers "AJCs" around the country in order to connect spouses to local services and find employment before they PCS; and (3) support direct connection with local employers (e.g., virtual interviews) prior to a PCS.
- **IMPROVE SUPPORT PROGRAMS:** Enhance employment support services for military spouses, including: (1) increase and enhance military spouse career events<sup>46</sup>; (2) improve coordination between installations and local WorkSource offices; (3) educate WorkSource staff about military spouse employment barriers, needs, and opportunities; (4) produce additional virtual employment training programs for military spouses<sup>47</sup>; (5) increase opportunities for service members and military spouses to attend employment programs together; (6) expand and promote work experience and internship programs for military spouses, with an emphasis on transferrable and portable careers<sup>48</sup>; and (7) expand spouse employment mentorship and sponsorship programs.
- **EXPAND FLEXIBLE WORK SERVICES:** Work with partners to promote services that support flexible work, including: (1) host and support virtual-job career events; and (2) promote the National Virtual Job Labor Exchange to make virtual jobs accessible to military spouses<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> I.e., base exchanges, housing services offices, libraries, etc.

<sup>45</sup> E.g., JBLM's Spouse Ambassadors, and the Air Force's Key Spouse program.

<sup>46</sup> Events should include spouse coaching, navigator services, and childcare.

<sup>47</sup> I.e., webcasts, on-line recorded videos, etc.

<sup>48</sup> Similar to what is provided to spouses of junior enlisted service members and junior officers through MyCAA, and to transitioning service members through DOD's SkillBridge and the Hiring our Heroes Fellowship program.

<sup>49</sup> The National Association of State Workforce Agencies "NASWA" is launching an exchange in the near future.

- **MARKET ORIENTATION SERVICES:** Develop installation orientation and information programs for PCS'ing military spouses, including: (1) create or enhance installation webpages, Facebook pages, and other social media; (2) leverage search engine optimization “SEO” strategies to guide military spouses to specific web-based employment resources; (3) promote pre-PCS participation in Military OneSource SECO’s online MySTEP military spouse transition program; and (4) promote local employer participation in SECO’s Military Spouse Employment Partnership “MSEP”<sup>50</sup>.
- **INCENTIVIZE ORIENTATION:** incentivize military spouse participation in installation orientation programs, including: (1) incentivize service members to bring spouses to orientation<sup>51</sup>; (2) require service members to obtain signed verification that they have shared employment program information with their spouses; (3) make moving services, Basic Allowance for Housing “BAH”, and/or other benefits contingent on sharing military spouse contact information (e.g., e-mail addresses) and participating in spouse newcomer orientation; and (4) improve overall military family PCS support, so military spouses can focus attention on employment.

## POLICY AND LEGISLATION

- **EXPAND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:** Enhance workforce development services for military spouses, including: (1) add military spouses to Federal Jobs for Veterans State Grants “JVSG” funding<sup>52</sup>; (2) call-out and prioritize military spouses as a WIOA category, rather than as dislocated workers or displaced homemakers; and (3) develop employment support programs for military spouses based on the model used for National Guard and Reserve employment support programs.

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<sup>50</sup> MSEP supports recruitment of PCS'ing spouses, and helps spouses connect with employers in new states.

<sup>51</sup> The Marine Corps and Army have experimented with granting service members an additional day of leave if their spouse attends orientation and gets a signed attendance certificate.

<sup>52</sup> Includes expanding the mandate of veteran employment representatives (Local Veterans Employment Representatives and Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program Specialists) to include military spouses.

### 3. Credential Portability

#### PROGRAMATIC

- **CLARIFY INFORMATION FOR SPOUSES:** Work with credentialing agencies to improve sharing of information with spouses, including: (1) improve marketing of support services for military spouses; and (2) provide clearer and more consistent website and call center information for spouses.
- **EXPEDITE CREDENTIAL PROCESSING:** Streamline military spouse credential application processing, including: (1) provide front-of-the-line service to military spouses<sup>53</sup>; and (2) develop and enhance navigator services for military spouses<sup>54</sup>.
- **DEVELOP PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS:** Collaborate with non-governmental partners to support spouse licensure, including: (1) partner with business groups, unions, and military spouse groups on credential portability strategies<sup>55</sup>; and (2) promote employer-sponsored financial support and other assistance to military spouses seeking new state licenses, certificates, or other credentials<sup>56</sup>.
- **UNIFORM REQUIREMENTS:** Promote uniform credential requirements across the country based on national standards.

#### POLICY AND LEGISLATION

- **INTERSTATE AGREEMENTS:** Support interstate compacts and reciprocity agreements, particularly where there are nationally accepted professional credential standards<sup>57,58,59</sup>;
- **PROVISIONAL CREDENTIALS:** Support 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<sup>60,61,62</sup>.
- **BOARD APPOINTMENT:** Appoint military spouses to licensing boards.

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<sup>53</sup> Both DOH and OSPI offer front-of-the-line service to military spouses who self-identify.

<sup>54</sup> Both the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) offer customized navigator services for military spouses.

<sup>55</sup> The U.S. Chamber Foundation's Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zone "MSEEZ" Initiative provides a framework for public-private partnerships. Washington established the first statewide MSEEZ in 2018, and two regional zones have been established in Olympia and Spokane.

<sup>56</sup> Attendees noted that employer-sponsored credential support is a common practice in the financial services industry.

<sup>57</sup> DOH participates in interstate compacts for physical therapists. A nursing compact is currently under consideration by the Washington State Legislature.

<sup>58</sup> While OSPI does not have any formal interstate compacts or reciprocity agreements, it generally grants credit for other states' credentials and national teaching certificates.

<sup>59</sup> While the Washington State Department of Licensing (DOL) does not have any formal interstate compacts or reciprocity agreements, it generally accepts nationally recognized credentials.

<sup>60</sup> DOH offers temporary practice permits for several health care professions

<sup>61</sup> OSPI offers expedited certificates for emergency substitute teacher and conditional teacher at a District's request.

<sup>62</sup> DOL offers a provisional certificate for security guards, and is considering one for private investigators.

## 4. Childcare

### PROGRAMATIC

- **COLLABORATE WITH LOCAL CHILDCARE STAKEHOLDERS:** Engage local childcare providers, military family services, and other community-based organizations on strategies to: (1) increase the number of available childcare slots; (2) increase the availability of childcare before and after traditional working and school schedules; (3) increase the availability of drop-in childcare; and (4) decrease the cost of childcare for military families.
- **DEVELOP CHILDCARE INCENTIVES:** Offer incentives to increase childcare options, including: (1) military spouse operated in-home daycares; (2) large childcare business operated centers near installations; and (3) alternative to traditional daycare (e.g. au pairs).

### POLICY AND LEGISLATION

- **INCREASE CHILDCARE FUNDING:** Increase Federal funding support for military family childcare<sup>63</sup>.
- **ENHANCE CHILDCARE TAX CREDITS:** Promote additional childcare tax credits, including: (1) increase federal childcare tax credits for spouses; and (2) provide an employer childcare tax credit.
- **INCREASING WAGES:** Increase wages of on-base and off-base childcare workers.

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<sup>63</sup> U.S. Senator Murray has proposed federal legislation.

## **5. Housing**

Attendees also discussed the intersectionality of housing and childcare on spouse employment opportunities. Common themes included: (1) insufficient on-base housing; (2) insufficient affordable housing near military installations; and (3) failure of the Military Basic Allowance for Housing “BAH” to cover the cost of housing near military installations. Consequently, many military families locate far away from installations, employment opportunities, and other resources (e.g., childcare), resulting in spouses forgoing employment.

### **SOLUTIONS**

Attendees discussed several programmatic, policy, and legislative options, including:

#### **PROGRAMATIC**

- **COLLABORATE WITH LOCAL HOUSING STAKEHOLDERS:** Partner with local housing providers, installation housing offices, local housing agencies, and housing advocacy organizations to discuss strategies to: (1) increase the availability on-base and near-base housing for military families; and (2) decrease or subsidize the cost of military family housing.

#### **POLICY AND LEGISLATION**

- **INCREASE HOUSING FUNDING:** Increase funding support for military family housing, including (1) increase BAH at installations in areas with high housing costs and/or low housing stock availability; and (2) develop funding options that combine housing and childcare<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> The Washington State Department of Commerce is exploring policy options.