

Military Spouse Occupational Licensure Recognition

By Janet Farley, Military Spouses Career Coalition (MSCC) Co-Chair

Earning a paycheck for some military spouses just became a little easier thanks to the efforts of elected officials across the state and members of the Colorado Springs Military Spouse Career Coalition (MSCC), a Chamber and EDC subcommittee whose mission is to empower military spouses in pursuit of meaningful careers and/or livable wages and to support legislation and initiatives that minimize barriers to employment.

Recently voted into law, HB 20-1326, also known as the “Create Occupational Credential Portability Program” created an occupational credential portability program for the state which includes a military spouse occupational licensure recognition amendment.

The amendment allows military spouses relocating to Colorado as a part of an active duty military assignment and who have an active occupational license in good standing from any other U.S. state or territory, the ability to receive a temporary occupational license to practice in Colorado for a maximum of three years at no cost.

The new law repeals the current one-year licensure exemption and replaces that exemption with this new three-year temporary license, saving effected military spouses untold time in their job search process and out of pocket expenses for licensure costs.

“We are pleased that HB 20-1326 was signed into law because it will offer more expansive coverage for military spouses with occupational licenses and it helps military spouses transition into the Colorado workforce more quickly while they are stationed here,” said Dawn Conley, a specialist assistant to Mayor Suthers who co-chairs the MSCC along with Janet Farley, a career services specialist from the University of Colorado Colorado Springs.

“The Military Spouse Career Coalition (MSCC) worked closely on the effort with elected leaders to advocate for military spouses. We were happy to receive support from our leaders across the state on this important issue,” said Conley.

The unemployment rate for military spouses is 24% and the underemployment rate is 55%. These number predate COVID-19 by years.

Studies have shown that military spouse employment is vital to our nation’s military readiness and overall retention rates. Servicemembers who are married to spouses who are not satisfied in their careers or lifestyles tend to leave military service, taking with them valuable skills and training.

“Finding and maintaining meaningful employment and advancing within a career is challenging for many of our military spouses who often relocate on the average of every three years to a new community. Essentially, they have to have to start their careers and lives over with each move in addition to dealing with the other hardships that come with living a military lifestyle,” said Farley.

Other hardships that job-seeking military spouses face include finding affordable and available childcare at each new location in order to be able to work in the first place; dealing with the stress of managing the home front while their active spouse repeatedly deploys to faraway and often hostile locations; and making some employers understand the long-lasting value they can bring to the organization.

The provisions under the HB 20-1326 provide a quick and expedient avenue to licensure in Colorado so that military spouses can seamlessly continue working in their careers within a regulated framework, protecting them and consumers.

It does not reduce or remove any existing requirements to become licensed for original applicants within Colorado, or change in any way the original requirements for licensure or allow for military spouses to obtain a temporary license if their prior license has expired, has disciplinary action, or if there are any other outstanding adverse actions taken on their prior license from another state or U.S. territory.

After the three-year period has lapsed, military spouses can either renew their temporary license or if they wish to continue operating in Colorado after expiration of their temporary license, they would need to apply for an original license.

Passage of HB 20-1326 continues the MSCC's efforts to increase military spouse workforce mobility in the state which is home to six major military installations and nearly 62,000 active duty service members, National Guard and Reserve members and civilian employees, many of whom have families in the workforce.

Colorado is also seeking to permanently increase that military population with the addition of the US Space Command in Colorado Springs and HB 20-1326 contributes to making the state an attractive option for that basing decision.