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License Portability Helps Military Spouses

BY [STEPHENIE OVERMAN](#) | NOV 12, 2012 | POSTED IN [JOB HUNTING](#)
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If you're a healthcare worker married to a member of the military, you aren't alone in facing employment challenges.

"Military spouses are 10 times more likely than their civilian counterparts to move across state lines," where their licenses often are not valid, says Karen Golden, deputy director of government relations for [Military Officers Association of America](#).



MOAA and other organizations have been lobbying states to make licenses portable. To date, 23 states have passed pro-military spouse license portability measures.

Unemployment concerns

According to the U.S. Department of Defense, 26 percent of military spouses are unemployed and seeking work — more than three times the national unemployment rate.

One-third of all military spouses work in a field that requires state licensure, with nursing the third most common occupation for a military spouse after teaching and child-care work. Also affected by the lack of license portability are speech pathologists, dental hygienists, physical therapists and counselors.

Thirty-five percent of all military spouses have a background in fields requiring licenses, Golden says. And "they move more often than their civilian counterparts. They move across state lines when their spouses get new [assignments]. They're setting up homes, putting children in school and they want to restart their careers." But having to get a new license in order to work in a new state can result in a long waiting period.

"The average spouse can lose up to six to nine months of income per move and there are frequent moves," Golden says. "Spouses have the credentials. They have the talent. They have the skills. But the constant moving around really impacts the family" and employability.

Some improvements

In February 2012, First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden spoke to the nation's governors and their spouses about how they could support military spouses by making it easier for their licenses to transfer as they move from state to state.

At that time, 12 states had passed legislation. Since then almost another dozen have joined the list and the goal, according to Golden, is "by 2014, we'd like to see some type of licensure portability in all the states."

MOAA and other military services organizations are providing updates to military spouses

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about portability, Golden says.

The [U.S. Department of Defense USA 4 Military Families](#) program has a website that includes an interactive map so individuals can check current regulations in each state.

Some states now have full reciprocity, Golden says, while others offer temporary or provisional licenses or allow a state board to recognize active licenses from other states. And some will expedite the licensing process.

"We encourage families to check with their own professional licensing boards to get the most accurate information," Golden adds.

"And we're encouraging them to write to their elected officials, to tell them how important it is."



About Stephenie Overman

Stephenie Overman (<http://www.stephenieoverman.com/>) writes about workplace and health issues. She is author of "Next-Generation Wellness at Work" (Praeger).

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