

Legislative Testimony Senate Bill 341

Good morning, I am LTG(R) Perry Wiggins, Executive Director, Governor's Military Council, State of Kansas. I want to thank the Chairperson and the Committee for the opportunity to testify at this hearing for Senate Bill 341. A bill that addresses the removal of federal impact aid from the determination of local foundation aid in the Kansas school equity and enhancement act.

The Governor's Military Council serves as a key partner with local communities, administration, key legislators, members of the Kansas congressional delegation, key businesses, military leaders and the Defense Department to grow and optimize the military presence in Kansas, including the recruitment and retention of new missions and force structure.

The council also protects the Department of Defense's economic impact for the State of Kansas which equates to approximately 9 to 10 billion dollars a year. The Department of Defense is one of the largest employers in the State of Kansas employing over 41,000 people. Approximately 170,000 jobs in Kansas are supported directly or indirectly by defense related employers.

During my tenure as the Executive Director of the Governor's Military Council I have witnessed a transformational paradigm shift in the methodology/metrics used by the Department of Defense to make stationing/forces structure decisions. Although mission readiness remains the number one decision criteria, faced with a retention/recruitment challenge the Department of Defense and the Services collaborated with policy professionals and subject matter experts to develop quantitative criteria and a framework to address military families top two issues that influence their decision to continue serving in the military. The top two issues were (1) The quality of pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade public education offered by school districts that service Department of Defense installations and (2) states' spouse licensure reciprocity/portability.

In response to the Military Families report that outlined the decision to continue military service is influenced by public education opportunities for their children the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force informed the National Governor's Association on February 23, 2018 that "Eliminating or mitigating these barriers will improve quality of life for our military families and ease the stress of transferring duty stations with consideration for long term career implications. We realize improving schools.....will take time. Over the long term, however, leaders who want to make a difference for the military and our missions will make the most impact if we focus on what matters."

Armed with a true appreciation the importance military families place on public education opportunities and spouse reciprocity/portability coupled with the knowledge that the Department of Defense created a quantitative scorecard to determine force structure/stationing decisions the Governor's Military Council developed a plan to tackle these complex challenges.

On 21 April 2021 through the Herculean efforts of many, Kansas House Bill 2066, the Occupational License Reciprocity bill was signed into law. This law provides License Reciprocity recognition of a license gained in one state by the state of Kansas. The signing of this law was lauded by military service members and military spouses throughout our state and Department of Defense officials. It also moved military installations in Kansas from red (lowest score) to green (highest Score) on the Spouse Licensure Reciprocity/Portability criteria (Quality of Life) on the framework for future stationing decisions.

The past few years I have focused on a way forwarded on meeting the criteria associated with the issue of providing quality pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade public education offered by school districts that service Department of Defense installations and it was clear that the initial lack of transparency provided by the services would make that task extremely difficult.

In order to gain clarity, I reached out to the services several times to gain insight and recommendations on how the State of Kansas could improve its score regarding the quality of pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade public education. They candidly shared that the State of Kansas received low assessments because we were one of three states (New Mexico, Alaska, and Kansas) that equalizes federal impact aid and the perception was that equalization impacts programs and staff designed to ease transitions and provide emotional and academic support to military students.

Today, the State of Kansas is the only state that equalizes federal impact aid. The states of New Mexico and Alaska have recently passed legislation to eliminate the equalization of federal impact aid.

In 2020, the State of Kansas made a push to land the Headquarters of the United States Space Command. Four cities Leavenworth, Derby, Kansas City, and Wichita submitted proposals seeking to land the headquarters. Throughout the process the Air Force was very transparent in providing its framework and criteria for making the decision. The Secretary of the Air Force announced that the framework and criteria were developed to provide communities and states with information so they can determine how they can better support Airmen and Space Professionals and their families.

As an example, the Department of the Air Force tracks criteria in Academic Performance (graduation rates, student average annual learning rate), School Climate (chronic absenteeism rate, suspension rate) and Service Offering (pre-k availability, student to counselor ratio, student to mental health support ratio, student to nurse ratio, student to teacher ratio). It utilizes a public education framework that is organized into nine (9) criteria across three (3) categories for each location. This comparative analysis uses colors to graphically display results for all criteria, categories and locations. The colors are assigned using percentiles, divided into thirds, to provide information about a location's relative position compared to other Department of the Air Force installations. The nine (9) education criteria are individually evaluated across the school districts supporting an installation, with larger school districts (by student enrollment) receiving proportionally greater weight. The criteria results are then combined (straight average) into the three (3) categories to determine ratings for Academic Performance, Service Offering, and School Climate. Finally, the three (3) categories are combined (weighted average, 60, 20, 20, respectively) to determine the composite score for the installation.

This is the second year the Air Force has conducted this comprehensive assessment of these issues in the communities around all 157 Air Force Bases. Commanders for each Major Command received the results for installations within their command. This is a transparent, repeatable, reliable, and deliberate process. All Department of the Air Force installation results are publicly available at <https://www.af.mil/>, under the Support to Families tab. In the 2021 assessment McConnell Air Force Base, Kansas ranks at the lowest end, the "Least Supportive" active-duty bases.

In conclusion, the Department of Defense believes the equalization of federal impact aid has a negative impact on programs and staff designed to ease transitions and provide emotional and academic support to military students. Kansas is the only state that equalizes federal impact aid. Therefore, armed with a keen understanding the critical role the quality of pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade public education offered by school districts that service Department of Defense installations plays in the Department of Defense stationing/force structure decision process I believe it is in our best interest economically to eliminate the equalization of federal impact aid in the State of Kansas.

Thank you once again for this opportunity to testify on behalf of Senate Bill 341. I look forward to any questions you might have.