

Remarks of

Harold E. Cooney

**State Liaison, Northeast
DoD-State Liaison Office
Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense,
Military Community and Family Policy**

**Informational Meeting:
2016 DoD Key Personnel and Readiness Issues Supporting Service members
and their Families**

March 9, 2016

**Pennsylvania Joint Senate/House Veterans Affairs and Emergency
Preparedness Committees Information Meeting on Veterans Issues**

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2016 DoD Key Personnel and Readiness Issues Supporting Service members and their Families

Chairman Vulakovich and Chairman Barrar and members of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees, on behalf of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and in particular, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, thank you for the opportunity to present remarks at this Informational Meeting on Veterans and military community issues.

My name is Harold Cooney. I retired from the Army after 30 years of service in 2004 and have worked in the DoD family policy arena since. I am the Northeast Region Liaison for the Department of Defense State Liaison Office. Our mission is to be a resource to state policymakers addressing the issues that affect the quality of life of our military and their families.

More than ten years ago, the Department of Defense (DoD) recognized that many issues surrounding quality of life and family well-being can only be addressed by states. The Department started the [USA4 Military Families](#) initiative to engage state policymakers, not-for-profit associations, concerned business interests, and other state leaders about the needs of military members and their families. By developing state/military partnerships, the DoD seeks to work with states to remove unnecessary barriers and significantly improve the quality of life for military families.

We collect issues from the military Services and the Department staff each year, review them for relevancy across the Department and appropriateness in terms of state legislative action and then vet potential solutions with all stakeholders.

There are eight Liaisons across the country working with the many state leaders who are concerned for the welfare of the Active Duty, Guard, and Reserve Service members and their families living within their borders. We broadly educate state leaders on key issues, and as this education process proceeds, build relationships with interested state leaders. If one of these leaders (normally members of the legislature) wants to tackle an issue, we can provide assistance

in the form of information papers, identifying 'best practice' legislation from other states and providing testimony if requested.

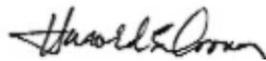
The USA4 Military Families initiative has been very successful and much progress has been made. I reported last year before these committees that states have addressed several key quality of life issues, to include the impact of frequent school transitions experienced by military children, the lost income by military spouses as a result of military moves, and the enforcement of the congressionally mandated DoD predatory lending regulation. I can proudly say that Pennsylvania is among those states.

In your packets, I have provided the 2016 list of active issues with the current status of each. You will see some states have already seized the initiative on several of those issues.

We are currently tracking legislation in the Pennsylvania General Assembly regarding Service member and Military Spouse Licensure, Veterans Treatment Courts, a Veteran Hiring Preference for Private Employers, Child Custody and Distance Education. I welcome your questions and can discuss any of the issues on the list.

In closing, let me say that we are grateful for the tremendous effort Pennsylvania has historically made in supporting our Service members and their families. I want to thank this Committee for your time and attention. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or would like additional information on any of these issues.

Respectfully submitted:



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2016 DoD Key Personnel and Readiness Issues

Facilitate military spouse transition through licensure portability: Mandatory military moves require spouses to leave employment and start again in a state with new licensing requirements. **Pennsylvania has met some of the desired outcomes of this issue. Pending: SB964 (Teplitz)/HB1675 (Rozzi) (licensure portability); SB1133 (Baker) Unemployment Compensation.**

Allow Service members to retain their earned priority for receiving Medicaid home and community care waivers: Because states frequently have long waiting lists, members face large gaps in service every time they transfer across state lines. Allowing Service members to enroll their exceptional family member in the State they designate as their legal residence (i.e. where they pay taxes, vote, etc.) can stabilize their request for support. **This was a new issue last year. 13 states have passed legislation, 6 have legislation pending.**

Facilitate Service members receiving licensure and academic credit for military education, training and experience: Separating Service members may be held back from finding employment or finishing a degree. States can assist separating Service members not having to repeat requirements completed while in the military to obtain academic credit or an occupational license. **Act 23, signed 7/10/15, addressed occupational licenses. Pending: HB841 (Deasy) addresses academic credit.**

Provide authority for establishing Veteran Treatment Courts (VTCs): One in five veterans suffer from behavioral health problems. States can help by authorizing VTCs to facilitate rehabilitation (instead of incarceration) for veterans and Service members experiencing problems. **Pending-SB517 (Teplitz)/ HB887 (Bizzarro). Pennsylvania reports 18 active VTCs.**

Assign an identifier for military children in education data systems: Military children may experience unique life challenges, but there is no method of tracking their attendance and academic progress in public schools. States can assist DoD in developing policies and military child education initiatives by identifying military children and providing data on their educational outcomes. **Addressed in December 2015 by Federal legislation, S.1177 - Every Student Succeeds Act" (ESSA). Now the issue is how states will implement it.**

National Guard employment protections during state-sponsored activation: State statutes that cover Guard members during state-sponsored mobilizations impact employers within the state. States can modify their statutes to protect the employment rights of members of the National Guard living outside of their affiliated state during state-sponsored mobilizations. **18 states have passed legislation, 12 have legislation pending. Pennsylvania: 51 PA.C.S.A. Section 7309 provides protection for Pennsylvania National Guard members, but doesn't protect Guard members of neighboring states who work in Pennsylvania.**

State Policy to support identification and reporting of child abuse and neglect: DoD installations develop Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with counties which can leave gaps in coverage and inconsistencies in managing care for children in protective custody and foster care. States can provide consistent underlying policies to support the development of more consistent MoUs and sharing pertinent case file information with the appropriate military authorities. **4 states have passed legislation. 5 states have legislation pending.**

State licensing exemption for distance education: Service members may lose substantial academic credit if they are transferred to states where there is no agreement allowing them to continue taking distance education courses from their out-of-state institution. States can exempt licensing requirements for postsecondary distance education programs through reciprocal agreements. **36 states have passed legislation or made policy changes, 4 have legislation pending. Pending-HB1552 (Roae)/SB108 (Teplitz).**

Allow private sector employers to offer hiring preference to veterans: Private sector employers attempting to offer hiring preferences to veterans may be risking claims of discrimination from applicants lacking military experience. States can establish policies that protect private sector employers from discrimination claims when offering hiring preference to veterans. **28 states have passed legislation, 8 have legislation pending.**

Pro-bono legal representation for military families: Military families have access to legal assistance attorneys for advice and help with important documents, but they must generally obtain their own counsel to represent them in court. State governments can assist by organizing pro-bono programs that can connect qualified attorneys with Service members and their families in need. **This is a new issue this year. 2 states have passed legislation. 2 states have legislation pending.**

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