



Interim Report
TO THE EIGHTY-NINTH TEXAS LEGISLATURE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
DEFENSE & VETERANS' AFFAIRS
NOVEMBER 2024

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON DEFENSE & VETERANS' AFFAIRS
TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
INTERIM REPORT 2024**

**A REPORT TO THE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
89TH TEXAS LEGISLATURE**

**TERRY M. WILSON
CHAIRMAN**

**RAY LOPEZ
VICE CHAIRMAN**

**COMMITTEE CLERK
ANDREW HARKEY**



Committee On
Defense & Veterans' Affairs

November 18, 2024

Terry M. Wilson
Chairman

P.O. Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78768-2910

The Honorable Dade Phelan
Speaker, Texas House of Representatives
Members of the Texas House of Representatives
Texas State Capitol, Rm. 2W.13
Austin, Texas 78701

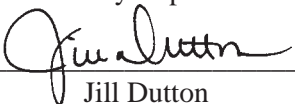
Dear Mr. Speaker and Fellow Members:

The Committee on Defense & Veterans' Affairs of the Eighty-eighth Legislature hereby submits its interim report including recommendations and drafted legislation for consideration by the Eighty-ninth Legislature.

Respectfully submitted,



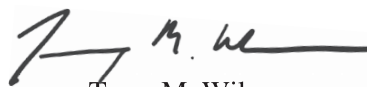
Ray Lopez



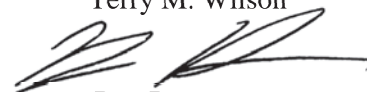
Jill Dutton



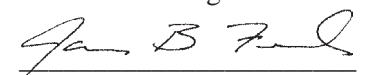
Penny Morales Shaw



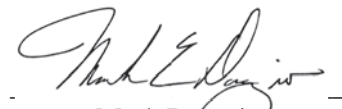
Terry M. Wilson



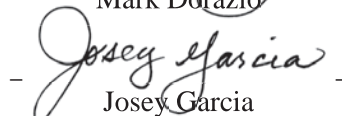
Ben Bumgarner



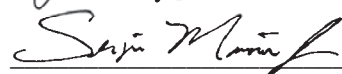
James B. Frank



Mark Dorazio



Josey Garcia



Sergio Muñoz Jr.

Ray Lopez
Vice-Chairman

Members: Ben Bumgarner, Mark Dorazio, Jill Dutton, James B. Frank, Josey Garcia, Penny Morales Shaw, Sergio Muñoz Jr.

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INTRODUCTION

The speaker of the House, the Honorable Dade Phelan, appointed nine members to the House Defense & Veterans' Affairs Committee for the 88th Legislative Session, which began in January 2023. Representative Terry M. Wilson (HD-20; Williamson County) was appointed Chair and Representative Ray Lopez (HD-125; Bexar County) was appointed Vice-Chair. The remaining members of the Committee included Representative Ben Bumgarner (HD-63; Denton County), Representative Mark Dorazio (HD-122; Bexar County), Representative Jill Dutton (HD-2; Hopkins, Hunt, Van Zandt), Representative James B. Frank (HD-69; Archer, Baylor, Clay, Cottle, Fisher, Foard, Hardeman, Haskell, King, Knox, Motley, Stonewall, Wichita, Wilbarger), Representative Josey Garcia (HD-124; Bexar County), Representative Penny Morales Shaw (HD-148; Harris County), and Representative Sergio Muñoz Jr. (HD-36; Hidalgo County).

Pursuant to House Rule 3, Section 9, the committee-maintained jurisdiction over all matters pertaining to:

1. The relations between the State of Texas and the federal government involving defense, emergency preparedness, and veterans issues;
2. The various branches of the military service of the United States;
3. The realignment or closure of military bases;
4. The defense of the state and nation, including terrorism response;
5. Emergency preparedness;
6. Veterans of military and related services; and
7. The following state agencies: the Texas Military Department, the Texas Veterans Commission, the Veterans' Land Board, the Texas Military Preparedness Commission, the Texas Division of Emergency Management, and the Emergency Management Council.

In March 2024, the speaker of the House, the Honorable Dade Phelan, assigned interim charges for the various committees of the Texas House of Representatives.

INTERIM STUDY CHARGES

CHARGE I: **Monitoring:** Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee’s jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 88th Legislature. Conduct active oversight of all associated rulemaking and other governmental actions taken to ensure the intended legislative outcome of all legislation, including the following:

- HB 90, relating to benefits for certain members of the Texas military forces and survivors of members of the Texas military forces; and
- HB 671, relating to a veterans suicide prevention campaign.

CHARGE II: **Identification and Support of Texas Veterans:** Identify barriers to identifying and verification of veteran status. Make recommendations to improve identification efforts to better engage and support the state’s veteran populations.

CHARGE III: **Professional License Portability for Military and Spouses:** Evaluate compliance statewide with the Section 19 of the Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-333, 50 U.S.C. §4025a), concerning the portability of professional licenses of service members and spouses and make recommendations to ensure that service members and their spouses may, under appropriate circumstances, continue to practice under a license issued by another jurisdiction.

CHARGE IV: **Strength of Texas Military Bases:** Review the federal criteria for considering and recommending base closure or realignment and evaluate the strength of Texas Military Bases under the scoring system utilized by the U.S. Department of Defense. Make recommendations to mitigate the risk of realignments or closures of military installations in Texas.

Additionally, the committee gathered testimony on Defense Research and Partnerships:

Defense Research & Partnerships: Review the role and contributions of the University of Texas San Antonio to the defense of the state and nation through defense research, especially regarding security infrastructure, talent recruitment, and development of partnerships with the federal government.

Due to the relationship between the goals of the charges, the report is organized by topics as follows:

-
- Monitor the agencies and programs under the committee’s jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 88th legislature;
 - Defense Research and Partnerships;
 - Identification and Support of Texas Veterans; and
 - Strength of Texas Military Bases.

The interim report details the charges below, separated into the corresponding topics listed above.

TOPIC 1: MONITOR THE AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS UNDER THE COMMITTEE’S JURISDICTION AND OVERSEE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RELEVANT LEGISLATION PASSED BY THE 88TH LEGISLATURE.

Interim Charge #1

Monitoring: Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee’s jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 88th Legislature. Conduct active oversight of all associated rulemaking and other governmental actions taken to ensure the intended legislative outcome of all legislation, including the following:

Texas Military Department

- *HB 90, relating to benefits for certain members of the Texas military forces and survivors of members of the Texas military forces; and*
- *SB 538, relating to the use of appropriated money by the Texas State Guard for recruiting and retention purposes.*

Texas Veterans Commission

- *HB 671, relating to a veterans suicide prevention campaign.*
- *HB 1457, relating to required military informed care or military cultural competency training for certain personnel of entities that provide mental health services to veterans or veterans' families before award of a state agency grant;*
- *HB 2951, relating to the establishment of a service dog pilot program for certain veterans; and*

TOPIC 2: DEFENSE RESEARCH & PARTNERSHIPS

Defense Research & Partnerships: Review the role and contributions of the University of Texas San Antonio to the defense of the state and nation through defense research, especially with regard to security infrastructure, talent recruitment, and development of partnerships with the federal government.

TOPIC 3: IDENTIFICATION AND SUPPORT OF TEXAS VETERANS

Interim Charge #2

Identification and Support of Texas Veterans: Identify barriers to identifying and verification of veteran status. Make recommendations to improve identification efforts to better engage and support the state's veteran populations.

TOPIC 4: STRENGTH OF TEXAS MILITARY BASES

Interim Charge #3

Professional License Portability for Military and Spouses: Evaluate compliance statewide with the Section 19 of the Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-333, 50 U.S.C. §4025a), concerning the portability of professional licenses of service members and spouses and make recommendations to ensure that service members and their spouses may, under appropriate circumstances, continue to practice under a license issued by another jurisdiction.

In addition to the above charge, the Committee also considered the implementation of:

- *SB 422, relating to the authority of certain military service members to engage in a business or occupation in this state;*

Interim Charge #4

Strength of Texas Military Bases: Review the federal criteria for considering and recommending base closure or realignment and evaluate the strength of Texas Military Bases under the scoring system utilized by the U.S. Department of Defense. Make recommendations to mitigate the risk of realignments or closures of military installations in Texas.

**TOPIC I: MONITOR THE AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS
UNDER THE COMMITTEE’S JURISDICTION AND OVERSEE
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RELEVANT LEGISLATION
PASSED BY THE 88TH LEGISLATURE**

Interim Charge #1

Monitoring: Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee’s jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 88th Legislature. Conduct active oversight of all associated rulemaking and other governmental actions taken to ensure the intended legislative outcome of all legislation, including the following:

- *HB 90, relating to benefits for certain members of the Texas military forces and survivors of members of the Texas military forces; and*
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In addition to the above legislation, the Committee also considered the implementation of:

- *HB 1457, relating to required military informed care or military cultural competency training for certain personnel of entities that provide mental health services to veterans or veterans' families before award of a state agency grant;*
- *HB 2951, relating to the establishment of a service dog pilot program for certain veterans;*
- *SB 538, relating to the use of appropriated money by the Texas State Guard for recruiting and retention purposes.*

Texas Military Department

Pursuant to House Rule 3, Section 9, the House Committee on Defense & Veterans' Affairs maintains jurisdiction over all matters pertaining to the Texas Military Department.

Following the 88th Legislative Session, the committee monitored the implementation of relevant legislation to ensure the intended legislative outcome, including all associated rulemaking.

For the purposes of this report, the Committee conducted a review of the following legislation in connection with oversight of the Texas Military Department:

- *HB 90, relating to benefits for certain members of the Texas military forces and survivors of members of the Texas military forces; and*
- *SB 538, relating to the use of appropriated money by the Texas State Guard for recruiting and retention purposes.*

Implementation of H.B. 90

Background

[The Bishop Evans Act \(H.B. 90\)](#)¹ provides line-of-duty death benefits to soldiers serving on state active-duty orders such as Operation Lone Star due to the disparity between the benefits received by members of the Texas State Guard and those received by other state and government employees. Operation Lone Star involves Texas State and National Guard members and state law enforcement officials working jointly on the mission to uphold Texas' sovereignty with as many as 10,000 military personnel to the southern border since its launch in March 2021.²

The death of Specialist Bishop Evans, a Texas National Guard member who drowned while attempting to save migrants in the Rio Grande in April of 2022, brought national attention to the risks faced by service members on this mission. Evans' death highlighted the lack of guaranteed death benefits for Guardsmen on state-active duty, leading to the introduction of the Bishop Evans Act. Senator Joan Huffman, R-Houston, remarked, "He was certainly a hero, and I am proud to present this bill to the Senate."³ The bill passed unanimously in both the House and in the Senate.

The Bishop Evans Act, officially House Bill 90, ensures that members of the National and Texas State Guard on state active duty receive a \$500,000 death benefit, aligning their benefits with those of law enforcement officers on the same mission. This legislation represents the culmination of efforts by military leaders and advocates to provide appropriate compensation and support to the families of fallen service members. The bill also extends coverage to retroactively apply to Evans and others who died during Operation Lone Star.

1 <https://legiscan.com/TX/text/HB90/id/2817575>

2 <https://artexas.org/remembering-bishop-evans/>

3 <https://www.texastribune.org/2023/05/19/legislature-bishop-evans-act-approved/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThis%20bill%20is%20named%20after,this%20bill%20to%20the%20Senate.%E2%80%9D>

Between 2021 and 2024, at least 17 Texas Guardsmen died while deployed to the Southern border. Under HB 90, families of most of these service members have received \$500,000 in authorized state death benefits. However, during a public hearing held on August 20, 2024, Shelia Bailey-Taylor of the Texas Military Department informed the committee that at least 6 others were denied.

Bishop Evans Act Eligibility Requirements

Duty Status: The individual must have been on state active duty at the time of death.

Circumstances of Death: The death must have occurred in connection with operations initiated to address criminal activity in the border region.

Retroactive Claims: The individual must have died on or after March 6, 2021, but before September 1, 2023.

Eligible Claimants:

- If the individual was a member of the Texas National Guard, the beneficiary designated on the individual's United States Department of Defense Form DD-93 is eligible.
- If there is no designated beneficiary or if the individual was not a member of the Texas National Guard, the following are eligible in order of priority:
 - The surviving spouse of the individual.
 - A surviving child of the individual if there is no surviving spouse.
 - The surviving parent of the individual if there is no surviving spouse or child.

Benefit Amount

- ERS provides a lump sum payment of \$500,000 to an eligible claimant. If there is more than one eligible claimant (e.g., multiple surviving children or parents), ERS will divide a \$500,000 payment equally among them.

The legislation represents a significant step forward, and implementation has been successful so far. While the TMD conducts ongoing reviews, many families of the deceased Guardsmen have already received the compensation they deserve. Efforts continue to ensure that all eligible families receive their benefits as quickly as possible.

Testimony Gathered on August 20, 2024

Robin Hardaway Verbal Testimony – Director of Customer Benefits for the Employee Retirement System of Texas

Robin Hardaway, Director of Customer Benefits for the Employee Retirement System of Texas (ERS), began by explaining the process and structure of administering death benefits under H.B. 90, which expanded coverage to Texas military forces. ERS collaborates with the Texas Military Department (TMD) to determine eligibility based on Department of Defense Form DD93, which identifies beneficiaries. If the service member does not list a beneficiary, ERS will distribute the payment to their family. Under the act, eligible survivors receive a lump sum of \$500,000, adjusted for inflation. For FY24, this amount stands at \$591,040. Additionally, surviving minor children receive monthly payments, scaled based on the number of children. ERS works with the Office of the Comptroller to ensure timely disbursement of these funds upon completion of certification.

Shelia Bailey-Taylor Verbal Testimony – Director of State Administration, Texas Military Department

Shelia Bailey-Taylor, Director of State Administration at the Texas Military Department (TMD), outlined the two phases of TMD's implementation of H.B. 90.

In Phase One, TMD collaborated with the Crime Victims Compensation Program to provide one-time lump sum payments to eligible survivors of service members who died in border-related incidents. Of the ten claims submitted, only four met eligibility requirements, receiving payments.

In Phase Two, TMD partnered with ERS to administer benefits under [Chapter 615 of the Government Code](#).⁴ TMD is responsible for investigating whether a service member's death occurred in the line of duty. To date, one death has been certified, while six others are under review. Taylor highlighted the complexity of determining eligibility under broader definitions of the "line of duty," especially as it relates to workers' compensation claims that were initially denied but may still qualify under the new law. She also addressed concerns about how the review process considers activities like travel to or from duty stations and the need for further advocacy to expand benefit eligibility.

Representative Dorazio asked about the interplay between workers' compensation and the \$500,000 death benefit, and Taylor clarified that these are separate processes. Workers' compensation benefits are an additional provision, depending on the circumstances of death.

Representative Frank inquired about the timeline for reviewing service-related deaths, and Taylor explained that the military line of duty review is broader, taking into account not just job duties but also factors like travel. She stated she would need to provide more accurate timing information later. Taylor also explained that the workers' compensation review is more direct,

⁴ <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/GV/htm/GV.615.htm>

focusing on whether the activity was part of the individual's job duties, while the military line of duty review is broader and can include activities such as travel that are still considered service-related for benefit purposes.

In a later response from TMD, they explained that the projected timeline for completing investigations into State Active Duty (SAD) deaths is set at 180 days from the appointment of the Eligibility Determination Officer (EDO). However, this timeline may extend if delays occur in receiving necessary documents from outside agencies such as police departments or medical examiners' offices. The process begins within five days of the death report, upon appointment of an EDO. The EDO must complete the investigation within 120 days, although extensions may be required if critical documents are pending, with 30-day updates provided during the process. Following the EDO's investigation, the General Counsel completes a legal review within 7 to 10 days. In cases of self-inflicted deaths, J9/BH must provide a mental health evaluation memo within the same timeframe. Afterward, J1 conducts a review of the investigation findings and the legal review within 7 to 10 days. The target date for concluding the investigation is 180 days. Submission to the Office of the State Administration (OSA) and OSA's submission to the Employees Retirement System (ERS) are not part of this investigation timeline.

Representative Garcia raised the issue of "military duty's" definition, suggesting that expanding the scope of eligibility could benefit more service members. Garcia specifically noted that travel to and from duty should qualify as part of the scope of duty. Taylor responded by affirming that H.B. 90 already includes travel but agreed that further review could improve program reach.

Chairman Wilson asked if there had been any discussion about an appeals process during rulemaking, given that the investigation followed a military process. Shelia Bailey-Taylor clarified that the Texas Military Department's rules do not include an appeals process, while Lane Brown, of the Attorney General's Office, confirmed that Crime Victim Services does have one as part of their standard procedure but did not have specific details available at the moment.

Lane Brown Verbal Testimony – Division Chief, Crime Victim Services Division, Office of the Attorney General of Texas

Lane Brown, Division Chief of Crime Victim Services (CVSD) at the Office of the Attorney General (OAG), provided additional testimony on the role of CVSD in administering lump-sum payments to families of Texas military members who died during border operations. Brown explained that \$1.5 million out of a \$2 million allocation had been awarded to qualifying families. He praised the positive impact of the payments on these families and highlighted the importance of continued collaboration between CVSD, TMD, and the committee.

In response to a question from **Representative Garcia** about the \$2 million fund allocation, Brown confirmed that unused funds would roll over to FY25 but deferred further financial details to the CFO and budget teams. Garcia emphasized the importance of fully utilizing these funds to support families affected by military deaths, particularly for those who do not meet eligibility requirements.

Findings – Implementation of H.B. 90

Problems Identified:

1. Disparity in Benefits for Texas State Guard

- Texas State Guard members have historically had less access to death benefits compared to other state and government employees, especially when serving on state active duty such as during Operation Lone Star. Implementation of H.B. 90 has helped resolve this disparity.

2. Appeals and Review Process Issues

- There is no clear appeals process within the Texas Military Department for those denied benefits under H.B. 90, making it difficult for affected families to contest decisions.

Solutions and Recommendations:

1. Establish an Appeals Process:

- Consider implementing a formal appeals process within the Texas Military Department to allow claimants to contest benefit decisions, providing them with an additional layer of support and recourse.

2. Continued Legislative and Policy Review:

- Regularly review and update policies and legislation to address gaps and improve support for service members and their families, particularly regarding benefits and eligibility criteria.

Benefits

The committee heard invited testimony from the Texas Military Department regarding the differences between federal and state benefits provided to service members.

Lieutenant Colonel Yesenia Sigcho Verbal Testimony – Human Resources Officer, Texas Military Department

Lieutenant Colonel Yesenia Sigcho, a Human Resources Officer for the Texas Military Department, provided an overview of the federal benefits available to Army soldiers, covering various aspects from enlistment to retirement.

Life and Health Insurance

Upon enlistment, soldiers receive life insurance through the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI), with options for \$400,000 or \$500,000 in coverage. This cost is automatically deducted from their pay, making it convenient and affordable. Soldiers are also covered by various TRICARE health insurance plans, depending on their service status. Active-duty soldiers with orders longer than 30 days can access TRICARE Prime at no cost, while traditional guardsmen can opt for TRICARE Reserve Select for themselves and their families. Mobilized soldiers and their families receive TRICARE coverage 180 days before and after deployment through the Transition Assistance Management Program (TAMP). Retired service members have the option to continue TRICARE coverage under the TRICARE Retired Reserve plan.

Education and Career Development

Soldiers can pursue further education through federal and state tuition assistance programs. The federal tuition assistance covers 100% of tuition fees, and the state program has seen a recent increase in applications. Additional resources include credentialing assistance for certifications like PMP (Project Management Professional) and SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management), the Hazelwood Act for Texas National Guard enlistees, GI Bill benefits, and ASVAB testing support for career advancement.

Family Support and Youth Programs

The Texas Military Department provides comprehensive family support services, including financial counseling, employment opportunities, and youth programs. The recent "Back to School Brigade" supported over 300 military children with school supplies. The Yellow Ribbon Program offers resources to families during deployments, and transition services are available for soldiers leaving the military. Partnerships with agencies like the Texas Workforce Commission, Texas Veterans Commission, and [militaryhire.com](https://www.militaryhire.com/)⁵ facilitate employment support.

⁵ <https://www.militaryhire.com/>

Retirement and Financial Planning

Soldiers begin earning retirement points as soon as they enlist. Active Guard Reserve soldiers can qualify for retirement after 20 years of service, while traditional guardsmen collect retirement benefits at age 60. The Thrift Savings Plan, akin to a 401(k), and various enlistment and retention bonuses are additional financial incentives provided throughout a soldier's career.

Sigcho concluded by mentioning ongoing efforts to improve talent management within the department, focusing on placing individuals in appropriate roles to enhance retention. She expressed the department's commitment to supporting service members throughout their careers, pending any questions from the committee.

Shelia Bailey-Taylor Verbal Testimony – Director of State Administration, Texas Military Department

Shelia Bailey-Taylor, Director of State Administration for the Texas Military Department, provided testimony regarding the benefits available to Texas Military Force members while on state active duty. She explained that these members are considered temporary state employees during their service, which includes training and other special duties. Under House Bill 90, service members receive several key benefits.

Base Pay

All service members called to state active duty receive a base pay, with National Guard members receiving pay based on the U.S. military pay scale, including various allowances and special pays. State Guard members receive the same base pay as the National Guard, along with per diem and special pay if applicable.

Insurance and Workers' Compensation

In terms of insurance and compensation, service members are eligible for workers' compensation from the first day of state active duty. After 60 consecutive days, they qualify for group health and medical insurance benefits. Additional death benefits include military funerals and honors upon request, and grave markers for certain personnel. Military leave is available for service members who are also state employees, although this does not apply to National Guard members.

Unemployment and USERRA Protections

Taylor also discussed other benefits, such as unemployment insurance and access to the Texas Military Department's Employee Assistance Program, which is available to all state employees. The State Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) protects service members' civilian jobs when they are called to state active duty, even if they are on unpaid orders.

However, Taylor noted several benefits not provided to service members on state active duty. They are not eligible to enroll in the Texas SAVER 401(k) or 457 plans offered to state employees, nor

do they receive state service credit or retirement benefits from the Employees Retirement System (ERS) for their time on state active duty. This lack of retirement benefits and service credit is particularly concerning for those on long-term state active duty. Additionally, these service members do not accrue annual or personal leave like regular state employees, but they receive some granted time off, referred to as "pass," at their commander's discretion.

Findings - Benefits

Problems Identified:

1. Limited Access to Retirement Benefits:

- Texas Military Force members on state active duty do not receive state service credit or retirement benefits from the Employees Retirement System (ERS). This is a concern, especially for those serving long-term on state active duty.

2. Lack of Access to Certain Financial Benefits:

- Service members on state active duty are not eligible for the Texas SAVER 401(k) or 457 plans, which are available to regular state employees. This limits their ability to save and invest for retirement.

3. No Accrual of Leave for State Active Duty:

- Unlike regular state employees, service members on state active duty do not accrue annual or personal leave. They may receive time off, referred to as a “pass,” but this is granted at the discretion of their commander, which creates uncertainty and lack of formalized leave benefits.

Solutions and Recommendations:

1. Align State Benefits with Federal Standards:

- Advocate for changes in state policy to better align the benefits provided to service members on state active duty with those available under federal service. This includes expanding eligibility for retirement benefits and financial savings programs like the Texas SAVER 401(k) or 457 plans.

2. Enhance Retirement Benefits:

- Explore the possibility of providing state service credit or an alternative retirement benefit for service members on long-term state active duty to ensure they receive recognition and support for their service.

3. Formalize Leave Policies:

- Implement a standardized policy for leave accrual for state active-duty service members, ensuring they receive fair and consistent benefits similar to those of regular state employees.

Implementation of S.B. 538

Background

Prior to the passage of [S.B. 538](#),⁶ the Texas State Guard (TXSG) faced challenges in recruitment and retention due to unclear statutory language regarding the use of state-appropriated funds for public relations and advertising. To address this unclear statutory language, Senate Bill 538 explicitly authorized the use of state funds for Texas Military Department (TMD) recruitment and retention efforts.

Although state appropriations already fund recruitment, TMD required formal authorization to allocate these funds effectively. SB 538 allows TXSG to meet its strategic goals and maintain the strength of force mandated by Governor Abbott and the Legislative Budget Board.

S.B. 538 Analysis

Senate Bill 538 amends [Section 2113.011 of the Texas Government Code](#)⁷ to specifically allow the Texas State Guard to use state-appropriated funds for recruiting and retention purposes. Prior to this amendment, there was uncertainty about whether the Texas State Guard could legally allocate state funds for these activities. The bill clarified that the Texas State Guard may use appropriated funds to recruit and retain service members, employees, and other personnel, ensuring the resources necessary to for the Guard to build and maintain its force.

SB 538 empowers the Texas State Guard to proactively address its staffing needs, aligning with broader strategic goals for state readiness and security.

Lieutenant Colonel Dale Laine Verbal Testimony – Texas Military Department

In his testimony, Lieutenant Colonel Dale Laine, representing the Texas Military Department, provided an update on the implementation of Senate Bill 538, which focuses on the use of appropriated funds for recruiting and retention in the Texas State Guard. He began by describing the unique role of the Texas State Guard within the broader Texas Military Department, explaining that it cannot be deployed overseas and comprises about 1,800 members across four brigades. The Guard primarily responds to the Governor's activation during emergencies, assisting civil authorities. The State Guard is made up of professionals from various backgrounds, including judges, physicians, and veterans from elite military units, with about 40% being prior service members.

LTC Laine emphasized that Senate Bill 538 allows the State Guard to engage in targeted digital advertising, especially around areas with high military populations such as Killeen, San Antonio, and the Rio Grande Valley. Although this idea originated three years ago, the Guard could not proceed with advertising without legislative authorization, which the bill provided. Despite some

⁶ <https://tlis/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=88R&Bill=SB538>

⁷ <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/GV/htm/GV.2113.htm#2113.011>

delays in the procurement process, the Guard is working with platforms like iHeartMedia to ensure targeted recruitment.

LTC Laine also discussed the specific audiences they aim to reach, including separating service members, professionals with critical skills such as doctors, nurses, and chaplains. He mentioned the Guard's involvement in Operation Border Health, an annual event in the Valley in conjunction with the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) providing free healthcare to residents. He concluded by stressing the importance of recruitment efforts to strengthen the State Guard's capabilities, especially in areas like chaplaincy and legal services, and expressed gratitude to the legislature for passing the bill, which will enable the Guard to attract more members to serve Texas.

Recruitment and Retention

Testimony Gathered on August 20, 2024

On August 20, 2024, the committee held a public hearing at the Texas Capitol, featuring invited testimony from Colonel Steven Thomas of the Texas State Guard, Master Sergeant John Guidry, Senior Enlisted Leader for Recruiting and Retention of the Texas Air National Guard, and Lieutenant Colonel Samantha Lewis, Executive Officer for Recruiting and Retention of the Texas Army National Guard.

Colonel Steven Thomas Verbal Testimony – Texas State Guard

Colonel Steven Thomas of the Texas State Guard testified before the committee, discussing recruitment and retention challenges. He explained that the Texas State Guard, a component of the Texas Military Department, provides mission-ready military forces for state emergencies and homeland security. It operates under the Adjutant General of Texas and the Governor, with a current force of 1,780 members who have already served 109,000 mission days in the first quarter of FY24. Thomas described the fiscal impact of the State Guard's unpaid service, noting that volunteer efforts saved taxpayers approximately \$3.7 million.

The State Guard's limited recruiting resources bottleneck recruitment and retention efforts. With just four full-time recruiters and one manager, the onboarding process takes around 30 days per applicant. The lack of recruiters leads to a loss of potential recruits. In the first three quarters of FY24, nearly 3,000 applicants expressed interest in recruitment. However, as COL Thomas explained, "not having enough recruiters, we tend to lose applicants. After about 30 days, they change their mind and decide to go do something else and lose interest and we're not able to, you know, move them into our system."

Additionally, the lack of compensation negatively impacts recruitment and retention efforts. Particularly difficult for younger recruits who work hourly jobs and struggle to attend training without financial support, Texas State Guard members do not receive financial compensation for attending monthly training drills. Lastly, Colonel Thomas expressed pride in the Guard's accomplishments, including being named the defense force of the year in 2022 and 2023.

Master Sergeant John Guidry Verbal Testimony - Recruiting and Retention Senior Enlisted Leader, Texas Air National Guard

Master Sergeant John Guidry, the Recruiting and Retention Senior Enlisted Leader for the Texas Air National Guard, testified before the committee about the Guard's recruitment and retention efforts.

He described their multifaceted recruiting strategy, targeting both prior and non-prior service members. Approximately 70% of recruits are prior service, while 30% are new to the military. The

Air National Guard actively engages with educational institutions, including JROTC programs, high schools, colleges, and vocational schools, and uses social media to attract younger audiences.

On the prior service side, recruiters collaborate with in-service recruiters at active-duty bases, attending events and seminars to connect with separating service members. Retention efforts include a mentorship program, where seasoned service members guide new recruits, fostering confidence and organizational understanding. Professional development opportunities, such as leadership courses, are also available to improve job satisfaction and long-term retention.

Master Sergeant Guidry addressed two key challenges: MHS Genesis, a medical records system that unintentionally disqualifies potential recruits and creates excessive paperwork, and the Air National Guard's low recruiter-to-airmen ratio. With only nine recruiters covering the entire state, each recruiter is responsible for approximately 345 airmen, compared to the Army's one recruiter for every 100 soldiers. This limits the Guard's ability to grow and sustain itself. Additionally, the operational tempo and the need to balance military, civilian, and family responsibilities contribute to attrition.

Despite these challenges, the Texas Air National Guard remains committed to improving recruitment and retention through continued innovation and support for its personnel.

Lieutenant Colonel Samantha Lewis Verbal Testimony - Executive Officer, Recruiting and Retention, Texas Army National Guard

Lieutenant Colonel Samantha Lewis, Executive Officer for Recruiting and Retention for the Texas Army National Guard, testified about the challenges and strategies impacting recruitment and retention. She explained that the recruiting environment has evolved significantly over the past decade due to factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, decreased interest in military service, the rise of behavioral health diagnoses among teens, and complications introduced by MHS Genesis, which has slowed down recruitment processing.

Currently, the Texas Army National Guard has 172 recruiters statewide. Lewis described the importance of JROTC and ROTC programs in high schools and universities, which introduce young people to military service. She advocated for broader engagement opportunities such as uniform access across all schools.

The Simultaneous Membership Program (SMP) was also described as key to developing future leaders. This program allows students to participate in both the Army ROTC program and the Army National Guard or Army Reserve at the same time. Currently, Texas averages 175 SMP cadets across seventeen universities, with approximately 100 returning to Texas to commission as officers. Lieutenant Colonel Lewis stated, "The cadets receive various incentives such as drill pay, ROTC stipends, and we are working to streamline the management of SMP experience to reduce delays and ensure cadets drilling units are aligned with their school locations."

Lieutenant Colonel Lewis also noted "that 32 of the 50 states provide full tuition for Army National Guard service members," and that expanding benefits, such as full tuition assistance, could significantly enhance recruitment and retention. Despite these challenges, the Texas Army

National Guard has met or exceeded its authorized end strength in recent years, with Texas standing at 100.7% of its authorized strength.

Regarding retention, Lieutenant Colonel Lewis emphasized the importance of mentorship programs, career development opportunities, and professional growth to keep soldiers engaged and satisfied. Implementation of an exit survey has helped the Guard understand factors contributing to attrition, such as balancing multi-state and federal missions, conflicts with civilian employment, and challenges related to career progression within the Guard.

Lieutenant Colonel Lewis testified that in FY19, the retention success rate for the Texas Army National Guard stood at 60%, impacted by challenges such as COVID-19 restrictions. By FY20, the rate dropped to 56% due to the ongoing pandemic. In FY21, retention efforts improved, bringing the rate back to 60%. In FY22, retention increased to 64%, as COVID restrictions eased. In FY23, the rate rose further to 66%, highlighting the success of their retention strategies. Currently, in FY24, the rate stands at 62%, with projections to end the year at 65%, which is 5% above the National Guard Bureau standard.

For FY25, retention initiatives will focus on education incentives, extension bonuses, and professional development to retain soldiers. The state tuition assistance program has been essential, and leaders are considering new incentives for soldiers who extend their service for six years. Lieutenant Colonel Lewis thanked the committee for its support in ensuring the Texas Army National Guard remains a strong, ready, and resilient force.

Questions from Members to the Panel of Recruiters

Following the prepared testimony given, the panel opened up to questions from the committee.

Chairman Wilson asked a series of questions to the panel of witnesses, starting with Colonel Steven Thomas of the Texas State Guard. He began by confirming that the State Guard was authorized for 1,925 personnel but currently has 1,708. Colonel Thomas explained that previous legislation determined the authorized number, but it could change based on future missions.

Chairman Wilson then inquired if the State Guard's brigades were organized regionally for support or specific skill sets. Colonel Thomas clarified that they are set up for regional support, with medical and engineering battalions equally distributed. When asked about the 450 members currently on state active duty, Colonel Thomas confirmed that most serve under Operation Lone Star.

Chairman Wilson congratulated the State Guard on being named "Defense Forces of the Year" by the State Defense Force Council and asked what distinguished them for the award. Colonel Thomas responded that Texas has the largest state defense force in the country.

When asked about retention, Colonel Thomas replied that the average service duration is about three years.

Wilson noted that the State Guard requires members to drill one weekend per month and asked about the challenges related to travel distances. Thomas noted that most members are stationed regionally, but some, especially those in West Texas, must travel long distances.

Chairman Wilson then shifted to the Texas Army and Air National Guard, focusing on tuition benefits. He asked whether Texas provides 100% tuition coverage, and Lieutenant Colonel Samantha Lewis confirmed that it does not, unlike 32 other states. Wilson explored the balance between recruiting prior service members and non-prior service recruits, particularly in the Air National Guard, where Master Sergeant John Guidry explained that 30% of their recruits are non-prior service. Guidry expressed a desire to increase that percentage to integrate younger airmen into the force.

Wilson also asked about the Guard's involvement in military installations and school districts for recruiting efforts. Lieutenant Colonel Samantha Lewis mentioned ongoing efforts to build relationships Fort Bliss and Fort Cavazos, while Master Sergeant John Guidry noted that Texas schools generally welcome recruiters. Wilson stressed the importance of accessibility to students, given that 76% of 17–24-year-olds in Texas are ineligible for service due to various disqualifications.

Monica Martinez Verbal Testimony – Associate Commissioner for Standards and Programs, Texas Education Agency

Monica Martinez, Associate Commissioner for Standards and Programs at the Texas Education Agency (TEA) provided an overview of the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) in Texas public schools. She explained that JROTC has been part of Texas education since at least 2001, allowing students to earn up to four elective credits towards high school graduation and potentially substitute JROTC participation for the required physical education credit.

Martinez highlighted that the JROTC curriculum is set by each branch of the military, rather than by the Texas State Board of Education, and that the program is a partnership with shared costs between schools and military branches. She also mentioned that, while JROTC instructors have a specific teaching certificate option, it is not mandatory. There have been 81 JROTC teaching certificates issued since 2016.

Martinez provided data on JROTC student enrollment, noting that approximately 55,000 students participate in JROTC programs annually across 191 of the state's 1,200 school districts. She clarified that these students often use JROTC to fulfill their physical education requirement before continuing with higher-level JROTC courses.

She also addressed the inclusion of military enlistment in the state accountability system and the challenges of verifying enlistment data. Despite an agreement with the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), the data sharing process has not yet begun, affecting the ability to accurately credit districts for military readiness.

Additionally, Martinez discussed the impact of House Bill 651, which aimed to classify JROTC as a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program, potentially allowing JROTC courses to

receive additional weighted funding. While this bill did not pass, she noted that it would have provided financial incentives to schools offering JROTC, similar to other CTE programs.

Chairman Wilson and Vice-Chair Lopez raised questions about the distribution and impact of JROTC programs, including why only 191 school districts offer JROTC, the process for establishing JROTC programs, and how the choice of military branch is determined for each school. Martinez indicated that schools decide which branch to host, but acceptance into the program can depend on factors such as student interest and meeting military requirements.

The discussion concluded with acknowledgments of the benefits of JROTC for military readiness and a reflection on how missed legislative opportunities, like the stalled House Bill 100, could have affected programs such as JROTC.

Texas Education Agency - Presentation on JROTC

History of JROTC

The Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) is a long-established program aimed at instilling values of citizenship, service, and personal responsibility in high school students. The roots of JROTC date back to the National Defense Act of 1916, which established organized training programs in public and private educational institutions. Congress expanded this initiative in 1964 to include all branches of the military, shifting from active-duty support to a shared responsibility between the services and schools. Today, JROTC is mandated under Title 10 U.S. Code Section 2031, ensuring its continued operation in secondary schools across the country.

Establishing a JROTC Program

The process of establishing a JROTC unit involves educational institutions applying for the program, committing to share costs, and meeting the program's requirements. At least two instructors must staff each unit, typically a retired officer and a noncommissioned officer. These instructors take responsibility for teaching the curriculum and supervising cadet activities. The Army reimburses schools for a percentage of instructor salaries, provides uniforms, equipment, and an accredited curriculum. Similarly, the Navy offers resources like textbooks and instructor salaries, contributing to the comprehensive support structure of JROTC programs.

Overview of JROTC in Texas High Schools

JROTC in Texas high schools offers students up to four elective credits toward graduation, including physical education (P.E.) credits based on district policies. State administrative rules have explicitly listed it as a P.E. substitute since 200. Each military branch offers a unique curriculum, allowing students to gain valuable skills while earning endorsements in public services. The program not only helps students meet graduation requirements but also fosters leadership and civic responsibility.

JROTC Course Enrollment

Over the years, JROTC enrollment in Texas has seen fluctuations, with recent years showing a slight decline in participation. Course enrollment data from 2019 to 2024 highlights a decrease in the number of students opting for JROTC courses, especially in advanced levels of the program. For example, enrollment in JROTC IV dropped from over 6,000 students in 2019-20 to 4,442 in 2023-24.⁸ Despite these fluctuations, the program remains a key pathway for students interested in military service, leadership training, and personal development.

H.B. 651, 88th Texas Legislature

To further support JROTC and military enlistment, [House Bill 651](#)⁹, filed during the 88th Texas Legislature, proposed incorporating JROTC courses as part of career and technical education programs. The bill also recommended weighted funding for students enrolled in JROTC programs, acknowledging the rigorous training and unique learning experiences these courses provide. This move aims to bolster JROTC participation and ensure its continued impact on students' educational and professional trajectories.

College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) Credit for Military Enlistment

For purposes of state accountability, [TEC, §39.053](#)¹⁰ defines military readiness as “students who enlist in the armed forces of the United States or the Texas National Guard”. School districts can receive CCMR credit for graduates by submitting a completed DD Form 4, which serves as the official "Enlistment/Reenlistment Document" for the Armed Forces. This document must be fully signed and submitted to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), which securely reviews and stores the information. Graduates who provide this form are granted CCMR credit for military enlistment, contributing to both the district’s academic accountability metrics and the calculation of CCMR Outcomes Bonuses. This submission process began with the 2023 graduating class and continues for future graduates.

Armed Forces Recruiter Access to Students and Student Recruiting Information

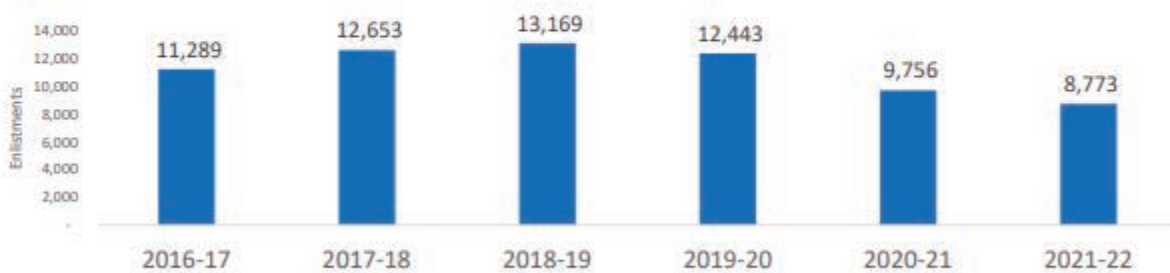
Under §8528 of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), any Local Education Agency (LEA) that receives ESEA funding is required to provide access to military recruiters or institutions of higher education (IHEs) upon request. This access includes the name, address, and telephone number of each secondary school student served by the LEA, unless the student (or their parent, if the student is under 18) submits a written request to opt out of the disclosure of such information. LEAs must inform parents or eligible students of the option to submit a written opt-out request. Additionally, military recruiters must be granted the same level of access to secondary school students as is afforded to IHEs or potential employers. This ensures equal opportunities for military recruitment alongside higher education or employment prospects.

⁸ TEA Presentation to the House Committee on Defense & Veterans' Affairs in a public hearing on August 20, 2024

⁹ <https://tlis/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=88R&Bill=HB651>

¹⁰ <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/ED/htm/ED.39.htm#39.053>

Military Enlistment for Texas Public High School Graduates, 2016-17 through 2021-22



Source: PEIMS Graduate Data, Defense Manpower Data Center, 2017 – 2022. Div. 213

Testimony Gathered on August 21, 2024

The committee heard invited testimony on August 21, 2024 in a public hearing at the University of Texas San Antonio Downtown Campus from Deputy Brigade Commander Terri Meyer of the U.S. Army 5th Recruiting Brigade, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army Joseph Bray, Colonel RET Will Lachance (Director of Army Instruction for Northeast ISD), Lieutenant Colonel RET Jerry Cheatom (Director of Army Instruction for San Antonio ISD), and Humberto L. Quintanilla II, a retired U.S. Navy Captain and President of the San Antonio Alamo Council of the U.S. Navy League.

Lieutenant Colonel Terri Meyer Verbal Testimony – Deputy Brigade Commander, 5th Recruiting Brigade, U.S. Army Recruiting Command

Lieutenant Colonel Terri Meyer, representing the 5th Recruiting Brigade of the U.S. Army Recruiting Command, expressed pride and gratitude in testifying, noting her personal connection as a native Texan, a product of the Texas public education system, and a current resident of the state. She highlighted the positive trend in recruiting numbers for FY24, specifically mentioning the success of the San Antonio Battalion as one of the top-ranking battalions in U.S. Army recruiting. Lieutenant Colonel Meyer attributed this success to the collaborative efforts of local communities, legislation, nonprofit organizations, private citizens, veterans, and the Texas education system.

She mentioned that the U.S. Army is on track to meet its 55,000-recruitment goal set by the Secretary of the Army, a milestone not achieved in the past three years. Looking ahead to FY25, Lieutenant Colonel Meyer emphasized proactive engagement with the Texas education system and the student population, noting that 31% of Texas high schools have already made their student lists available for recruitment purposes. She expects that the list will increase significantly by October of 2024 as schools finalize their junior and senior year lists.

Addressing concerns about recruitment standards, Lieutenant Colonel Meyer clarified that the Army's utilization of the AIM 2.0 program to help potential recruits meet existing qualifications, including efforts to lower body fat percentages and improve ASVAB scores, does not equate to a lowering of standards. She stressed that the Army has focused recruitment efforts on developing well-qualified soldiers rather than merely increasing numbers.

Lieutenant Colonel Meyer emphasized the importance of access to schools and colleges for effective recruitment, advocating for the Army as a career accelerator that provides both tangible and intangible skills to its recruits. She concluded, reiterating that sharing personal stories and engaging directly with students is the most effective recruitment strategy.

Representative Morales-Shaw asked for clarification about the 31% participation figure previously mentioned and whether it referred to schools or ISDs, and how it compares nationally. She also inquired if the percentage was high, low, or average and what actions are being taken to increase participation. Lieutenant Colonel Terri Meyer explained that the 31% statistic refers to the availability of high school student lists for recruiting purposes in Texas. This figure is about average compared to the national trend. She noted that many school systems prefer to finalize their junior and senior class lists before releasing them, which affects the participation rate. Lieutenant Colonel Meyer anticipated that the number would increase by October, providing a clearer picture of participation.

When asked if the typical increase in participation is satisfactory, Lieutenant Colonel Meyer responded that while the current average is acceptable, they always strive for more comprehensive access. She emphasized the importance of obtaining more complete lists and expanding access not only to public schools but also to private and charter schools that receive federal funding. Lieutenant Colonel Meyer highlighted the need for continued relationship-building with these institutions to present the Army as a viable pathway in both education and career development, and she welcomed any assistance in these efforts.

Joseph Bray Verbal Testimony – Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army

Joseph Bray, a U.S. Army Vietnam veteran and Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army (CASA) for Texas South, began his testimony expressing his continued commitment to the Army, noting that the oath he took upon enlistment in 1970 remains in force for him today.

In his role as a CASA, he serves as an advisor and supporter to Army leaders, providing insights on public sentiment toward the Army. A CASA is equivalent in status to a three-star general and is appointed by the Secretary of the Army to support Army Recruiting Command in its mission.

Bray emphasized the importance of fostering a pipeline of talented young men and women into colleges, corporations, and the military. He highlighted his collaboration with UTSA and the 5th Recruiting Brigade, discussing the challenge of attracting the best and brightest into these sectors. He then outlined five key topics he and his team aimed to address: enhancing JROTC programs with industry-based certifications to provide students with valuable skills and qualifications; advocating for increased state funding for Leadership Officer Training Corps (LOT) programs in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades; expanding the number of JROTC programs across Texas; supporting

the reintroduction and passage of House Bill 651, which did not pass in the previous legislative session; and addressing proposed changes to the pay structure of Cadet Command that could impact the recruitment and retention of JROTC instructors.

Questions from Members to the Panel

Representative Garcia began by expressing her appreciation for the witnesses' presence and shared her personal connection to the military, highlighting her role as a proud Air Force representative and the wife of a Purple Heart veteran who served in Iraq. She noted her excitement about the representation of the infantry and mentioned a concern raised by others regarding recruitment challenges in Texas schools, specifically whether military recruiters are facing barriers to accessing schools.

In response, **Lieutenant Colonel Meyer** acknowledged that, while she could not speak for every school district, the overall experience has been positive, with most schools welcoming military recruiters. She explained that the level of access varies, but they strive to build relationships with schools to enhance their presence and engagement with students.

Joseph Bray added to this by sharing his experiences as a CASA, regularly visiting high schools and engaging with superintendents, principals, and counselors. He described a wide range of access levels for recruiters, even within the same district. Some schools provide full access, allowing recruiters to enter classrooms and bring in subject matter experts to speak directly with students. In contrast, other schools restrict recruiters from setting up tables outside the cafeteria, where they must wait for students to approach them voluntarily. He emphasized the variability in access and clarified that it spans a broad spectrum across the state.

Representative Garcia continued by expressing appreciation for the clarification provided and emphasized her interest in understanding potential barriers to military recruitment, particularly for individuals impacted by the juvenile justice system. She noted a historical practice where juveniles with low-level offenses could opt for military service instead of incarceration, which many, including herself, have found transformative. She asked whether there are any current waivers for justice-impacted recruits and inquired about the existence of delayed enlistment programs.

Lieutenant Colonel Meyer confirmed that there are waivers in place, but eligibility depends on factors such as the time elapsed and the severity of the offense. She encouraged individuals to come in for a conversation to explore their options and go through the waiver process.

Representative Garcia then asked if there has been an impact on recruitment due to students receiving records for incidents like possession of vape cartridges.

Lieutenant Colonel Meyer responded that she couldn't provide specific statistics on such cases but noted that the waiver system has generally worked smoothly once the recruit's situation is fully assessed. When Representative Garcia requested examples of waivable offenses, Lieutenant Colonel Meyer cited two-time possession of marijuana as a common example, noting changes in federal policies regarding access to THC.

Representative Frank asked whether most high school recruits come from JROTC programs or if they are more often students who didn't participate in JROTC. He shared a personal anecdote about his sons and their friends considering military service without JROTC involvement.

Lieutenant Colonel Ret. Jerry Cheatom, the Director of Army Instruction for San Antonio ISD, responded that data from Cadet Command shows that enlistments are twice as high in schools with JROTC programs compared to those without. Although only about two percent of JROTC students enlist directly in the Army, the presence of JROTC instructors provides valuable mentorship for students exploring various military pathways, such as enlistment, ROTC scholarships, or service academy appointments. However, he clarified that federal law prohibits JROTC instructors from directly recruiting for the military.

Chairman Wilson asked for clarification on whether the recruitment restrictions are based on federal or state law, and Cheatom confirmed that it is federal law.

Colonel Ret. William Lachance, the Director of Army Instruction for Northeast ISD, added that JROTC programs have a positive impact on recruitment by introducing a military culture, structure, and values to the entire school, which influences the student body beyond just the cadets. He explained that JROTC cadets generally outperform their peers in areas like attendance, graduation rates, and GPA. He also noted that 44 percent of all Army enlistments come from schools with JROTC programs.

CASA Bray concluded by stating that Texas has a high propensity for military service across all branches compared to other states, reflecting a strong tradition of service within the state.

Chairman Wilson opened another line of questioning by asking about the accessibility and quality of data available to recruiters and whether there were barriers to accessing this information. **CASA Bray** agreed that accessibility and quality are both essential. Chairman Wilson noted that the ability for recruiters to approach potential recruits is often hindered by the lack of face-to-face interaction, especially in the digital age. He emphasized the need for data that could help recruiters target potential candidates more effectively and asked about specific barriers to accessing such data.

Lieutenant Colonel Meyer identified three main barriers: incomplete data, limited access to the totality of available data, and the difficulty in sifting through copious amounts of information to identify quality leads for recruitment. Chairman Wilson then asked what specific data recruiters need from schools to which Meyer responded that they typically request names, contact information, and influencer data (such as information about parents or guardians who may influence a student's decision to join the military).

Chairman Wilson inquired about the quality of the data received from schools and whether it varied across different regions. Lieutenant Colonel Meyer stated that in Texas, the data quality is generally good, and recruiters have systems in place to refine the data they receive. She noted that they are always seeking ways to improve data quality and access.

Chairman Wilson asked if there was anything the state of Texas could do to help improve accessibility and data quality. Lieutenant Colonel Meyer indicated that there were multiple programs that could benefit from state support and promised to provide more detailed information later. Wilson also asked about the percentage of students whose parents opt out of providing contact information, which LTC Meyer said varies yearly and promised to follow up with specific numbers.

The conversation then shifted to the cost of living for recruiters in Texas. **Chairman Wilson** pointed out that many recruiters are E6s or E7s and asked how they are managing with the cost of living, particularly regarding housing allowances. **Lieutenant Colonel Meyer** explained that the situation varies significantly depending on location, as cities like San Antonio, Dallas-Fort Worth, and Houston have different cost structures. She mentioned that while programs exist to help recruiters find stable housing, there are still challenges, especially when they are not near major military facilities.

Chairman Wilson raised concerns about whether TRICARE, the military health insurance program, is accepted in all areas where recruiters are stationed. **LTC Meyer** stated that, to her knowledge, there were no specific facilities refusing TRICARE, but she acknowledged that accessing TRICARE-approved providers can sometimes be complicated.

Chairman Wilson suggested a review of basic allotment for housing (BAH) for different ranks across Texas and noted the need to compare BAH with actual housing costs in major recruitment areas. He expressed concern that the increasing cost of living might discourage potential recruits or even lead current service members to leave the military if they cannot afford to live in their assigned areas.

Chairman Wilson emphasized the importance of making Texas an attractive place for military families and supporting their needs, highlighting the broader impact on national security and military readiness. **CASA Bray** added that inflation has affected not only housing but also food and gas costs, making it increasingly difficult for service members to keep up with the rising cost of living.

Chairman Wilson thanked the witnesses and reiterated the committee's commitment to addressing these challenges and supporting military families and veterans in Texas.

Representative Garcia asked Lieutenant Colonel Meyer about the robustness of the recruiter assistance program and whether they are receiving returning service members to assist with recruitment efforts. LTC Meyer explained that they have a robust system, including various programs like the Soldier Referral Program, Hometown Recruiter, and Gold Bar Recruiter. These programs allow soldiers to share their experiences and encourage others to join, leveraging peer-to-peer recruitment.

CASA Bray added that in San Antonio, the recruiting battalion, which recruits the highest number of soldiers in the nation, benefits from proximity to Fort Sam Houston and other military facilities. This allows for greater interaction between soldiers and students, enhancing recruitment through hands-on experiences and subject matter expert visits to schools. He emphasized the importance

of informing and educating the public about military service, given that less than 1% of the population serves in the military.

Representative Garcia then asked about the role of the Selective Service System in schools and whether there is any collaboration with military recruiters or JROTC. **Lieutenant Colonel Meyer** clarified that Selective Service is not a focus for recruiters, as their goal is to find people who want to serve voluntarily. She noted that they avoid bringing up the draft in conversations, focusing instead on those who choose to enlist.

Lieutenant Colonel Ret. Jerry Cheatom emphasized the importance of the Purple Star Program, which supports military families and provides resources to help them navigate school systems. He noted that the program's reach is expanding, with more schools receiving Purple Star designation each year, providing a supportive environment for military families and aiding recruiters in choosing schools for their children.

Chairman Wilson initiated another line of questioning by stating the importance of the JROTC program, noting the informative slide decks provided by Mr. Bray that detail the program's impact. He mentioned that out of over 1,200 school districts in Texas, only 191 have some form of JROTC program, with 202 schools having Army JROTC programs. He inquired about the barriers preventing more districts from establishing JROTC programs, asking if funding or policy were the fundamental issues.

CASA Bray responded by explaining that the Army is currently restricted from increasing the number of JROTC programs in Texas. Despite having 202 programs, they are only allocated for 134 based on Army parameters. He explained the two types of JROTC programs: the National Defense Cadet Corps Program (NDCC), which is entirely funded by the school district, and the shared program, where the Army covers 50% of the costs, including instructor salaries and other expenses. Bray used Davenport High School as an example, which started as an NDCC program, funded entirely by the school district. Due to its success, the program shifted to a shared model where the Army now covers half the costs.

Chairman Wilson asked if there are specific enrollment requirements to start a JROTC program. **Colonel Ret. William Lachance** explained that a school needs 100 cadets or 10% of the student population to begin, whichever is higher. Schools are given a grace period, typically five years, to reach this number. If a school fails to meet the threshold, the program may be placed on probation and potentially disestablished.

Chairman Wilson expressed concern about the difficulty of meeting the enrollment requirements, particularly for large school districts like Liberty Hill ISD. **COL Ret. Lachance** reassured him that there is no specific minimum number required on the first day and that schools have time to build up their programs.

CASA Bray added that if a high school desires a JROTC program, it is usually because they have assessed the interest and viability within their student population. He emphasized that with proper preparation and interest, a program should be successful.

Lieutenant Colonel Ret. Jerry Cheatom further elaborated that before establishing an NDCC program, schools must go through an application process that evaluates the school's facilities, student population, and support for the program. Approved applications are placed on a waiting list for shared program consideration.

Chairman Wilson and the witnesses agreed that with the right support and planning, JROTC programs can be successfully implemented in schools, providing significant value to students and the community.

In a later response from **CASA Joseph Bray**, the difference between the two types of JROTC programs was elaborated on. Specifically, the difference between a Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) program, and a National Defense Cadet Corps (NDCC) program.

According to the [U.S. Army Junior ROTC website](#)¹¹, an NDCC program is virtually identical to a JROTC program except that it is fully funded by schools which choose to pursue a JROTC unit without financial assistance from the U.S. Army. This is an excellent alternative for schools that wish to expedite the opening of a program. In a NDCC program, the school incurs all costs, to include instructors salaries, uniforms, and daily operational expenses. In a later response from **LTC Ret. Jerry Cheatom**, it was explained that the school is responsible for funding cadet uniforms, extracurricular equipment such as demilitarized rifles U.S. colors, and TX flags for color guard teams; demilitarized rifles for drill teams; air rifles for marksmanship safety teams; other equipment that the schools want to offer such as archery, drones, robotics, and or Raider Challenge teams. In addition, two required instructors' salaries according to the JROTC Pay System as well as transportation to events. The U.S. Army supplies curriculum material for the instructors, the students and Cadets. The U.S. Army also supplies forms and regulations which are required to successfully conduct the program. Schools hosting an NDCC unit must comply with statutory and regulatory guidance as regular JROTC units; specifically, units must employ a minimum of two instructors certified by HQ USACC. Schools hosting NDCC units may apply and be placed on the Order of Merit List (OML) for a JROTC Program.

In a JROTC program, the Army reimburses schools for a percentage of each instructors pay and provides Cadet uniforms, equipment, automation, and an accredited and rigorous curriculum.

Captain, U.S. Navy, RET Humberto Quintanilla Verbal Testimony – President, San Antonio Alamo Council, U.S. Navy League; Post Commander, American Legion Post 10

Humberto L. Quintanilla II, a retired U.S. Navy Captain and President of the San Antonio Alamo Council of the U.S. Navy League, testified about an initiative involving the Navy League's Sea Cadets program. He mentioned that charter schools in San Antonio have reached out to the Navy League to help establish an adjunct ROTC-type program for their students. This initiative is already underway, with the Gervin Charter School being the first to participate. The aim is to create a national template for the Navy League and Sea Cadets to support charter schools,

¹¹ <https://www.usarmyjrotc.com/procedures-to-establish-a-u-s-army-jrotc-or-ndcc-program/>

which often do not qualify for traditional ROTC programs due to their structure and funding sources.

Quintanilla emphasized that this new program seeks to provide opportunities for students in charter schools who might otherwise be excluded from participating in ROTC. He acknowledged the complexities surrounding charter schools in Texas but highlighted this initiative as a potential solution to ensure these students are not left out of such valuable programs. He concluded by noting the significance of this development for the San Antonio area and the potential for it to expand to other charter schools.

Findings

Problems Identified:

1. Recruitment Staffing Challenges

- The Texas State Guard faces challenges in recruitment due to limited recruiting staff resources, resulting in a loss of potential recruits. The onboarding process takes around 30 days, and many applicants lose interest or decide to go to another service due to delays.
- The Texas Air National Guard has a low recruiter-to-airmen ratio, limiting its ability to grow and sustain itself. With only nine recruiters covering the entire state, each is responsible for approximately 345 airmen, compared to the Army's one recruiter for every 100 soldiers.
- The Texas Army National Guard faces decreased interest in military service due to factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, increased behavioral health diagnoses among teens, and complications introduced by MHS Genesis.

2. Lack of Financial Compensation

- Texas State Guard members are not financially compensated for attending monthly training drills, which poses a challenge for younger recruits who work hourly jobs and struggle to attend training without financial support.

3. Limited Tuition Benefits

- Texas does not provide 100% tuition coverage for National Guard service members, unlike 32 other states. Expanding benefits, such as full tuition assistance, could enhance recruitment and retention.

4. Accessibility and Quality of Data for Recruiters

- Recruiters face challenges accessing and using high-quality data to target potential recruits effectively, especially in the digital age, where face-to-face interaction is limited.
- While generally positive, the level of access to schools varies, with some schools providing full access and others restricting recruiters to areas like the cafeteria, limiting effective engagement with students.

5. High Cost of Living for Recruiters

- Recruiters, often E6s or E7s, face challenges managing the cost of living, particularly regarding housing allowances in high-cost areas like San Antonio, Dallas-Fort Worth, and Houston.

6. JROTC Program Expansion Limitations

- The number of JROTC programs in Texas is capped, preventing further expansion despite interest from schools. Current Army parameters allocate only 134 programs, even though Texas currently has 202.
- Charter schools often do not qualify for traditional JROTC programs due to their structure and funding sources, excluding their students from valuable leadership and military readiness opportunities.

Solutions and Recommendations:

1. Increase Recruiting Resources:

- Allocate additional resources to the Texas State Guard and Texas Air National Guard to increase the number of recruiters. This would help reduce the recruiter-to-airmen ratio and ensure a more effective and timely onboarding process for potential recruits.
- Develop programs at the state level similar to the Soldier Referral Program and Hometown Recruiter Assistance Program to leverage peer-to-peer recruitment. Recognize and reward recruiters who successfully engage with and recruit new service members.
- Implement extension bonuses for soldiers who extend their service for six years.

2. Provide Financial Compensation for Training:

- Implement financial compensation for Texas State Guard members attending monthly training drills. This would help younger recruits who struggle to attend training without financial support and improve overall retention.

3. Expand Tuition Assistance Benefits:

- Advocate for state legislation to provide 100% tuition coverage for Texas National Guard service members, similar to other states. This would enhance recruitment and retention efforts by making military service more financially viable.

4. Enhance or Standardize Data Accessibility and Quality:

- Improve the quality and accessibility of data provided to recruiters. This includes ensuring that recruiters receive complete and up-to-date contact information and influencer data from schools to better target potential recruits.

5. Increase Access for Military Recruiters to Schools:

- Strengthen relationships between military recruiters and schools to ensure more consistent access. Encourage schools to allow recruiters to engage more directly with

students in classrooms and other academic settings.

6. Address Cost of Living Challenges for Service Members:

- Review and adjust the Basic Allotment for Housing for different ranks across Texas to better align with housing costs in major recruitment areas.
- Consider additional support programs through the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) to help service members and veterans manage the excessive cost of living in metropolitan areas.
- Remove barriers to affordable child care by recognizing military family child care certification in lieu of state licensing. Provide for provisional licensing or registration if the operator or owner of the family child care home has completed the Defense Department FCC certification process within the previous six months.
- Support expansion of the fee assistance program: Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood-PLUS.

7. Expand JROTC Programs and Funding:

- Advocate for the expansion of JROTC programs beyond the current cap and explore additional funding mechanisms to support innovative programs in schools with high interest. This would increase access to leadership and military readiness training for more students.
- Develop and implement JROTC-type programs tailored for charter schools, similar to the initiative being explored by the Navy League's Sea Cadets program. This would provide charter school students with similar opportunities for leadership and military readiness training.
- Advocate for legislative changes, such as the reintroduction of House Bill 651, to include JROTC as part of Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and provide additional weighted funding for JROTC courses.
- Support expansion of JROTC Cyber Program.

Texas Veterans Commission

Pursuant to House Rule 3, Section 9, the House Committee on Defense & Veterans' Affairs maintains jurisdiction over all matters pertaining to the Texas Veterans Commission.

The Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) stands as a premier organization, dedicated to serving those who have bravely served our country. Renowned for their exceptional support and resources, the TVC is committed to ensuring that Texas veterans and their families receive the benefits and assistance they deserve. The agency consistently upholds its mission through a wide range of programs that cover everything from healthcare and education to employment and financial assistance. The annual [Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services \(TCCVS\) Report](#)¹² serves as testament to TVC's ongoing efforts to improve and expand these services. The 2024 report details the council's strategic goals, including initiatives aimed at addressing mental health, housing, and education challenges faced by veterans. Through collaboration with state agencies, nonprofits, and community organizations, the TVC continues to lead the way in supporting the well-being and success of Texas veterans.

Following the 88th Legislative Session, the committee was charged with monitoring the implementation of relevant legislation, including conducting active oversight of all associated rulemaking and other governmental actions taken to ensure the intended legislative outcome of all legislation.

For the purposes of this report, the committee conducted a review of the following legislation in connection with oversight of the Texas Veterans Commission:

- *HB 671, relating to a veteran's suicide prevention campaign;*
- *HB 1457, relating to required military informed care or military cultural competency training for certain personnel of entities that provide mental health services to veterans or veterans' families before award of a state agency grant;*
- *HB 2951, relating to the establishment of a service dog pilot program for certain veterans;*

Implementation of H.B. 671

Background

Suicide rates, both nationally and in Texas, are disproportionately high among military veterans – 37.4 per 100,000 -- compared to the general population -- 18 per 100,000.¹³ In 2021, data from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) revealed that Texas veterans experienced an average of 1.6 suicide deaths per day. Of particular concern, 77.5 percent of these suicides involved firearms, a rate significantly higher than the general population.

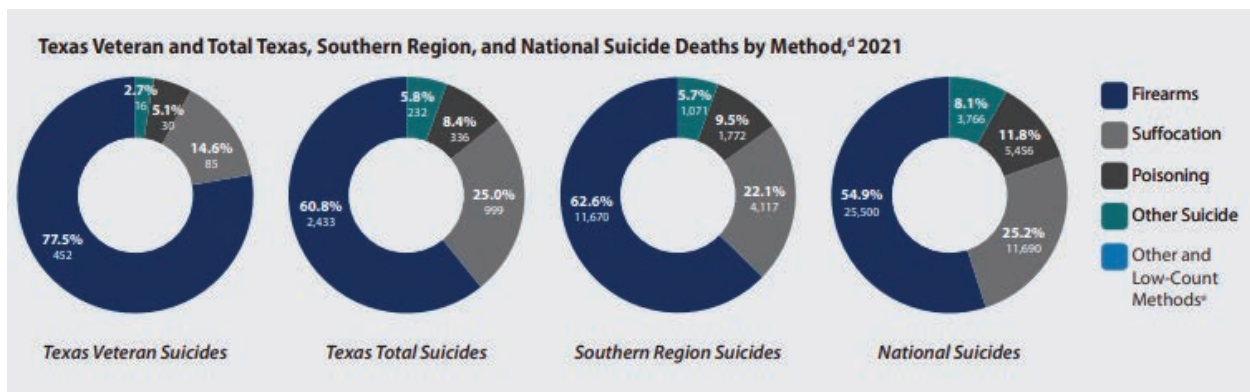
¹² https://tvc.texas.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/TCCVS-Report_8_28_24.pdf

¹³ *US Department of Veterans Affairs "Texas: Veteran Suicide Data Sheet, 2021"; Health and Human Services Commission "Report on Long-Term Action Plan to Prevent Veteran Suicides"*

Texas Veteran and Total Texas, Southern Region, and National Suicide Deaths and Rates by Age Group, 2021^c

Age Group	Texas Veteran Suicides	Texas Total Suicides	Southern Region Total Suicides	National Total Suicides	Texas Veteran Suicide Rate per 100,000	Texas Suicide Rate per 100,000	Southern Region Suicide Rate per 100,000	National Suicide Rate per 100,000
18-34	98	1,395	5,667	14,230	52.7	19.6	19.7	18.8
35-54	186	1,355	6,141	15,263	38.1	17.5	19.0	18.2
55-74	174	937	4,970	12,411	29.6	16.4	17.2	16.2
75+	123	313	1,852	4,508	41.3	21.3	22.1	20.3
All	583	4,000	18,630	46,412	37.4	18.1	18.9	18.0

Recognizing the urgent need for targeted intervention, H.B. 671 proposed a solution by mandating the Texas Veterans Commission to conduct a comprehensive suicide prevention campaign focused on providing veterans with critical information on suicide prevention, including the establishment of a dedicated website offering guidance on the safe storage of firearms.



H.B. 671 intends to effectively disseminate life-saving information and resources to those who need it most by leveraging the trust veterans place in the Texas Veterans Commission.

H.B. 671 Analysis

[House Bill 671](#) (H.B. 671)¹⁴ established a comprehensive veteran focused suicide prevention campaign conducted by the Texas Veterans Commission. The bill amended the Government Code by adding Section 434.0241, which outlines the responsibilities of the Texas Veterans Commission.

Suicide Prevention Campaign

HB 671 mandates The Texas Veterans Commission conduct a suicide prevention campaign aimed specifically at veterans, designed to provide veterans with vital information and resources to prevent suicide.

¹⁴ <https://tlis/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=88R&Bill=HB671>

Dedicated Website

As part of the campaign, HB 671 requires Texas Veterans Commission create and maintain a [dedicated Internet website](#)¹⁵ to serve as a central hub for veterans seeking information on suicide prevention, including resources on safe firearm storage.

Collaboration and Contracting

The bill authorizes the Texas Veterans Commission to collaborate with, and potentially contract, community-based, nonprofit, or private organizations to effectively conduct the suicide prevention campaign.

Funding

The commission can solicit and accept gifts and grants to support the campaign, ensuring it has the necessary resources to reach and assist veterans.

Implementation Timeline

The Texas Veterans Commission must establish the campaign by March 1, 2024, and adopt any rules necessary to implement it.

Effective Date

The act took effect on September 1, 2023.

Dr. Blake Harris Verbal Testimony – Director, Veterans Mental Health Department, Texas Veterans Commission

Dr. Blake Harris, a licensed clinical forensic psychologist and Director of the Veterans Mental Health Department for the Texas Veterans Commission, testified about the launch of a new suicide prevention website, created in response to House Bill 671. The [website](#),¹⁶ designed for ease of use, allows veterans to quickly connect with services and support. Dr. Harris emphasized the importance of making the site accessible to veterans of all eras, skill levels, and locations, including rural areas. The site includes suicide prevention resources, peer support options, and links to the Military Veteran Peer Network, which provides individual and group-based support.

Dr. Harris explained that veterans at elevated risk for suicide, such as those involved in the justice system or at risk of homelessness, are specifically targeted by the resources available on the site. The website also aims to engage faith-based organizations and community partners in suicide prevention efforts, leveraging them as force multipliers. In addition, Harris discussed various initiatives, including Buddy Check Day on the 11th of each month, which encourages veterans to

¹⁵ <https://veteransmentalhealth.texas.gov/suicide-prevention/>

¹⁶ Ibid.

check in on one another, and the Texans Ask campaign, which helps identify veterans to connect them with the appropriate services.

Since the website's launch, over 6,300 veterans have signed up to be volunteers or connected with peer service coordinators. Dr. Harris noted that the website is continuously improving and includes data on veterans' mental health needs, trauma-related issues, and reports from state and federal agencies. He emphasized the site's role in collaborating with partners like the Texas Veterans Network, the Texas Workforce Commission, Health and Human Services, and others to meet veterans' mental health needs.

Following the prepared testimony, Dr. Harris responded to questions from **Representative Morales-Shaw** about the fiscal impact and data tracking related to the suicide prevention website created under House Bill 671. **Dr. Harris** explained that despite the lack of a fiscal note, the department has been operating under its existing \$1.04 million budget for over a decade, covering various programs such as the Veteran Suicide Prevention Program, Justice-Involved Network, and the Military Veteran Peer Network. Dr. Harris acknowledged that, despite successfully launching the website and providing services, TVC needs more funding and staff to meet growing demands.

When asked about data tracking, **Dr. Harris** stated that the department collects self-reported data, including zip codes, when veterans sign up on the website. This data helps connect veterans with local peer service coordinators. However, they also accommodate veterans who wish to remain anonymous. The department tracks service coverage by county using the same catchment areas as local mental health authorities. Dr. Harris noted that this data is not currently tied to the annual performance report, but they are collecting it and could provide it if needed.

Representative Morales-Shaw thanked Dr. Harris for his detailed response and the work being done to support veterans.

Vice-Chair Lopez then raised concerns regarding the broad scope of suicide prevention under House Bill 671 and the challenges of measuring its effectiveness. He pointed out that veterans face various issues contributing to suicide, such as drug abuse, homelessness, and legal troubles, and emphasized the importance of tracking veteran suicides as a key indicator of the program's impact. Rep. Lopez asked Dr. Blake Harris if the state is collecting data on veteran suicides.

Dr. Harris explained that tracking veteran suicides is a national challenge and outlined some of the complexities in gathering accurate data. He mentioned that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) produces annual reports, but these figures do not capture all veterans, and different local practices, such as varying roles of medical examiners, coroners, and justices of the peace in death investigations, further complicate data collection. He also noted that determining whether a death is a suicide and whether the individual was a veteran can be difficult, particularly in rural areas where resources are limited.

Vice-Chair Lopez then discussed the need for state-level legislation to require counties to collect veteran status on death certificates as a way to improve the tracking of veteran suicides in Texas. **Dr. Harris** agreed that this would be helpful but also took into account the ongoing national

discussions surrounding veteran suicide prevention and the known strategies to reduce suicide rates, such as increasing connectedness and access to mental health professionals.

In conclusion, **Vice-Chair Lopez** emphasized the importance of establishing a mechanism for accurately evaluating veteran suicide rates in Texas to measure the effectiveness of ongoing suicide prevention efforts. He suggested that further legislation may be necessary to standardize data collection across the state.

Representative Garcia suggested creating a standardized Texas death certificate form, similar to the military's universal DD-214 document, to ensure that veteran status is consistently reported across the state. She noted that no matter where a service member leaves the military—whether in Alaska, Texas, or elsewhere—they receive the same form, the DD-214, which clearly identifies their veteran status. Rep. Garcia proposed that Texas adopt a similar approach, perhaps calling it "Texas Standard Form 671," to standardize the information required on death certificates, including the identification of veterans, service members, or National Guard members.

Representative Garcia acknowledged that while some individuals may not be identified as veterans, having a standardized form with this information would help ensure better tracking. Rep. Garcia suggested that this standardized form could be used by justices of the peace, coroners, and medical examiners, who all operate under certain rules and oversight, to collect more reliable data. She emphasized that this proposal could be worth exploring to improve the identification of veterans in death records.

Findings – Implementation of H.B. 671

Problems Identified:

1. Data Collection and Tracking Issues:

- Incompatible local practices and limited resources, especially in rural areas, complicate the process of determining veteran status and suicide circumstances at both the state and national levels.
- The lack of a standardized process for recording veteran status on death certificates in Texas has resulted in data collection gaps in the tracking of veteran suicides.

2. Insufficient Funding and Resources:

- Despite the launch of the suicide prevention website, the Texas Veterans Commission has been operating under an existing \$1.04 million budget for over a decade, a funding level insufficient to meet the growing demands for veteran mental health support.

Solutions and Recommendations:

1. Continued Monitoring and Adaptation of Suicide Prevention Efforts:

- Dr. Harris emphasized that the suicide prevention website and associated resources are continuously improving based on feedback and data. Ongoing collaboration with partners such as the Texas Veterans Network and Health and Human Services is crucial to adapting and enhancing the support provided to veterans.

2. Legislation for Data Collection on Veteran Status:

- Vice-Chair Lopez suggested state-level legislation requiring counties to collect veteran status on death certificates, providing a more accurate mechanism for evaluating veteran suicide rates and the effectiveness of suicide prevention efforts.
- To improve the tracking of veteran suicides, Representative Garcia proposed creating a standardized Texas death certificate form, similar to the military's DD-214, which would include a clear indication of veteran status. This would ensure consistent reporting of veteran suicides across the state.

3. Increased Funding and Resources for Veterans Mental Health Services

- Dr. Blake Harris stated the need for additional funding and staff to meet the growing demands of veteran mental health services. Securing more financial resources would enable the Texas Veterans Commission to expand its outreach and support efforts.

Implementation of H.B. 1457

Background

Military culture is distinct, and understanding its nuances is crucial for those providing mental health services to military personnel. Professionals without a military background who work with this population need specialized training to effectively address the unique mental health challenges veterans face.

Recognizing the importance of such training, [H.B. 1457](#)¹⁷ ensures that any entity receiving grants to provide mental health services to veterans or their families is adequately trained. This includes training on military sexual trauma (MST), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and developing an awareness of personal beliefs in relation to the military worldview and culture.

The bill seeks to improve the quality and effectiveness of mental health services provided to veterans by ensuring that providers are well-equipped to understand and address the specific needs of this population.

HB 1457 Eligibility Requirements

The eligibility requirements for receiving grants under House Bill 1457, which pertains to providing mental health services to veterans or veterans' families, are as follows:

Prior Grant Experience

The entity seeking the grant must demonstrate that it has previously received and successfully executed a grant from the awarding state agency.

Training Requirements

If the entity has not previously received a grant, it must provide training on military-informed care or military cultural competency to its personnel who provide mental health services to veterans or their families. Alternatively, the entity can require these personnel to complete military competency training provided by one of the following organizations:

- The Texas Veterans Commission
- The Health and Human Services Commission
- The Military Veteran Peer Network
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- The U.S. Department of Defense
- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- A nonprofit organization exempt from federal income taxation under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, with experience in providing training or technical assistance to

¹⁷ <https://tlis/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=88R&Bill=HB1457>

entities offering mental health services to veterans or their families.

Verification

The commission and the Department of State Health Services are responsible for jointly verifying that state agencies authorized to award grants have adopted policies ensuring compliance with these requirements.

These requirements must be met before a state agency can award a grant to an entity for the provision of mental health services to veterans or their families. The act took effect on September 1, 2023.

Dr. Blake Harris Verbal Testimony – Director, Veterans Mental Health Department, Texas Veterans Commission

Dr. Blake Harris provided testimony regarding the implementation of House Bill 1457, which mandates military cultural competency training for any organization receiving state funds to provide mental health or peer-based services to veterans.

Dr. Harris described the collaborative effort between the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) and the Health and Human Services (HHS) Commission in notifying state agencies of the bill and its requirements. A joint letter, signed by the TVC Executive Director and HHS Deputy Executive Commissioner, was sent out on October 25, 2023, to inform state agencies of the change, with follow-up communications in March and April 2024 to ensure compliance. The TVC took on the responsibility of collecting responses from state agencies, and they have received feedback from several key departments, including the Texas Military Department, Texas Workforce Commission, and Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs.

Dr. Harris reported significant growth in the delivery of Military Cultural Competency Training. In FY22, 640 training courses were conducted, reaching 3,996 people. By FY23, despite a slight drop in the number of training courses to 554, the number of participants increased to 6,800. As of the current fiscal year, 657 trainings have been held, reaching 8,362 individuals.

The training covers various aspects of military culture, such as the different branches of service, common misconceptions about veterans' benefits, and available state and local services. It also addresses veterans' mental health risk factors, transition difficulties, and suicide prevention. Dr. Harris emphasized the importance of tailoring the training to specific audiences, such as those working with older veterans with cognitive issues, as well as customizing it for organizations like the [Veteran Leadership Program](https://www.twc.texas.gov/programs/veterans/leadership)¹⁸ (through the Texas Workforce Commission) and smaller community groups.

In addition to online and in-person training, TVC also conducts outreach through initiatives like "Buddy Check Day" and provides training to a wide range of organizations, including veterans'

¹⁸ <https://www.twc.texas.gov/programs/veterans/leadership>

service groups and local congregations. Dr. Harris expressed pride in the department's efforts and their impact on improving services for Texas veterans.

Following his prepared testimony, Dr. Blake Harris stressed the importance of integrating military cultural competency training with suicide prevention efforts. He shared that his team has effectively combined both trainings into a "one-two combo" format, often bringing participants in for a few hours and incorporating suicide prevention training alongside military cultural awareness. Dr. Harris explained that, over the past two years, this approach has led to 459 training courses and 5,289 Texans being trained in suicide gatekeeping, helping them recognize individuals at risk of suicide. While it's difficult to quantify the exact impact, Dr. Harris expressed confidence that these efforts have likely saved lives.

Implementation of H.B. 2951

Background

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reports that an average of 17.5 veterans take their lives each day nationally, with a 2021 suicide rate among U.S. veterans of 33.9 per 100,000.¹⁹

In Texas alone, 583 veterans died by suicide in 2021. Despite these alarming statistics, [research from the RAND Center for Military Health Policy Research](#)²⁰ shows that less than half of veterans with mental health needs receive treatment. However, many veterans have reported significant improvements in managing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury, military sexual assault, and related drug use through the use of service dogs.

In response, [H.B. 2951](#)²¹ proposed the creation of a pilot program to pair veterans with highly-trained service dogs to help mitigate symptoms of PTSD and related mental health conditions. This bill amended current law to establish this pilot program, offering an innovative approach to improving mental health care for veterans.

H.B. 2951 Analysis

House Bill 2951 (H.B. 2951) established a pilot program within the Texas Veterans Commission to assist veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), or military sexual trauma (MST) by providing them with trained service dogs. This bill added [Section 434.029](#)²² to the Government Code, outlining the structure and requirements of the pilot program.

Pilot Program Creation

HB 2951 tasks The Texas Veterans Commission with the creation of a pilot program to provide

19 *US Department of Veterans Affairs "Texas: Veteran Suicide Data Sheet, 2021"*

20 https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9336.html#

21 <https://tlis/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=88R&Bill=HB2951>

22 <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/GV/htm/GV.434.htm>

veterans with service dogs that are trained to mitigate the symptoms of PTSD, TBI, or MST.

Request for Proposals

The Commission will issue requests for proposals from nonprofit organizations experienced in working with veterans to provide the necessary training and services.

Nonprofit Requirements

Approved nonprofits must demonstrate experience in dealing with PTSD, TBI, or MST, and must meet specific standards, including being authorized to operate in Texas and adhering to Assistance Dogs International standards.

Services Provided

HB 2951 requires the nonprofits to provide fully trained service dogs to veterans at no cost, along with ongoing training and support. They must also conduct regular mental health and depression assessments of participating veterans.

Service Dog Standards

All service dogs provided must complete accredited training, comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements, and be medically fit to serve as service dogs.

Funding

The Commission is authorized to accept gifts, grants, and donations to fund the program.

Program Evaluation

The Commission is required to submit a report by October 1, 2026, evaluating the program's effectiveness, including recommendations on whether the program should be continued, expanded, or terminated.

Program Conclusion

The pilot program is set to expire on September 1, 2027.

This legislation provides an innovative approach to support veterans by using service dogs to address mental health challenges, aiming to improve the quality of life for those who have served.

Testimony Gathered on August 20, 2024

Elaine Zavala Verbal Testimony – Director, Fund for Veterans’ Assistance, Texas Veterans Commission

Elaine Zavala, Director of the Fund for Veterans Assistance (FVA) at the Texas Veterans Commission, provided an overview of the FVA, its funding sources, and updates on the Service Dog Pilot Program established under House Bill 2951. The FVA, created by the Texas Legislature in 2007, offers grants to nonprofit organizations and local governments to support veterans and their families in areas such as housing repairs, mental health counseling, and job training. Since its inception, the FVA has distributed over \$313 million in grants, with \$44 million awarded just this year to 161 organizations.

Zavala also discussed the veterans-themed lottery ticket initiative, which was introduced in 2009 to generate funding for the FVA. The initiative has been highly successful, contributing significantly to expanding FVA’s grant programs. The funds support five key programs: general assistance (for emergency needs like rent and utilities), Housing for Texas Heroes (focused on home modifications for veterans), Veterans Treatment Courts (rehabilitating veterans before they enter the justice system), Veterans County Service Offices, and the Veterans Mental Health grant.

Zavala then addressed the implementation of House Bill 2951, which established the Service Dog Pilot Program for veterans with mental health conditions such as PTSD, military sexual trauma, and traumatic brain injuries. The Texas Veterans Commission awarded \$985,000 to four accredited organizations to support the training and placement of service dogs. Zavala expressed optimism about the program's impact on veterans’ lives and stressed the importance of ongoing communication with the participating organizations.

In closing, she emphasized the FVA’s continued efforts to enhance the well-being of Texas veterans and expressed gratitude for the committee’s support.

During an exchange of questions following Zavala’s prepared testimony, **Chairman Wilson** asked about the implementation and funding of the service dog program for veterans. **Zavala** explained that the program has a \$1 million budget per year and awarded \$985,000 across four accredited organizations that train service dogs. She noted that the program is in a learning phase, as it operates on a 12-month grant cycle, but dog training can take up to two and a half years, depending on the organization and the maturity of the dogs.

Zavala emphasized that her team maintains regular contact with the grantees, checking on their progress and offering support. The funds provided by the program, around \$200,000 per organization, go toward training the dogs but not purchasing them. Once the dogs are fully trained and placed with veterans, the VA can assist with follow-up care, such as veterinary services. **Chairman Wilson** also inquired about post-training support for veterans and their service dogs, and Zavala explained that the program connects veterans with the VA for ongoing support after the dogs are placed with them.

The discussion revealed the early-stage learning curve of the program, with Zavala noting that the program is continually adapting based on feedback and experience.

Dan Rollings Verbal Testimony - Program Director, Canine Companions for Independence

In his testimony, **Dan Rollings, Program Director for the South-Central Region of Canine Companions**, shared insights about the organization's role in the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) Pilot Program, which provides task-trained service dogs to veterans, particularly those suffering from PTSD. Rollings described the significant impact of these dogs, noting that 93% of veterans regularly use anxiety interruption tasks, and many report improvements in public comfort, nightmares, and PTSD symptoms.

Canine Companions currently serves 25 veterans in Texas, with 16 more awaiting placement. Rollings emphasized that the TVC grant has been crucial in supporting these veterans, covering expenses like travel, veterinary care, and food for the service dogs.

One issue Rollings raised was the TVC reimbursement process, which currently allows only 15 to 60 days for documentation submission. He requested an extension to 90 days, as gathering the necessary paperwork from veterans can take time.

He also discussed the size of the waiting list, explaining that Canine Companions manages the list by keeping it between 10-16 clients, typically for a period of one to one-and-a-half years. **Representative Dutton** inquired about the funding and waiting list prioritization, and Rollings confirmed that the organization covers initial costs and prioritizes veterans based on the availability and skills of the dogs rather than a first-come, first-served basis. He also explained that Canine Companions tries to keep their waiting list manageable, around 10-16 clients, typically for a one-to-one-and-a-half-year period.

Debra Krakar Verbal Testimony - Executive Director, Austin Dog Alliance

In her testimony, **Debra Krakar, Founder and Executive Director of the Austin Dog Alliance**, explained her organization's unique approach to training service dogs for veterans. The Austin Dog Alliance, founded in 2006 and accredited by Assistance Dogs International (ADI) in 2021, is located in Central Texas and exclusively serves Texans. Unlike most programs, her organization allows veterans to train their own dogs under professional guidance, leveraging the bond between the veteran and their pet. If a veteran does not have an acceptable dog, the organization provides one that has been bred and trained for 12 months.

Krakar emphasized the value of peer support that comes from veterans working together in the training process, which helps foster a sense of connectedness. She mentioned that veterans often enjoy the program so much that they sometimes do not want to graduate, and she hopes to use this enthusiasm to create ongoing peer support groups for graduates.

Krakar also made several suggestions for future funding. She recommended structuring grants as multi-year programs due to the lengthy process of breeding and training service dogs, which can take up to 18 months. She also advocated for funding to cover the costs of selecting, breeding, whelping, and training dogs from birth. Krakar emphasized the importance of early puppy development and explained that the first 14 weeks of life are crucial for building resilience in service dogs.

Debra Krakar added that their organization has been discreet about offering services due to limited funding. However, with the increased funding, they are now receiving significant interest, noting that 25 veterans have already signed up for their next introductory seminar. She emphasized that while there may be a waiting list, the demand could be much higher as the program becomes more widely known.

Representative Dutton concluded by asking if the waiting list is prioritized based on need or other factors. Krakar explained that the matching process depends more on the skills and availability of the dogs, ensuring the right fit between the dog and the veteran, rather than operating solely on a first-come, first-served basis.

Damian Cook Verbal Testimony - Director of Policy and Government Affairs, K9s For Warriors, Inc.

In his testimony, **Damian Cook, Director of Policy and Government Affairs for K9s for Warriors Inc.**, expressed gratitude to the committee and Representative Buckley for supporting the creation of the service dog pilot program under House Bill 2951. He emphasized that K9s for Warriors, the largest provider of service dogs to veterans, focuses on helping those with PTSD, traumatic brain injury (TBI), or military sexual trauma (MST). Their unique approach involves rescuing dogs from high-kill shelters and training them to become service dogs, which takes anywhere from 6 to 18 months.

Cook highlighted the effectiveness of service dogs in helping veterans heal, citing a [study from the University of Arizona](#)²³, which found that veterans paired with service dogs experienced reduced PTSD symptoms and improved psychosocial functioning. He praised the Texas Veterans Commission for its role in administering the program and acknowledged the complexities of operating a service dog program, which involves far more than simply providing a dog to a veteran.

Cook shared feedback on the grant program, explaining that the long training process for service dogs differs from other mental health services, and the one-year grant period may not align perfectly with the time it takes to fully train a dog. He also emphasized the importance of providing wraparound support and non-clinical case management for veterans, which K9s for Warriors offers for the life of the veteran. This support is critical to ensure that veterans have access to all available resources.

Lastly, Cook noted that while the number of veterans served by service dog programs may be lower than other mental health services, the impact of a service dog is long-lasting, continuing

23 https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2819452#google_vignette

beyond the grant period. He also echoed concerns about the difficulties veterans face in accessing federal veterinary health insurance benefits, praising Texas for its leadership in addressing this issue.

Rick Stevens Verbal Testimony - Director of Operations, Patriot PAWS

In his testimony, **Rick Stevens, Director of Operations at Patriot PAWS Service Dogs**, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to discuss the impact of House Bill 2951. Stevens explained that Patriot PAWS, founded in 2006, trains, and provides service dogs at no cost to disabled American veterans and others with mobility disabilities, with the goal of restoring physical and emotional independence. He noted that 60% of the 500 dogs they have placed are serving Texas veterans.

Stevens emphasized how transformative HB 2951 will be for Patriot PAWS. The bill will enable them to expand resources, reduce wait times for veterans to receive service dogs, and better support Texas veterans. The additional funding will help alleviate financial pressures, allowing Patriot PAWS to hire fresh staff, offer continuous education, and expand their service dog program.

He described the emotional and practical benefits that service dogs provide to veterans dealing with PTSD, traumatic brain injury (TBI), and military sexual trauma (MST). The bill's focus on evaluating and improving the one-year pilot program will also generate valuable data to assess its effectiveness and guide future enhancements.

Stevens acknowledged the collaborative effort between Patriot PAWS, Assistance Dogs International, and other Texas-based service dog organizations. He stressed the importance of educating legislators on the complexities of the service dog industry and expressed a willingness to support any future service dog legislation.

In closing, Stevens thanked the Texas Veterans Commission for their dedication to learning about the service dog industry and for their work in making the pilot program successful. He encouraged future legislative discussions to involve all stakeholders in a roundtable format to ensure the best outcomes for veterans and service dog organizations.

Findings – Implementation of H.B. 2951

Problems Identified:

1. Funding and Support Limitations:

- The Service Dog Pilot Program established under H.B. 2951 is constrained by a \$1 million annual budget, and funding limitations pose challenges for both program expansion and service sustainability.
- Dan Rollings of Canine Companions noted a challenge with the TVC reimbursement process, which currently requires documentation to be submitted within 15 to 60 days.

2. Challenges in Service Dog Training and Placement:

- The training process for service dogs can take up to two and a half years, which complicates the grant cycle and makes it difficult for organizations to meet demand within a one-year funding period.

3. Veterinary Care and Post-Placement Support:

- Veterans often face challenges in accessing federal VA coverage for veterinary care for their service dogs, impacting the long-term health and wellbeing of the animals and creating financial burdens for veterans.

Solutions and Recommendations:

1. Proposed Changes to Grant Structure and Reimbursement Period:

- Witnesses recommended structuring grants as multi-year programs to align with the lengthy service dog training process. This approach would provide stability and better support for organizations managing long-term training and placement.
- To improve the efficiency of the reimbursement process, it was suggested that the documentation submission window be extended to 90 days. This would give organizations more time to gather necessary paperwork and ensure smooth reimbursement.

2. Collaboration and Legislative Advocacy

- The testimony called for ongoing collaboration between legislators, service dog organizations, and the Texas Veterans Commission to refine and improve the program. Engaging all stakeholders in a roundtable format was suggested to ensure comprehensive input and effective outcomes.
- Continued efforts to educate legislators and the public about the complexities of service dog programs and the mental health needs of veterans were recommended. Expanding the program based on the pilot's findings could help reach more veterans in need.

TOPIC II: DEFENSE RESEARCH & PARTNERSHIPS

Defense Research & Partnerships: Review the role and contributions of the University of Texas San Antonio to the defense of the state and nation through defense research, especially with regard to security infrastructure, talent recruitment, and development of partnerships with the federal government.

Background

Pursuant to House Rule 3, Section 9, the House Committee on Defense & Veterans' Affairs maintains jurisdiction over all matters pertaining to the relations between the State of Texas and the federal government involving defense, and the defense of the state and nation, including terrorism response.

In a public hearing held on August 21, 2024, at the University of Texas San Antonio Downtown Campus, the committee reviewed the role and contributions of the University of Texas San Antonio to the defense of the state and nation through defense research, especially with regard to security infrastructure, talent recruitment, and development of partnerships with the federal government.

Chairman Wilson's opening remarks stressed the significance of defense research and the state's obligation to support it. He pointed out that although the committee's primary focus is on veterans, service members, and their families, Texas has a broader responsibility to foster research in areas such as defense, energy, and agriculture. He explained that the defense industry is now surpassing agriculture in importance to the Texas economy, making defense research vital to both the state's industry and national security.

Chairman Wilson noted that Texas is home to three major research institutions: The University of Texas System, the Texas A&M System, and Rice University. He referenced [recent legislation](#)²⁴, supported by the committee, that established the Texas University Fund to strengthen research institutions across the state. He noted the importance of this investment in growing Texas' capacity for defense research.

During the remarks, he specifically mentioned the University of Texas San Antonio (UTSA) as a key contributor to state and national defense through its research efforts. The committee then heard firsthand about UTSA's contributions, particularly in areas related to security infrastructure, talent development, and partnerships with the federal government.

²⁴ <https://tlis/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=88R&Bill=HB1595>

Testimony Gathered on August 21, 2024, at the University of Texas San Antonio

JoAnn Browning Verbal Testimony – Interim Vice President for Research, University of Texas San Antonio

The committee heard testimony from **JoAnn Browning, the Interim Vice President for Research at UTSA.**

In her testimony, JoAnn Browning illustrated the university's contributions to defense research and partnerships. She emphasized the significance of UTSA's recent designation as a Carnegie R1 institution, marking it among the top 4% of research universities in the country. This designation enhances UTSA's ability to recruit world-class talent and contribute to national defense through research in areas like cybersecurity, data science, and national security. It also signifies that UTSA has achieved very high research productivity, raising both its profile and that of San Antonio and Texas as centers for world-class research.

Recruiting world-class talent is essential to UTSA's mission, with every tenured and tenure-track faculty member taking on both academic and research responsibilities. This ensures that students not only receive quality education but are also exposed to innovative research, preparing them to meet workforce demands and contribute to Texas' economic and social growth. Faculty recruitment at UTSA is highly strategic, with support from both state funding and UT System programs, enabling the institution to attract specialists in a variety of fields.

Browning pointed out UTSA's unique role in defense-related research, noting its strong collaboration with the Department of Defense, NASA, and other federal agencies. UTSA is known for its expertise in cybersecurity, holding three National Center of Academic Excellence designations from the NSA and the Department of Homeland Security. Browning also discussed the university's National Security Collaboration Center, which plays a pivotal role in defense research, offering students pathways into national security careers through academic and research opportunities.

One notable source of support is the Texas University Fund (TUF), which has been instrumental in helping UTSA grow its research capabilities. UTSA leverages this state funding to hire faculty in clusters, promoting interdisciplinary collaboration between academic programs. This approach is crucial for addressing complex, global challenges that require expertise across multiple fields. UTSA also benefits from several other funding initiatives, including the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas and the Governor's University Research Initiative.

Additionally, Browning emphasized the strategic importance of federal funding in maintaining UTSA's research standing and outlines several large-scale grants, including a \$67 million award from the National Science Foundation for research security and a \$111 million grant from the Department of Energy focusing on cybersecurity in manufacturing. This grant from the Department of Energy focuses on cybersecurity for manufacturing across the country. One

component of this is helping small-business owned manufacturing facilities make sure that they are up to date and secure in their manufacturing policies and procedures.

Through UTSA's partnerships with federal agencies and its commitment to addressing defense challenges, Browning underscored the university's critical role in supporting both state and national security, while providing innovative opportunities for students and researchers in the field.

Byron Hepburn Verbal Testimony – Director of the Military Health Institute, U.T. Health San Antonio

Dr. Byron Hepburn, Director of the Military Health Institute, testified to the institute's critical role in advancing medical research and its valued partnerships. He began by emphasizing San Antonio's unique position as "Military Medical City USA," which boasts an extraordinary ecosystem of medical, research, and educational resources. San Antonio is home to the nation's only integrated military level one trauma system, a vast array of educational disciplines, and a thriving research environment. These assets, Dr. Hepburn noted, foster a synergistic environment that benefits both the military and the broader community, and he called for celebration of this achievement at both the state and local levels.

Dr. Hepburn focused on a new human optimization partnership, which has been a year in the making, between the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), the Southwest Research Institute, and the military. The initiative, involving collaboration with Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, aims to improve injury outcomes and prevent injuries for military personnel, particularly special operations airmen. The research will use advanced diagnostic tools to track human performance, monitor individuals over a two-year period, and identify ways to mitigate or prevent injuries. While the primary focus is on military personnel, Dr. Hepburn emphasized that the research has broad applicability, including for athletes, firefighters, and law enforcement officers.

One notable partnership is with the San Antonio Spurs, who will collaborate on this project, further integrating civilian and military efforts to enhance human performance. The research facility for this initiative will be located at the Spurs' state-of-the-art training facility, The Rock, situated next to UTSA. Dr. Hepburn expressed optimism about the positive outcomes this research will bring not only for military and veterans but also for civilians, including individuals with Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, or other neurological conditions.

In addition to discussing human optimization, Dr. Hepburn touched on the growing importance of cybersecurity in medical and academic research. He highlighted UTSA's leadership in artificial intelligence and cybersecurity, stressing that these areas have significant implications for protecting intellectual property and advancing medical research. Hepburn underscored the need for continued collaboration across Texas to ensure that San Antonio, and the state as a whole, remains a leader in military, medical, and research fields. He closed by expressing gratitude for the committee's ongoing support of military personnel, veterans, and their families, emphasizing that their sacrifices must remain central to these efforts.

Protection of Intellectual Property

In a later exchange, **Representative Dorazio** raised concerns about how rapidly knowledge is advancing and the need to protect intellectual property, particularly in research institutions like UTSA. He emphasized the importance of safeguarding intellectual property from cyberattacks and foreign interference, asking what measures Texas could implement to protect inventions and patents created within the state.

Dr. Byron Hepburn responded, explaining that UT system institutions, including UTSA, have robust cybersecurity offices and technology commercialization departments tasked with protecting and mentoring faculty on how to safeguard intellectual property. He expressed the need for a cross-sector approach to security and collaboration among institutions, especially in San Antonio, where agencies like the Air Force are heavily involved in cybersecurity operations.

Representative Dorazio also inquired about legal protections for Texas citizens' patents, asking whether this was a state or federal issue. Hepburn assured him that the Office of Technology Commercialization handles this process, ensuring that intellectual property is properly protected and commercialized. He also mentioned that faculty members receive mentorship on how to handle patents and intellectual property in a secure manner.

Dr. Hepburn further noted that UTSA and other institutions have dedicated staff members who oversee these processes. **Dr. Robert Christy** added that the UT system is nationally recognized for its patent protections for faculty and staff. Representative Dorazio expressed appreciation for their efforts in safeguarding intellectual property and the importance of protecting future inventors.

Relationship to Defense Health Agency

Following the exchange with Representative Dorazio, **Chairman Wilson** asked about the relationship between the Defense Health Agency (DHA) and the institutions present in San Antonio. **Dr. Byron Hepburn** explained that the relationship with the DHA is strong, with a presence in San Antonio and plans for further engagement in the future. He described efforts to establish a Master Cooperative Research and Development Agreement (CRADA) between the DHA and the UT system to enhance research collaboration.

Chairman Wilson emphasized the importance of understanding acronyms like CRADA and OTAs (Other Transaction Agreements), as they are critical for expanding research opportunities. He noted that the Department of Defense (DOD) is issuing fewer University Affiliated Research Centers (UARCs), making it essential for Texas institutions to be competitive in securing research contracts. **Dr. Hepburn** confirmed that CRADAs also safeguard intellectual property.

Chair Wilson then asked about any upcoming changes within the DHA's organization. **Dr. Hepburn** responded that the DHA is maturing its research portfolio, particularly regarding the roles and responsibilities between the Army, Navy, and Air Force medical services. He explained that while the DHA manages clinical care, the services themselves must maintain operational readiness, particularly at facilities like Brooke Army Medical Center.

Chairman Wilson expressed the need for the committee to delve deeper into the DHA's structure and future scope, emphasizing the importance of Texas playing a key role in supporting DHA's

mission. **Dr. Hepburn** acknowledged the complexity of balancing operational and medical requirements, particularly in integrating service-specific needs with broader DHA mandates.

Dr. Robert Christy Verbal Testimony – Deputy Director, Military Health Institute, U.T. Health San Antonio

Dr. Robert Christy, Deputy Director of the Military Health Institute and the newly established Human Performance Institute, discussed the progress of two key research initiatives aimed at optimizing the health and performance of military personnel. Dr. Christy, who has extensive experience in trauma research with the Army, described the ongoing research projects funded by federal dollars.

The first project focuses on retention by helping older special forces operators, as well as SWAT and fire department personnel, recover from injuries more quickly, enabling them to remain on the job longer. The second initiative addresses recruitment and retention challenges by seeking ways to reduce the dropout rates of special operations personnel, which currently exceed 50% due to injuries sustained during training. This research is aimed at optimizing training to prevent injuries, ultimately preserving the military's investment in these personnel.

Dr. Christy emphasized that the work extends beyond the military, with valuable applications for civilian counterparts such as elite athletes, firefighters, and SWAT team members. The research also involves partnerships with organizations like the San Antonio Spurs and the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), strengthening the community impact of the initiative.

Additionally, Dr. Christy mentioned that the partnership could expand to include the Texas National Guard, which would further broaden the scope and benefits of the research. He emphasized the importance of these collaborative efforts, noting that they are just beginning, and that future research will continue to grow in scale and impact.

In response to a question from **Representative Garcia**, **Dr. Christy** explained that mental health, resilience, and behavioral health are integral components of the research. Mental toughness and grit, often discussed in military and athletic contexts, are key aspects of the study. Dr. Christy underscored the need for a comprehensive approach to both physical and mental health in military personnel and mentioned that the Military Health Institute is actively collaborating with experts at UT Health San Antonio on PTSD and substance abuse research, ensuring that mental health remains a focal point of the initiative.

Ultimately, Dr. Christy expressed optimism about the future of the research, noting its potential to benefit not only military personnel but also veterans and civilians, further solidifying the partnership's role in enhancing human performance across a variety of sectors.

Findings – Defense Research & Partnerships

Problems Identified:

1. Lack of Coordination in Defense Research:

- There is a need for better coordination and collaboration among Texas institutions in defense research and innovation.

2. Protection of Intellectual Property:

- Protection of intellectual property in research institutions, especially in fields like defense and cybersecurity is crucial but challenging in the face of cyber threats and foreign interference.

Solutions and Recommendations:

1. Enhanced Research Collaboration and Funding Support:

- Strengthen collaboration between Texas universities.
- Utilize Texas University Fund to support funding and collaboration.
- Position Texas Universities to secure large-scale grants, such as those from the National Science Foundation, to bolster research in critical areas.
- Leverage state and federal funding to build and sustain research infrastructure, ensuring Texas remains competitive in national defense research.
- Encourage hub-and-spoke collaboration between Texas universities, allowing research institutions with existing infrastructure to educate and assist smaller programs in growing research opportunities.
- Continue implementation of policy framework for secure research established by [Senate Bill 1565 \(88R\)](#)²⁵.

2. Protection and Commercialization of Intellectual Property:

- Strengthen cybersecurity and technology commercialization offices in research institutions to protect IP and guide faculty in safeguarding and commercializing their discoveries.
- Develop a cross-sector approach to security, collaborating with military and civilian agencies to ensure robust protection of research outputs.

²⁵ <https://tlis/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=88R&Bill=SB1565>

TOPIC III: IDENTIFICATION AND SUPPORT OF TEXAS VETERANS

Interim Charge #2

Identification and Support of Texas Veterans: Identify barriers to identifying and verification of veteran status. Make recommendations to improve identification efforts to better engage and support the state's veteran populations.

Background

Veterans who have bravely served the nation often encounter significant challenges in accessing the benefits they rightfully deserve. These benefits, designed to provide financial, medical, and social support, can be a lifeline for veterans and their families, particularly those struggling with health issues, housing, or employment transitions. However, despite the availability of such resources, many veterans in Texas face barriers to accessing them due to the absence of an official state veteran's database. Without a centralized database, veterans often remain unaccounted for, making it difficult for them to connect with the services they need.

Recognizing this issue, the Texas Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs was charged with reviewing and reporting on the progress toward creating a single, comprehensive veterans database. This proposed database is intended to facilitate the seamless provision of benefits by state agencies. Additionally, the committee has been tasked with making recommendations to improve coordination among state, federal, and local agencies, as well as other organizations that provide benefits to veterans. By addressing the lack of an official veteran's database and enhancing interagency coordination, the State of Texas aims to ensure that veterans can more easily access the benefits they have earned.

A primary factor contributing to this issue is the complex nature of the veteran benefits system itself. Navigating the web of local, state, and federal benefits can be overwhelming for veterans, especially for those dealing with physical or mental health challenges. Many veterans are unaware of the full range of benefits available to them, whether it's healthcare, education assistance, housing support, or disability compensation. For those who do know about the benefits, the bureaucratic processes involved in applying for and securing these services can be daunting. Forms, documentation requirements, and lengthy wait times create obstacles that some veterans may not have the time, energy, or resources to overcome.

Compounding this issue, Texas does not currently have an official veteran's database. Veterans may move frequently or fail to register with relevant organizations, resulting in significant gaps in records. Without a centralized system, a substantial portion of the veteran population remains invisible to the very agencies and organizations dedicated to serving them. A lack of accurate, comprehensive data makes it difficult for state, federal, and local agencies, as well as veteran-serving organizations, to identify veterans in need and tailor their outreach and support efforts effectively. The creation of a single veterans database, as charged to the Texas Senate Committee

on Veterans Affairs, aims to address these gaps by ensuring veterans are accounted for and can more easily connect with the benefits and services available to them.

On the other side of the equation, veteran-serving organizations themselves often face their own challenges in conducting outreach. These organizations, whether government agencies, nonprofits, or community groups, rely on accurate data to identify veterans and provide assistance. However, without access to complete and up-to-date information about veterans in their area, these organizations struggle to make contact with those who could benefit from their services. This disconnects results in many veterans slipping through the cracks, unaware of the help available to them or unable to access it due to logistical hurdles.

Moreover, even when outreach is possible, the methods and platforms used to connect with veterans may not always be effective. Veterans, particularly those from older generations, may not engage with digital platforms as frequently, while younger veterans may not feel connected to traditional outreach methods like mailings or in-person events. This creates a gap between those offering help and those who need it most, further contributing to the disparity in service provision.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. Efforts must be made to improve the accuracy of veteran databases, ensuring that all veterans are accounted for, and their information is up-to-date. Additionally, educational campaigns targeted at veterans need to be expanded to raise awareness about available benefits and simplify the application processes. Finally, veteran-serving organizations should be equipped with the resources necessary to enhance their outreach efforts, utilizing a blend of modern technology and traditional methods to reach veterans of all ages and backgrounds. By addressing both the informational and logistical barriers, it is possible to close the gap between veterans and the benefits they have earned.

Testimony Gathered on August 20, 2024

Bob Gear Verbal Testimony - Director, Texas Veterans Leadership Program, Texas Workforce Commission

Bob Gear, Director of the Texas Veterans Leadership Program at the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), testified about TWC's dedication to serving veterans, transitioning service members, and military spouses. He described the priority given to veterans in TWC programs and mentioned the 170 locations across Texas, with Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) employment services present in 90 of them. Gear summarized multiple TWC programs but focused on the [*We Hire Vets*](#)²⁶ program and the employment rates for Texas veterans and military spouses.

Gear noted that Texas veterans' unemployment rates have been low, consistently under 4%, which is considered full employment by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. He explained that while veterans have been performing well in the job market, the 2.6% of veterans who are harder to serve face multiple barriers, such as childcare and financial instability, which require more intensive support.

²⁶ <https://www.twc.texas.gov/programs/veterans/operation-welcome-home>

He explained the *Veterans Outreach Initiative*, funded at \$425,000 annually, which aims to find and support veterans struggling with homelessness, substance abuse, or mental health issues. Gear noted that while this is challenging work, the initiative has placed 301 veterans in employment over two years.

Regarding military spouse employment, Gear emphasized the unique challenges spouses face due to constant relocation and licensing issues. He shared that TWC started a [*Military Family Support Program*](#)²⁷ in 2017, helping military spouses with job searches, training, and certifications. Additionally, TWC recently launched a \$3 million statewide program to further support transitioning service members, recently separated veterans, and military spouses. The TWC has also released a report in 2023 on the [*Transition from Military Service to Employment*](#).²⁸

Mitch Fuller Verbal Testimony - Department of Texas National and State Legislative Chairman, Veterans of Foreign Wars

Mitch Fuller, Legislative Chair for the Texas Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), testified in support of veterans' issues and the implementation of various bills. He expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to testify and his pride in representing the VFW at both state and national levels. Fuller highlighted the VFW's involvement in legislative matters, both in Texas and nationally, and mentioned his upcoming role in sitting alongside the national commander during congressional testimony.

He acknowledged the positive work of the Texas Veterans Commission and Texas Workforce Commission in supporting veterans and highlighted VFW's support of JROTC and ROTC programs. Fuller also expressed concerns about fraudulent claims for veteran status and the need for vigilance in preventing such issues, particularly in light of advances in artificial intelligence.

He discussed VFW's state legislative priorities, emphasizing the creation of a single database to improve efficiency in serving veterans, which is currently being examined in the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. He then touched on key federal legislative priorities, including the [*Guard VA Benefits Act*](#)²⁹ to combat claim sharks, the [*TAP Promotion Act*](#)³⁰ to expedite veterans' access to VA services, and the [*Not Just a Number Act*](#)³¹ to elevate the Office of Veteran Suicide Prevention.

Fuller emphasized the importance of addressing opioid dependency and promoting alternative treatments, such as medical marijuana and psychedelics, for veterans struggling with PTSD, pain, and other mental health issues. He advocated for the expansion of Texas's [*Compassionate Use Program*](#)³² for medical marijuana and expressed strong support for hemp-derived consumables, arguing against any attempts to outlaw them.

27 Ibid.

28 <https://www.twc.texas.gov/sites/default/files/ogc/mtg23/commission-meeting-material-080823-item9-2023-report-transition-military-service-employemen-hb257-twc.pdf>

29 <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/740?overview=closed>

30 <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/2888>

31 <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/928>

32 <https://www.dps.texas.gov/section/compassionate-use-program>

He concluded by expressing support for the service dog pilot program and praised the transformative effects that service dogs have on veterans' lives. Fuller also voiced his commitment to supporting the Texas Army National Guard, Air National Guard, and State Guard in any legislation that benefits them.

Angela Woellner Verbal Testimony - Communications & Veteran Outreach Director, Texas Veterans Commission

Angela Woellner, the Director of Communications and Veteran Outreach for the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC), testified on the Commission's outreach efforts and ongoing initiatives. She began by noting that Texas now has the largest veteran population in the country, surpassing California, with over 1.5 million veterans.

Woellner outlined the diverse methods used by TVC to reach veterans across the state. She highlighted social media campaigns, like a video series on the Military Veteran Peer Network, which received significant engagement. Media outreach, including national stories about TVC programs like the service dog pilot initiative, was another valuable tool. She mentioned the Commission's monthly show on KXAN and a podcast available on six platforms and multiple iHeartRadio stations. Additionally, TVC recently launched a new, more user-friendly website and revamped the Texas Veterans Portal to ensure it serves as a comprehensive resource hub.

TVC also maintains a monthly newsletter sent to over 145,000 veterans and conducts numerous in-person outreach events, partnering with agencies such as the Veterans Land Board (VLB) and the Texas Workforce Commission. Woellner underscored the importance of brand recognition for TVC, noting that promotional items and printed materials play a key role in familiarizing veterans with TVC's services.

She also discussed the Commission's collaboration with nonprofits, Veteran County Service Officers, and other organizations, to expand their reach. A new initiative involves transition emails sent to service members who are soon to transition or recently transitioned, welcoming them to Texas and informing them of the services available to them. Woellner emphasized the success of this effort, noting an impressive 80% open rate.

One of TVC's key goals is to develop a comprehensive database and outreach engagement system to better identify and serve veterans. Woellner explained that this system would allow TVC to engage with veterans across different demographics and life stages, from aging Vietnam War veterans to newly transitioning younger veterans. The system would also help filter data based on age, service transition, and even discharge status, enabling TVC to target outreach efforts more effectively. TVC recently completed an agreement with the Defense Manpower Data Center to receive veteran data, but they currently lack the infrastructure to fully utilize it.

Woellner concluded by discussing the need to diversify TVC's marketing strategies, including potential billboard campaigns, enhanced web marketing, and targeted mailers. She also referred to the 2024 needs assessment by Texas A&M, which recommended an increase in outreach and marketing efforts. Expanding the agency's capacity would allow them to reach the veteran population more effectively with a broader range of strategies.

Previously Proposed Legislation

H.B. 2979 (88R)

Background

House Author: Garcia, Josey

Last Action: 5/11/2023, H Placed on General State Calendar

Many veterans struggle to access the benefits they are entitled to due to a lack of awareness or because they remain unaccounted for in veteran databases. Simultaneously, veteran-serving organizations often face difficulties in conducting outreach efforts, as they lack the necessary information to identify veterans who qualify for assistance. To address this gap, C.S.H.B. 2979 proposes a solution by allowing veterans to self-identify on voter registration forms. This legislation would require the list of registered voters to indicate veteran status, making this information publicly available. As a result, veteran-serving organizations could utilize these records to identify veterans more easily and conduct targeted outreach, ensuring that more veterans are informed about and able to access the benefits and services available to them.

H.B. 2749 (88R)

Background

House Author: Romero Jr., Ramon

Last Action: 4/18/2023, S Referred to Veteran Affairs

In Texas, with over 1.4 million veterans, many face challenges beyond physical injuries, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI), which can complicate their reintegration into civilian life. Unfortunately, some of these veterans, who were not involved in criminal activity before their military service, find themselves entangled in the criminal justice system due to these "invisible" wounds. While state law requires the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and county sheriffs to verify the veteran status of inmates and assist them in applying for federal benefits, the current system has two key shortcomings. First, the frequency with which these checks are conducted is vague, leading to inconsistent implementation across counties. Second, some justice-involved veterans cannot afford the cost of mailing the necessary paperwork to access their benefits.

H.B. 2749 seeks to rectify these issues by clarifying the specific timing for verifying a prisoner's veteran status and establishing new requirements for county sheriffs. The bill ensures that veterans involved in the criminal justice system receive the support they need to access benefits and services, with no associated cost to the veteran, thus providing them with crucial assistance as they work to rebuild their lives.

H.B. 2148 (88R)

Background

House Author: Lopez, Ray

Last Action: 3/9/2023, H Referred to Defense & Veterans' Affairs

House Bill 2148 would mandate that the Texas Veterans Commission conduct a comprehensive study evaluating veteran deaths caused by suicide over the preceding five years. The study's aim would be to gather detailed data, including the total number of veteran suicides, as well as demographic information such as age, gender, and race. It also seeks to investigate the medical and psychological factors contributing to these deaths.

The study would be focused on identifying patterns related to prescribed medications, particularly those with serious side effects, psychotropic drugs, and medications that carried warnings for suicidal ideation. It would examine medical diagnoses that led to these prescriptions and track instances where veterans were prescribed multiple medications by Veterans Affairs physicians. Additionally, the study would look to highlight correlations between veteran suicides and experiences of trauma, including combat exposure, military sexual trauma, traumatic brain injury, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Texas Veterans Commission would also analyze data from Veterans Health Administration facilities to identify those with higher-than-average prescription rates or suicide rates among patients. Based on the findings, the commission would be required to develop recommendations aimed at improving the safety and well-being of veterans.

The final report would provide the governor and legislature with the study's results and recommendations. This report would also be made publicly available on the Texas Veterans Commission's website.

National Defense Authorization Act – Section 558

Analysis of Section 558

Section 558 of the FY25 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) introduces provisions related to the **opt-out sharing of information** concerning service members who are retiring or separating from the armed forces. This section amends a prior law, Section 570F of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, to ensure that service members have greater control over how their personal information is shared with external entities, such as community-based organizations and State veteran's agencies.

The section establishes a formal opt-out mechanism, giving service members the option to prevent their personal information from being transmitted to external entities. Specifically, it requires that service members be given the opportunity to opt out via a form that they fill out upon retirement or separation. By providing this option, the legislation ensures that service members' privacy is respected, allowing them to decide whether or not to share their details with these organizations.

Additionally, Section 558 clarifies that unless a service member explicitly chooses to opt out of information sharing, their information will be automatically shared with and transmitted through State veteran’s agencies. This change emphasizes the need for clear consent and provides service members with the autonomy to manage their personal data after their military service concludes.

In summary, Section 558 enhances privacy protections for service members by creating a process through which they can opt out of sharing their information and making it clear that such information will only be shared if the service member does not choose to opt out.

Needs Assessment of Texas Veterans, Public Policy Research Institute, Texas A&M University

Background

The 2024 Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) Needs Assessment Report provides a comprehensive analysis of the current needs of Texas veterans. The report was conducted by the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University, based on the legislative mandate outlined in Texas Government Code §434.017. The study, carried out in collaboration with the TVC, identifies key areas where Texas veterans require support, as well as barriers they face when accessing services. The assessment was conducted through a combination of surveys and focus groups, involving over 18,000 veterans and 800 veteran-serving organizations across eight distinct regions in Texas.

Testimony Gathered on August 20, 2024

Nandita Chaudhuri and Anthony Jackson Verbal Testimony – Texas A&M Public Policy Research Institute

Dr. Nandita Chaudhuri from the Public Policy Research Institute (PPRI) at Texas A&M testified on the findings from the [2024 Needs Assessment of Texas Veterans](https://costx.us/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/TVC-Needs-Assessment-2024-Report-Final-8-15-2024.pdf).³³ She was joined by Anthony Jackson, a graduate researcher on the team, to provide detailed insights.

Dr. Chaudhuri began by explaining that the TVC is legislatively mandated to conduct a needs assessment every four years to ensure that funds for veteran assistance grants address the most relevant needs of Texas veterans and their families. PPRI was contracted to carry out the assessment, which involved surveys and focus groups with over 18,000 responses from veterans and veteran-serving organizations across Texas. This study followed up on a similar report conducted in 2020.

Anthony Jackson presented the top findings from the research. The top three needs identified were mental health counseling, business training, and alternative therapies. Mental health counseling was a particularly prominent need across all regions. The most common service barriers were a

³³ <https://costx.us/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/TVC-Needs-Assessment-2024-Report-Final-8-15-2024.pdf>

lack of understanding about benefits, not knowing where to get help, and life responsibilities that limited time to access services. These barriers were consistent across all regions.

The survey data also revealed that certain demographic groups, such as women veterans, Black and Hispanic veterans, and veterans with low income, unemployment, or disabilities, reported higher levels of need compared to other veterans. For example, in the Gulf Coast region, Black veterans were more likely to need financial assistance, while women veterans were more likely to need mental health counseling.

Jackson provided regional-specific findings as well. In the Panhandle region, elder care was identified as a significant need, while in West Texas, home repairs and modifications were critical. In the Gulf Coast and Central Texas regions, business startup training was a top need, and in East Texas, elder care was once again a priority.

Dr. Chaudhuri then discussed how the needs identified in the 2024 report compared to the 2020 report. Notably, employment services and short-term financial assistance decreased as needed, except for disadvantaged groups. Mental health counseling and integrative therapies, however, became more prominent. The top service barrier remained a lack of knowledge about benefits and how to access them.

Dr. Chaudhuri highlighted several key takeaways from the report, emphasizing the need to prioritize healthcare, especially mental health services, and integrative therapies. She also noted the importance of addressing veteran homelessness and basic living needs, which came up frequently across regions. The lack of awareness and difficulty in accessing services was another significant finding, leading to a call for more creative outreach strategies using both traditional and modern methods.

She also pointed out that administrative challenges, such as difficulties with documentation, were a barrier for many veterans, particularly older ones. Inconsistent identification documentation requirements across different agencies and counties further complicated access to services. Dr. Chaudhuri recommended improving service quality by systematically monitoring and reviewing providers to ensure proper healthcare support, especially in underserved regions.

Finally, Chaudhuri recommended that TVC conduct data-driven evaluations of their grant programs to assess their effectiveness. Feedback from veteran-serving organizations suggested that unclear expectations, burdensome reporting processes, slow reimbursements, and stringent eligibility requirements were all challenges that hindered the effectiveness of TVC grants.

Dr. Chaudhuri and Anthony Jackson concluded their testimony and opened the floor for questions.

Affordable Housing

Background

Veterans and active service members face similar pressing availability and affordability challenges in securing stable housing. Active-duty personnel, particularly those frequently relocating due to military assignments, encounter many of the same barriers as veterans when it comes to finding affordable, accessible housing. The rising cost of housing and the unique financial circumstances of service members transitioning in and out of military service compound the stresses of frequent moves.

For some, the path from military service to civilian life can lead to housing instability or homelessness. Active service members may be temporarily assigned to areas with high-cost housing markets, where the availability of affordable homes or apartments is limited, even with housing allowances. Veterans, especially those dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), or other service-related health issues, may face additional barriers when trying to secure stable housing. These factors can lead to a higher risk of homelessness among both groups, further underscoring the need for targeted solutions that address their specific needs.

In Texas, the [Veterans Land Board \(VLB\)](https://vlb.texas.gov/)³⁴ plays a critical role in supporting veterans through home loans and land purchasing assistance.

In addition, the [Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs \(TDHCA\)](https://www.tdhca.texas.gov/)³⁵ plays a critical role in addressing housing affordability for low- and moderate-income individuals, including veterans and military families. TDHCA administers programs that support affordable housing development, homebuyer assistance, and rental assistance, which could be more closely aligned with the housing needs of veterans and active-duty personnel. Strengthening the collaboration between TDHCA and the VLB could further enhance access to affordable housing for military families across the state.

The [Texas Affiliation of Affordable Housing Providers \(TAAHP\)](https://taahp.org/)³⁶, another key player in this effort, advocate for the development of affordable housing across Texas. TAAHP works closely with developers, policymakers, and stakeholders to create affordable housing solutions. By leveraging the expertise and resources of organizations like TAAHP, Texans can encourage the development of more affordable housing units specifically tailored to meet the needs of the military community.

Moreover, veteran, and active-duty housing issues are closely linked to broader factors that contribute to housing insecurity, including mental health challenges, unemployment, and lack of access to affordable housing. For active service members, the strain of frequent relocations can

34 <https://vlb.texas.gov/>

35 <https://www.tdhca.texas.gov/>

36 <https://taahp.org/>

make it difficult to establish long-term housing stability. For veterans, the transition out of the military can be especially difficult, as they may no longer have access to the support systems they had while serving. Addressing veteran and active-duty housing needs requires not only accessible and affordable housing but also comprehensive support services such as counseling, job placement, and financial education.

Ultimately, strengthening support for veteran and active-duty housing requires is not only ensuring stability for individuals and families but supporting the broader military community as well. By addressing the accessibility and affordability of housing and ensuring that agencies are equipped to assist both veterans and active service members, Texas can better support those who serve or have served, helping them to find the stability they need to thrive in civilian life.

Jean Latsha Verbal Testimony – Past President, Texas Affiliation of Affordable Housing Providers

Jean Latsha, representing the Texas Affiliation of Affordable Housing Providers (TAAHP), testified about affordable housing issues in Texas. TAAHP is a coalition of over 700 members, including developers, bankers, attorneys, and other professionals involved in the production of affordable housing across the state. Latsha shared materials with the committee, focusing on income levels typically served by the affordable housing sector, particularly through the housing tax credit program.

She explained that the affordable housing industry primarily serves individuals and families earning between 30% and 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI), which includes many workforce members like Army Staff Sergeants, whose salaries fall within this income range in the Austin, Texas area. While other programs address needs for those up to 120% of AMI or for chronically homeless individuals needing additional services, the tax credit program mostly focuses on "workforce housing" for those not earning high incomes, a group that often includes veterans.

Latsha acknowledged the various specific issues affecting the veteran community discussed during the session, though she emphasized her expertise is in housing rather than veteran-specific challenges. She noted that affordable housing and veterans' issues often intersect, as many veterans fall into the income categories served by the housing tax credit program.

Latsha concluded by mentioning her role as a developer working closely with the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) on housing tax credit projects and deferred further details to her colleague, Bobby Wilkinson, to continue the discussion.

Texas Affiliation of Affordable Housing Providers – Presentation on Housing Tax Credits

The presentation from the Texas Affiliation of Affordable Housing Providers (TAAHP) highlights the growing challenges in affordable housing in Texas, which have significant implications for both veterans and active service members. The affordability crisis is particularly concerning for

these populations, as many veterans and military personnel live on fixed incomes or face financial challenges upon returning to civilian life. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines affordable housing as housing that costs no more than 30% of a household's income. With rising housing costs across the state, more veterans and active service members are becoming cost-burdened, forcing them to sacrifice basic necessities to meet housing expenses.

Veterans, especially those returning from active duty, often face barriers to stable employment, making it difficult for them to secure affordable housing. Active service members, particularly those stationed in high-cost areas like Austin, may also find themselves priced out of local housing markets. The presentation shows that housing cost burdens are increasing across Texas, with more Texans spending a higher percentage of their income on housing. This trend is concerning for veterans and service members, as unstable housing situations can exacerbate mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression, which are already prevalent in the military and veteran communities.

The presentation further underscores the shifting rental market, noting a significant decrease in the availability of low-cost rental units and a rise in higher-rent properties. This trend limits affordable housing options for veterans and active-duty military personnel, who may rely on housing allowances or veteran benefits to cover their living expenses. The TAAHP emphasizes the importance of affordable housing developments that not only provide lower rent but also offer essential resources such as job search assistance, educational support, financial literacy programs, and services for the elderly. These additional resources can be invaluable for veterans transitioning back into civilian life or for service members seeking stability for their families.

Affordable housing developments supported by programs like the Housing Tax Credit (HTC) Program have been critical in addressing housing needs for income-eligible households, including veterans. These programs have led to the development or preservation of over 347,000 homes in Texas, serving over 809,000 income-eligible households and supporting nearly 600,000 jobs for one year. The economic impact of such programs is substantial, generating billions in tax revenue and wages, further supporting the local economy.

For veterans and active service members, access to affordable housing is not just a matter of financial stability but also a key factor in their overall well-being and reintegration into civilian society. The TAAHP's efforts to address the affordable housing crisis are crucial to ensuring that veterans and active service members have access to the housing and resources they need to thrive.

Bobby Wilkinson Verbal Testimony – Executive Director, Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs

Bobby Wilkinson, Executive Director of the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) provided testimony on the agency's efforts to support veterans through various housing programs. He emphasized that TDHCA serves veterans and their families across multiple housing initiatives, from homeless services to financing new construction and homebuyer programs.

Wilkinson explained that the TDHCA's [*Texas Homebuyer Program*](#)³⁷ offers enhanced flexibility for Texas veterans, providing lower interest rates and down payment assistance, even for those who have previously owned homes. This benefit also extends to spouses of veterans. Most of their housing programs are geared towards individuals earning at or below 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI), which includes many Texas veterans.

He outlined the housing tax credit program, which is a primary source of funding for affordable multifamily housing developments. In the most recent fiscal year, TDHCA financed over 12,000 new or rehabbed affordable housing units through this program. He highlighted that the housing tax credit programs mainly serve households earning 60% or less of the AMI, providing specific income examples for counties like Williamson and Bexar.

Freedom's Path

Wilkinson detailed two housing tax credit properties with a veteran preference: [*Freedom's Path in Kerrville*](#)³⁸ and [*Freedom's Path in Waco*](#)³⁹, which provide 49 and 34 units, respectively. The Kerrville property is supported with 20 HUD VASH (Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing) vouchers. He explained that the HUD VASH program combines HUD rental assistance with case management and clinical services from the VA, targeting homeless veterans. Currently, all VASH vouchers are utilized, and TDHCA is exploring options to request additional vouchers.

To further support veterans, TDHCA has incentivized the development of housing on or near VA campuses through its tax credit program. They have added a point preference in their Qualified Allocation Plan scoring criteria for projects developed in proximity to VA medical facilities, as legislated by [*House Bill 1558*](#)⁴⁰, which covers specific counties including Bexar, Dallas, Tarrant, and Travis.

Wilkinson also discussed a \$400,000 annual pilot program for veterans, established through Rider 19, to fund transitional housing in Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio. The program targets the areas with the highest populations of homeless veterans. The American GI Forum administers the program in San Antonio and Dallas, U.S. Vets in Houston, and Integral Care in Austin.

Additionally, TDHCA partnered with [*Texas Neighborhood Services*](#)⁴¹ to support "[*Operation Texas Strong*](#),⁴²" a program that provides RVs for homeless veterans, securing housing for 113 veterans through this initiative. He also noted that TDHCA has funded two full-time homeless veteran coordinator positions within the Texas Veterans Commission to provide outreach and housing navigation support.

37 <https://thetexashomebuyerprogram.com/>

38 <https://www.freedomspathkerrville.com/>

39 <https://www.freedomspathwaco.org/>

40 <https://tlis/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=87R&Bill=HB1558>

41 <https://txns.org/>

42 <https://operationtexasstrong.com/>

Wilkinson concluded his testimony by expressing his willingness to answer any questions from the committee members.

Qualified Allocation Plan

The Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP) includes specific provisions to prioritize veterans' housing needs. The plan grants eligibility for up to four points to developments that commit to serving populations with special housing needs, including veterans. These points are earned by ensuring that the development dedicate at least 5% of the total units to persons with special housing needs, which explicitly includes veterans among other groups such as individuals with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, and the homeless.

Furthermore, developments located within two miles of a Veterans Affairs medical center or hospital in counties with a population between 1 million and 4 million can also gain an additional point if they provide a leasing preference for veterans.

These incentives are designed to support the housing needs of veterans and ensure that low-income veterans have access to affordable, stable housing.

Additionally, developers are encouraged to market units to veterans through partnerships with veteran organizations and local housing authorities. This ensures that veterans are actively engaged in the housing opportunities created through the state's Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program. These measures reflect Texas' commitment to enhancing housing options for veterans and addressing the challenges they face in securing affordable housing.

Through prioritization in the QAP, TDHCA works to improve access to affordable housing for veterans and service-members, leveraging the LIHTC program to meet their specific housing needs.

Higher Education

Hazlewood Act Background

The Hazlewood Act reflects Texas's longstanding commitment to supporting service members, veterans, and their families by providing access to higher education through tuition exemptions and up to 150 credit hours of coursework at public colleges and universities. This initiative began in 1923 when the state first offered tuition and fee exemptions to veterans and nurses who served during World War I. In 1943, under the leadership of Texas Senator Grady Hazlewood, for whom the act is named, the program expanded to include World War II veterans and members of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and the Women's Auxiliary Volunteer Emergency Service. For the first time, it also extended benefits to the children of service members killed in action or who died in service.

Subsequent legislative updates continued to broaden the program's scope. In 1953, Korean War veterans were included, and by 1959, residency requirements were established, mandating that veterans must be Texas residents at the time of entering military service. The 1965 amendment extended benefits to the children of Texas National Guard members killed on active duty after 1946, while in 1967, Cold War veterans and reservists who served more than 180 days were added, along with their children if the service members died in action or service.

In 1993, a financial need requirement was introduced, but it was repealed two years later. The 1995 revision extended benefits to veterans of conflicts in Vietnam, Grenada, Lebanon, Panama, and the Persian Gulf, and capped eligibility at 150 credit hours, requiring that veterans exhaust their federal education benefits first. In 2009, Senate Bill 93 clarified residency requirements and introduced the Legacy Act, allowing eligible veterans to transfer unused benefits to their children under 26 years old. Finally, in 2013, the 83rd Legislature established the Permanent Fund Supporting Military and Veterans Exemptions (MVE) to reimburse institutions for costs associated with Legacy Act beneficiaries.

Hazlewood Act Eligibility Requirements

Veteran Eligibility

According to the Texas Veterans Commission website, a veteran must meet all the eligibility requirements as drawn from the [Hazelwood Act Statute](#)⁴³ and [40 Texas Administrative Code §461](#)⁴⁴.

A veteran must:

- At the time of entry into active duty of the U.S. Armed Forces, (**[DD Form 214](#)**⁴⁵ **required**) & (**[40 TAC §461.40](#)**⁴⁶)
 - designated Texas as Home of Record;
 - or entered the service in Texas;
 - or was a Texas resident;
- Have received an honorable discharge or separation or a general discharge under honorable conditions as indicated on the Veteran's Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty,

43 <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/ED/htm/ED.54.htm#54.341>

44 [https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.ViewTAC?tac_view=5&ti=40&pt=15&ch=461&sch=A&rl=Y](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.ViewTAC?tac_view=5&ti=40&pt=15&ch=461&sch=A&rl=Y)

45 [https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=40&pt=15&ch=461&rl=90](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=40&pt=15&ch=461&rl=90)

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[https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=40&pt=15&ch=461&rl=40](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=40&pt=15&ch=461&rl=40)

-
- Served at least 181 days of active duty service (excluding training);
 - Currently reside in Texas; ([40 TAC §461.40](#)) & ([40 TAC §461.70](#))
 - Have no federal Veteran's education benefits, or have no federal Veterans education benefits dedicated to the payment of tuition and fees only (such as Chapter 33 or 31; for term or semester enrolled that do not exceed the value of Hazlewood benefits;
 - Not be in default on a student loan made or guaranteed by the State of Texas;
 - Enroll in classes for which the college receives tax support (i.e., a course that does not depend solely on student tuition and fees to cover its cost), unless the college's governing board has ruled to let Veterans receive the benefit while taking non-funded courses; and
 - Meet the GPA requirement of the institution's satisfactory academic progress policy in a degree or certificate program as determined by the institution's financial aid policy and, as an undergraduate student, not be considered to have attempted an excessive amount of credit hours.

Child (Legacy) Eligibility

Eligible Veterans may assign or transfer unused hours of exemption eligibility to a child under certain conditions as drawn from the [Hazelwood Act Statute](#) and [40 Texas Administrative Code §461](#):

A Child (Legacy Act) must:

- Be classified by the institution as a Texas resident; ([40 TAC §461.70](#))
- Be the biological child, stepchild, adopted child, or claimed as a dependent in the current or previous tax year;
- Be 25 years old or younger on the first day of the semester or term for which the exemption is claimed (unless granted an extension due to a qualifying illness or debilitating condition); and
- Have no federal Veteran's education benefits, or have no federal Veterans education benefits dedicated to the payment of tuition and fees only (such as Chapter 33 or 31; for term or semester enrolled that do not exceed the value of Hazlewood benefits; ([40 TAC §461.70](#)) & ([40 TAC §461.90](#)))
- Not be in default on a student loan made or guaranteed by the State of Texas;
- Enroll in classes for which the college receives tax support (i.e., a course that does not depend solely on student tuition and fees to cover its cost), unless the college's governing board has ruled to let Veterans receive the benefit while taking non-funded courses; and
- Meet the GPA requirement of the institution's satisfactory academic progress policy in a degree or certificate program as determined by the institution's financial aid policy and,

as an undergraduate student, not be considered to have attempted an excessive amount of credit hours.

Legacy recipients will receive an exemption for the number of degree certified hours reported by the institution for that term or semester. Maximum degree certified hours awarded to the Legacy recipient will be dependent upon the degree or certificate program in which the student is enrolled for that term or semester and shall be consistent with the program length as defined within the school catalog as approved by the regional accreditation commission. (40 TAC §461.30)

**If a child to whom hours have been delegated fails to use all of the assigned hours, a Veteran may re-assign the unused hours that are available to another child. Only one child will use Hazlewood Legacy benefits at a time.*

Spouse/Dependent Eligibility

A Spouse/Dependent must:

Be the spouse/dependent of an eligible veteran who is determined by the VA to be 100%, total and permanent, service-connected veteran or one who became totally disabled for purposes of employability as a result of a service-related injury or illness. The spouse/dependent(s) of an eligible veteran who meets the requirements below are entitled to receive a 150 credit hours exemption, each, under certain conditions as drawn from the [Hazelwood Act Statute](#) and [40 Texas Administrative Code §461](#):

- Be a spouse / child of a Veteran who, at the time of entry into the U.S. Armed Forces, ([DD Form 214](#) required) , ([40 TAC §461.50](#)) & ([40 TAC §461.60](#))
 - designated Texas as Home of Record,
 - or entered the service in Texas;
 - or was a Texas resident;
- Be a spouse / child of a Veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces or the Texas National Guard who
 - died as a result of service-related injuries or;
 - became totally and permanently disabled or meets the eligibility requirements for individual unemployability according to the disability ratings of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) as a result of a service-related injury, or
 - Missing in action (MIA), or
 - Killed in action (KIA).

-
- Have no federal Veterans education benefits, or have no federal Veterans education benefits dedicated to the payment of tuition and fees only (such as Chapter 33 or 31) for term or semester enrolled that do not exceed the value of Hazlewood benefits;
 - Be classified by the institution as a Texas resident;
 - Not be in default on a student loan made or guaranteed by the State of Texas;
 - Enroll in classes for which the college receives tax support (i.e., a course that does not depend solely on student tuition and fees to cover its cost), unless the college's governing board has ruled to let Veterans receive the benefit while taking non-funded courses; and
 - Meet the GPA requirement of the institution's satisfactory academic progress policy in a degree or certificate program as determined by the institution's financial aid policy and, as an undergraduate student, not be considered to have attempted an excessive amount of credit hours. This requirement does not apply to the spouse / child of a MIA, KIA, or service-connected deceased Veteran. ([40 TAC §461.50](#)) & ([40 TAC §461.60](#))

Active-Duty Service-Member Transferability

Active-duty service members, as well as members currently serving in the National Guard and Armed Forces Reserves face a limitation when attempting to utilize the Hazlewood Act or Child Legacy Act. Under current requirements, service members must have been released or discharged from prior military service and possess a DD-214 that meets the eligibility criteria. This requirement is viewed by some service members as a barrier, as it prevents those Texans who are currently serving from using any of the benefits.

Currently serving members of the Armed Forces including the Reserve Components who have completed 180 days of satisfactory service after initial entry training, and who would otherwise meet eligibility, should be able to use the Hazlewood benefit for their own education, or use the Legacy Act to pass their benefit down without a Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (DD FORM 214). Supplemental documentation for the verification of Hazlewood Act eligibility for currently serving Texans could include a copy of current official assignment orders and a statement of service signed by the service-members current commander, a printout of a Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) record, or an active military ID; as verified by the Texas Veterans Commission. The VA Home Loan application process for active-duty service members uses a similar process in the form of a simple memorandum (downloadable from the VA web page), a copy of active-duty orders, and a statement of service signed by the service-members current commander.

Findings – Identification and Support of Texas Veterans

Problems Identified:

1. Access to Veterans Benefits:

- Veterans face challenges in accessing benefits due to the absence of a state veterans database, which can make it difficult to identify available services.
- Organizations serving veterans often lack access to complete and up-to-date information about veterans, hindering effective outreach and support.

2. Complex Benefit System:

- The complex nature of the veteran’s benefits system, involving local, state, and federal levels, makes it difficult for veterans to navigate and access the benefits to which they are entitled.
- The process of applying for benefits involves extensive paperwork, documentation, and long wait times, which many veterans may find overwhelming.

3. Claim-Sharking:

- This has been an ongoing problem in the VA disability claims process. The Office of the Attorney General has filed a lawsuit against an Austin-based company (VA Claims Insider), alleging it engages in “false, misleading, and deceptive acts and practices.”

4. Hazlewood Act Transferability:

- To qualify for the exemption, service-members must have been released or discharged from prior military service and possess a DD-214 that meets the eligibility criteria. This represents a barrier for service-members that choose to continue to serve on active-duty beyond their initial contract term.

Solutions and Recommendations:

1. Creation of a Comprehensive Veterans Database:

- Establish a single, comprehensive database for veterans in Texas to ensure they are accounted for and can be easily connected with the benefits and services available to them.

2. Improved Coordination Among Agencies:

- Enhance coordination among state and local agencies as well as other organizations providing benefits to veterans, to streamline the process and improve access to services.
- Strengthen collaboration between agencies such as the Texas Veterans Commission and

the Department of Housing and Community Affairs.

- Require standardization in methodology related to defining and determining cause of death, data collection/sharing, and reporting deaths by suicide among all medical examiners, coroners, and justices of the peace.
- Require consistent expectations across all jails for screening of veteran status upon intake.

3. Workforce Development:

- Create pilot program within state agencies using the DoD SkillBridge program to provide a pathway for transitioning service members. The Texas Workforce Commission should lead this through the Texas Veterans Leadership Program.
- Develop a State Military Employee Preference Form and framework for all state hiring authorities to adhere to. Require all state hiring authorities or designees to attend a direct hire computer-based training developed jointly by the Texas Veterans Commission, Texas Workforce Commission, and Health & Human Services every two years that promotes position availability.

4. Hazlewood Act Transferability:

- Amend Texas Education Code Sec. 54.341 to allow active-duty service-members to utilize their Hazlewood Act exemptions by accepting alternative supporting documentation.

TOPIC IV: STRENGTH OF MILITARY BASES

Interim Charge #3

Professional License Portability for Military and Spouses: Evaluate compliance statewide with the Section 19 of the Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-333, 50 U.S.C. §4025a), concerning the portability of professional licenses of service members and spouses and make recommendations to ensure that service members and their spouses may, under appropriate circumstances, continue to practice under a license issued by another jurisdiction.

In addition to the above charge, the Committee also considered the implementation of:

SB 422, relating to the authority of certain military service members to engage in a business or occupation in this state;

Interim Charge #4

Strength of Texas Military Bases: Review the federal criteria for considering and recommending base closure or realignment and evaluate the strength of Texas Military Bases under the scoring system utilized by the U.S. Department of Defense. Make recommendations to mitigate the risk of realignments or closures of military installations in Texas.

Background

The Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, a series of protocols undertaken by the Department of Defense (DoD) to refine military infrastructure, has significantly transformed the landscape of military installations in the United States. Through multiple rounds of BRAC, beginning in the late 1980s, the DoD sought to close, consolidate, or realign bases to increase efficiency and reduce costs. One of the most important aspects of this process is the development and use of a detailed scoring system to evaluate installations on various criteria.

At the core of the scoring system is an assessment of military value, which includes factors such as operational readiness, capacity for future missions, cost-effectiveness, and strategic location. Physical infrastructure, including the condition of facilities has been a critical metric in earlier rounds of BRAC. However, as the process eliminated some of the most outdated and deteriorating installations, the remaining bases have become more comparable in terms of physical infrastructure. This has resulted in a higher overall standard of facilities across the military.

With most bases now offering modern amenities and infrastructure, the competition for securing future missions has become more intense, and the margin for selection has narrowed. In many cases, the decision of which base to maintain or expand may come down to a small difference of one or two points in the BRAC scoring system. When the physical and operational capabilities of bases are closely matched, secondary factors such as quality of life for service members and their families become decisive. Quality of life metrics can include housing availability, access to education, healthcare facilities, recreational amenities, and the overall cost of living in the surrounding community.

Additionally, local and state support for military installations—such as tax incentives, portability of professional licenses, and infrastructure improvements—can tip the scales in favor of one installation over another. States and localities often advocate for their bases, emphasizing their commitment to improving the lives of military personnel and enhancing the base's operational effectiveness.

For the purposes of this report, evaluation of professional license portability has been grouped together with reviewing the strength of Texas military bases because of the nexus between quality of life and the BRAC selection criteria.

This nuanced scoring system showcases the complexity of modern military basing decisions, where even the smallest differences in factors such as community engagement or service member well-being can determine the fate of a base in or outside of a formal BRAC round. As a result, competition among states and localities has intensified, with each striving to create the most favorable conditions for retaining or expanding their military installations.

Authority of the Department of Defense to Realign or Close an Installation

When infrastructure is excess to personnel requirements, there are two different processes by which the Department of Defense may authorize a Base Realignment or Closure. One of the mechanisms is a formal process, authorized by Public Law (PL) 101-510. The other mechanism for Base Realignment and Closure is an informal process.

The formal approval process for a Base Realignment and Closure is included in the President's Budget Request; Congress must approve authorization for appropriation to conduct Base Realignment and Closure as part of the National Defense Authorization Act. Public Law (PL) 101-510 authorizes this formal approval process, also known as The Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990.

Within the formal approval process, a 9-member commission is appointed by the President (with advice of Congressional leadership) and is ratified by the Senate. The Department of Defense makes recommendations to the BRAC Commission. The BRAC Commission then adds, deletes, or modifies the reported recommendations before they are forwarded to the President. Finally, the President and Congress take an “up or down vote” on the entire report.

The informal process of Base Realignment and Closure is authorized by Section 2687, Title 10, U.S.C. This process begins when the Secretary of Defense notifies the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) and the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) as part of the annual Defense Authorization Act intent to either close an installation that has greater than 300 civilian employees authorized or realign an installation by more than 1,000/50% of the authorized number of civilians. Congress then has the longer duration of 30 legislative days or 60 calendar days to disapprove funding.

Selection Criteria for 2005 Round of B.R.A.C.

BRAC law requires that DoD develop criteria that must be used for making closure and realignment recommendations to the BRAC Commission. The law also requires that those criteria must ensure that Military Value is the primary consideration.

The selection criteria for the 2005 round of BRAC were required to be submitted in draft form by 31 December 2003, and the final criteria published in the Federal Register by 16 February 2004. Both of these deadlines were met. On 15 March 2004, the selection criteria became law.

The BRAC 2005 Selection Criteria were:

Military Value:

1. The current and future mission capabilities and the impact on operational readiness of the total force of the Department of Defense, including the impacts on joint warfighting, training, and readiness.
2. The availability and condition of land, facilities, and associated airspace (including training areas suitable for maneuver by ground, naval, or air forces throughout a diversity of climate and terrain areas and staging areas for the use of the Armed Forces in homeland defense missions) at both existing and potential receiving locations.
3. The ability to accommodate contingency, mobilization, surge, and future total force requirements at both existing and potential receiving locations to support operations and training.
4. The cost of operations and the manpower implications.

Other Considerations:

5. The extent and timing of potential costs and savings, including the number of years, beginning with the date of completion of the closure or realignment, for the savings to exceed the costs.
6. The economic impact on existing communities in the vicinity of military installations.
7. The ability of the infrastructure of both the existing and potential receiving communities to support forces, missions, and personnel.
8. The environmental impact, including the impact of costs related to potential environmental restoration, waste management, and environmental compliance activities.

The legislation for BRAC 2005 states that the selection criteria must ensure that Military Value (Criteria 1-4) is the primary consideration in making recommendations. The law also requires BRAC components to address the special considerations of cost, economic impact, local area infrastructure, and environment (Criteria 5-8).

Attributes Utilized by the Department of the Army in the 2005 Round of B.R.A.C.

This list of military value attributes was utilized in the [2005 Department of Defense Report to the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission](#)⁴⁷. Related attributes have been grouped together.

Training and Maneuver Capabilities

Direct Fire Capability (#1)

Indirect Fire Capability (#2)

Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT) (#3)

Heavy Maneuver Area (#4)

Light Maneuver Area (#5)

Airspace (#6)

Instructional and Training Facilities

General Instructional Facilities (#7)

Applied Instructional Facilities (#8)

Environmental and Natural Resources

Air Quality (#9)

Noise Contours (#10)

Soil Resiliency (#11)

Water Quantity (#12)

Deployment and Mobilization

Mobilization (#13)

Force Deployment (#14)

Materiel Deployment (#15)

Infrastructure and Facilities

Operations/Administrative Facilities (#16)

Buildable Acres (#36)

Brigade Capacity (#37)

Environmental Elasticity (#38)

Connectivity and Accessibility

Accessibility (#17)

Connectivity (#18)

Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation (RDTE) Capabilities

RDTE Mission Diversity (#19)

Test Range Capacity (#20)

Logistics and Supply

Munitions Production Capability (#21)

Ammunition Storage Capacity (#22)

Supply and Storage Capacity (#25)

47 <https://dml.armywarcollege.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/DoD-BRAC-Commission-2005-Vol-III-Army-Analysis-2005.pdf>

Maintenance/Manufacturing Production Capacity (#24)

Partnerships and Collaboration

Interservice and Partnering with Industry Flexibility (#23)

Joint Facilities (#32)

Quality of Life and Community Support

Crime Index (#26)

Employment Opportunity (#27)

Housing (#28)

Medical Care Availability (#29)

In-State Tuition Policy (#30)

Workforce and Economic Factors

Workforce Availability (#31)

Area Cost Factor (ACF) (#33)

Installation Unit Cost Factor (#35)

Sustainability and Encroachment

Urban Sprawl (#39)

Security and Strategic Importance

C2 Target for Focus Facilities (#34)

Critical Infrastructure Proximity (#40)

History of B.R.A.C.

The history of U.S. military base closures and realignments has evolved through several legislative actions at the federal level. In the 1960s, the Pentagon utilized the 1949 Federal Property and Administrative Services Act, originally intended to close World War II infrastructure that was excess to needs, to shut down 569 military installations, including 60 major bases. This marked a significant reduction in military infrastructure, driven by changing defense needs.

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson vetoed legislation that would have introduced Congressional oversight in the Department of Defense's base closure decisions, reflecting the executive branch's desire to maintain control over military infrastructure.

A decade later, in 1975, President Gerald Ford vetoed the Military Construction (MILCON) bill, which included a provision that would have prohibited the closure or realignment of any military installation employing more than 250 civilians. This led to Congressional action in 1977, resulting in the passage of legislation that is now codified as Section 2687 of Title 10, U.S. Code. This legislation established a more structured process for base closures, requiring extensive justification and reporting.

By the late 1980s, after three consecutive years of declining defense budgets (1985-1987), Congress enacted Public Law 100-526 in October 1987, which provided the legal framework for a one-time round of base closures and realignments. The Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC)

Commission created under this law reported directly to the Secretary of Defense, leading to the BRAC round of 1988.

In 1990, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney proposed closing 35 military installations and realigning 20 others without Congressional input, prompting Congress to pass Public Law 101-510, also known as the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990. This law authorized additional BRAC rounds in 1991, 1993, and 1995, and established an independent BRAC Commission to oversee the process. The Act, as amended, later served as the legislative authority for the BRAC round of 2005, which further reshaped the U.S. military's infrastructure.

This history of the BRAC process exemplifies the dynamic interaction between the executive and legislative branches in determining the structure and distribution of U.S. military bases. Over time, this process has involved careful balancing of national defense priorities with the economic and political implications of base closures and realignments, reflecting the complex considerations that influence decisions affecting military infrastructure.

B.R.A.C. in Texas

Bergstrom Air Force Base was a critical part of Austin's military history for over 50 years, supporting various military units and missions, including significant roles in the Berlin Airlift and Operation Desert Storm. Its closure in 1993, as part of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, initially hurt Austin's economy, but the conversion of the base into Austin-Bergstrom International Airport in 1999 revitalized the region, generating jobs and tourism.

Carswell Air Force Base, located in Fort Worth, was pivotal during the Cold War as part of the Strategic Air Command (SAC). However, following the Cold War's conclusion, it closed in 1994 as a result of BRAC. The base transitioned to Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Fort Worth, continuing military operations but with fewer personnel, reducing its economic footprint.

Chase Field Naval Air Station in Beeville, Texas, played a key role in Navy pilot training, but it closed in 1993 under BRAC, severely impacting the local economy. The base was later redeveloped as the Chase Field Industrial Complex, providing jobs and business opportunities, though it couldn't fully compensate for the loss of military activity.

Naval Air Station Dallas, originally Hensley Field, was critical for training Navy and Marine Corps pilots. Closing in 1998 as part of BRAC, its redevelopment has been slow due to environmental contamination, but ongoing efforts aim to transform the site into a mixed-use development that could revitalize the local economy.

Reese Air Force Base in Lubbock was known for training military pilots for over five decades. Its closure in 1997 under BRAC significantly impacted the area. However, the site was repurposed as Reese Technology Center, creating opportunities for technology and research, although environmental contamination remains a challenge.

Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio served as a major logistics hub for the Air Force. Closing in 2001 under BRAC, the Air Force repurposed the base as Port San Antonio, fostering new economic

growth while maintaining some military operations. Kelly Field continues to serve military needs and contributes to San Antonio's economy.

Red River Army Depot, activated in 1941, played a crucial role in vehicle maintenance and logistics for the Army. Despite recommendations for closure in the 1995 and 2005 BRAC rounds, the depot remains open due to its essential support functions, employing thousands and supporting military operations globally.

Naval Station Ingleside was home to the Navy's Mine Warfare Force but closed in 2010 under BRAC. Its closure had a major economic impact on the surrounding region, but the site was sold to private companies, creating new industrial opportunities.

The Lone Star Army Ammunition Plant in Texarkana produced munitions for decades before closing in 2009. Environmental remediation followed, and the site is under long-term monitoring due to contamination.

Brooks Air Force Base in San Antonio was a key research hub for aerospace medicine. Closing in 2011, the base was successfully redeveloped into Brooks City-Base, a center for research and economic development, continuing its legacy in the region.

Economic Impact of Military Installations in Texas

Comptroller of Public Accounts of the State of Texas; Military Installations Economic Impact in 2023

In 2023, Texas's military installations played a crucial role in bolstering the state's economy. With 14 bases representing the Army, Navy, Air Force, and the National Guard, these installations are spread across 10 of the Texas Comptroller's 12 economic regions, covering over 1.4 million acres. Collectively, they directly employed about 213,176 people, contributing to a total of 677,022 jobs when accounting for both direct and indirect employment.

The economic impact of these military bases is significant, with contributions totaling nearly \$89 billion to the state's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The overall economic output generated by these installations reached approximately \$151.3 billion, and they provided around \$48.4 billion in disposable personal income. This data emphasizes the vital role that Texas' military presence plays not only in national defense but also in supporting local economies and job creation across a variety of industries.

TEXAS

MILITARY INSTALLATIONS ECONOMIC IMPACT / 2023

Texas is home to 14 military installations that represent three of the six branches of the U.S. Department of Defense, including the Army, Navy and Air Force, and a reserve component of the National Guard. These bases are spread among 10 of the Comptroller's 12 economic regions and cover more than 1.4 million acres.

These installations play a vital role in strategic national defense and provide a significant contribution to the Texas economy. These bases support local businesses and create jobs in a variety of industries. In 2023, military bases in Texas supported about 213,000 direct jobs and contributed nearly \$89.0 billion to Texas' gross domestic product. These bases also contributed about \$48.4 billion in disposable personal income.

EMPLOYMENT, 2023

DIRECT EMPLOYMENT	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT (DIRECT AND INDIRECT)
213,176	677,022

ESTIMATED CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE TEXAS ECONOMY, 2023

GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT	ECONOMIC OUTPUT	DISPOSABLE PERSONAL INCOME
\$89.0 Billion	\$151.3 Billion	\$48.4 Billion



MILITARY INSTALLATIONS ECONOMIC IMPACT, 2023

	DIRECT EMPLOYMENT	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT (DIRECT AND INDIRECT)	ECONOMIC OUTPUT (IN BILLIONS)	GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (IN BILLIONS)	DISPOSABLE PERSONAL INCOME (IN BILLIONS)
Army Futures Command	970	8,757	\$1.8	\$1.1	\$1.0
Corpus Christi Army Depot	2,867	8,979	\$1.7	\$1.0	\$0.5
Dyess AFB	5,157	15,879	\$3.6	\$2.1	\$1.1
Ellington Field JRB	2,715	7,425	\$1.7	\$1.0	\$0.6
Fort Bliss	41,220	126,997	\$27.9	\$16.3	\$9.6
Fort Cavazos	59,695	173,730	\$39.1	\$22.9	\$10.9
Goodfellow AFB	6,220	12,064	\$3.1	\$1.8	\$0.8
Joint Base San Antonio	67,350	240,403	\$55.1	\$32.4	\$17.6
Laughlin AFB	3,043	7,533	\$1.7	\$1.0	\$0.4
NAS Corpus Christi	7,159	21,340	\$4.7	\$2.8	\$1.4
NAS JRB Fort Worth	5,041	22,548	\$4.9	\$2.9	\$2.2
NAS Kingsville	1,802	4,338	\$1.0	\$0.6	\$0.3
Red River Army Depot	3,535	9,228	\$1.7	\$1.0	\$0.4
Sheppard AFB	6,402	17,801	\$3.3	\$2.0	\$1.5
STATEWIDE TOTALS	213,176	677,022	\$151.3	\$89.0	\$48.4

Comptroller's 2023 economic impact, Texas military installations:
[COMPTROLLER.TEXAS.GOV/ECONOMY/ECONOMIC-DATA/MILITARY/](https://comptroller.texas.gov/economy/economic-data/military/)

Note: Totals may not sum due to rounding.
 Sources: Texas Military Preparedness Commission; the U.S. Military bases in Texas; REMI; Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts

Glenn Hegar

Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts

98-086 (6/24)

Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation, Reports on Defense Spending by State

2023 Executive Summary

In Fiscal Year 2023, Texas played a pivotal role in U.S. defense spending, receiving a substantial portion of the Department of Defense's budget. Texas led the nation with \$68.4 billion in total defense spending, reflecting its critical importance to national security. This spending encompasses contracts, grants, and personnel expenditures, making Texas one of the top recipients across all categories. Specifically, the state received \$55.5 billion in defense contracts, the highest in the country, highlighting its significant contributions to the production and maintenance of military supplies, equipment, and services.

Additionally, Texas was a major hub for defense personnel spending, with \$12.5 billion allocated to pay for military and civilian personnel, further underscoring its strategic importance. The state's defense industry and military installations are not only vital to national defense but also to the local economy, driving significant job creation and economic growth. This level of investment positions Texas as a cornerstone of the U.S. defense infrastructure, making it indispensable to both national security and economic stability.

[Defense Spending by State – Fiscal Year 2023 Report.](#)⁴⁸

Year-to-Year Analysis from Fiscal Year 2013 to Present

Over the past decade, Texas has consistently ranked among the top states in defense spending, underscoring its critical role in U.S. military operations and its substantial contribution to the national economy.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2013, Texas received \$46.0 billion in defense funds, representing 10% of the total U.S. defense budget. This spending, which constituted 3.0% of the state's GDP, was largely driven by contracts awarded to major defense contractors such as Lockheed Martin and Bell-Boeing Joint Project Office.

In FY2014, defense spending in Texas slightly decreased to \$39.6 billion, accounting for 9.5% of the national total. Despite the reduction, Texas remained a vital hub for defense activities, with significant investments directed towards supplies and equipment, particularly benefiting the Navy and Marines. The trend continued in FY2015, with \$37.9 billion in spending, maintaining Texas's position as a major contributor to U.S. defense, especially through contracts related to supplies and equipment.

The state saw a dip in FY2016, receiving \$33.3 billion, which made up 8.8% of the national defense budget. However, by FY2017, defense spending in Texas rebounded slightly to \$37.7 billion, reinforcing the state's importance in military operations, with significant contributions from the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force. This upward trend continued in FY2018, where

⁴⁸ <https://oldcc.gov/dsbs-fy2023>

Texas experienced a significant increase in defense spending to \$50.8 billion, accounting for 10.2% of the national total and contributing 2.8% to the state’s GDP.

Texas's defense spending remained robust in FY2019, with \$54.8 billion in expenditures. The state continued to be a crucial location for major defense contractors like Lockheed Martin and Bell Boeing Joint Project Office. The momentum carried into FY2020, with a substantial increase in defense spending to \$83.0 billion, which represented 14% of the total U.S. defense budget and 4.6% of Texas's GDP. This period saw the Navy and Marines receiving the largest share of funds, followed closely by the Army and Air Force.

In FY2021, Texas's defense spending slightly decreased to \$47.3 billion, still accounting for 8.5% of the national total and 2.2% of the state’s GDP. The majority of this spending was allocated to supplies and equipment, consistent with previous years. The following year, FY2022, saw an increase to \$58.0 billion, with Texas receiving 10.4% of U.S. defense spending, continuing its trend of significant investments in the defense sector.

Finally, in FY2023, Texas led the nation in defense spending with \$71.6 billion, solidifying its crucial role in national security. This funding spread across contracts, grants, and personnel expenditures, highlighting the state’s strategic importance. Over the past decade, Texas's defense industry and military installations have not only been vital to national defense but have also driven significant economic growth within the state, making it an indispensable part of the U.S. defense infrastructure.

2024 Texas State Legislature by Installation

Installation	House District(s)	Representative(s)	Senate District(s)	Senator(s)
ARMY				
Fort Cavazos	54,55,59	Buckley, Shine, Slawson	24	Flores
Fort Bliss	74,77,78,79	Morales, Ortega, Moody, Ordaz	29	Blanco*
Corpus Christi Army Depot	32	Hunter	20	Hinojosa
Red River Army Depot	1	VanDeaver	19	Hughes
AIR FORCE				
Dyess AFB	71	Lambert	28	Perry
Goodfellow AFB	72	Darby	28	Perry
Sheppard AFB	69	Frank*	30	Springer

Laughlin AFB	53,74	Murr, Morales	19	Gutierrez*
NAVY				
NAS Corpus Christi	32	Hunter	27	LaMantia
NAS Kingsville	43	Lozano	27	LaMantia
NAS Fort Worth JRB	99	Geren	9	Hancock*
Joint Bases/Reserve Bases				
Ellington Field JRB	129,144,147	Paul, Perez, Jones	6,11	Alvarado, Middleton
JBSA	120	Gervin-Hawkins	25,26	Campbell, Menéndez

*Indicates member of the House Defense & Veterans’ Affairs Committee or member of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee

Testimony Gathered on Strength of Texas Military Bases

The following testimony was gathered in public hearings held on August 20, 2024, and August 21, 2024.

Brian Stevens Verbal Testimony – Deputy Director for Construction and Facilities Management, Texas Military Department

Brian Stevens, the Deputy Director for Construction and Facilities Management for the Texas Military Department, testified before the committee regarding the challenges and needs associated with maintaining and upgrading the state's military facilities. He emphasized that the Texas Military Department manages the largest state military force in the country, supporting over 22,000 service members and more than 4,000 full-time employees across over 700 facilities.

Stevens explained that the Texas National Guard armories, known as readiness centers, are essential for operational readiness, community support, disaster response, and national defense. These armories, which are distributed across the state, house crucial military equipment and serve as staging areas for deploying troops during emergencies. He explained that the Texas Military Department is responsible for the construction, sustainment, and operation of these facilities through a combination of state and federal funding. However, the state is primarily responsible for maintaining 65 armories throughout Texas.

He noted several significant challenges to maintaining these facilities, including their age, geographical dispersion, rising costs for construction and utilities, and increased operational tempo. The average age of Texas Army National Guard armories is 55 years, with the oldest being 106 years old. Due to these challenges, the majority of the armories are in deficient or poor condition according to the U.S. Army's Building Condition Index rating system.

Stevens warned that the deteriorating state of these facilities poses several risks, such as reduced mission readiness, negative impacts on recruitment and retention, and potential loss of future Department of Defense (DOD) investments. He shared an example of the Fort Sam Houston armory, where the federal government initially declined to extend the lease due to the state's lack of investment in the facility. The lease was only renewed after Stevens demonstrated a commitment to a \$10 million renovation project funded through the State of Texas Armory Revitalization Program.

He concluded by stressing the importance of investing in these facilities to ensure the Texas National Guard is equipped to respond to threats and emergencies effectively. Stevens urged the committee to consider four exceptional items proposed for the upcoming legislative session to address these challenges and invited the members to visit the facilities to better understand their condition and the impact of revitalization efforts.

Representative Morales-Shaw asked Mr. Stevens for clarification about power outages during a recent storm, inquiring if the issue affected one or multiple armories. **Stevens** explained that more than one armory lost power during Hurricane Beryl in Houston, specifically mentioning the Angleton Readiness Center, which lacked backup generation. Despite this, the Texas Military Department was able to maintain operations by utilizing other facilities in the area due to their geographic diversity.

Representative Morales-Shaw questioned whether these facilities, as critical infrastructure, should have commercial-grade generators capable of sustaining operations during emergencies, such as storms or cyberattacks. **Stevens** acknowledged that, ideally, these armories would have such capabilities. He detailed ongoing federal investments in energy resilience, such as microgrids under construction at Camp Mabry and Camp Swift, which will enable 14 days of operation without external power.

However, he explained the financial limitations in providing backup generation for armories, mentioning that currently only nine out of 65 have any kind of backup power. For major renovation projects, backup generators are included as bid options, but their installation depends on available funding. He noted that one of the Texas Military Department's exceptional items for the upcoming legislative session includes a proposal to fund full renovations of ten armories, each with a dual-fuel backup generation system, while planning for six more.

Representative Morales-Shaw asked if the armories with backup power are strategically located. **Stevens** confirmed that the focus has been on the Gulf Coast due to its vulnerability to hurricanes, and resources have been allocated accordingly.

Representative Dorazio asked Mr. Stevens about the number of armories that need renovation and the associated costs. **Stevens** explained that three out of the sixty-five armories in Texas are being divested due to their poor condition. Since 2016, the Texas Military Department (TMD) has received state funding through the armory revitalization program, averaging \$10 million per session. In the most recent legislative session, they received \$20 million but had requested \$176 million. Stevens stated that it would take approximately \$124 million in state funding, supplemented by \$10 to \$15 million in federal funding, to fully renovate 10 armories and design six more. The unconstrained need to bring all armories up to a fully functional state would cost around \$685 million, a sum that could not be executed within a single biennium due to state contracting constraints. Stevens recommended a sustainable plan that includes full revitalization of 10 armories every session, with a budget uplift to \$40 million per biennium, to ensure all armories are maintained on a 25-year cycle. Additionally, TMD is seeking funds for new regional armories to consolidate older facilities and improve operational efficiency.

Representative Dorazio inquired if the federal government participates in rebuilding costs. **Stevens** clarified that while the federal government provides significant funding to TMD, including \$655 million in fiscal year 2021 for various operational needs, the state only received \$26.5 million for its side. For facilities, the federal government typically supports 50% of the costs for armory sustainment, but after 40 to 50 years, extensive renovations are required, necessitating a larger state investment. Stevens noted that historical underinvestment by the state has allowed these facilities to degrade, and now a substantial effort is needed to restore them.

Chairman Wilson acknowledged that Texas could have secured more federal matching funds in the past had the state invested more in maintaining these facilities. **Stevens** agreed, stating that earlier investment would have resulted in higher matching funds from the federal government.

Representative Dorazio also asked about compliance with federal regulations when using federal funds for construction. **Stevens** confirmed that TMD must comply with both state and federal regulations, which, while complex, is beneficial as it enables them to seek future sustainment dollars.

Representative Bumgarner expressed gratitude to Mr. Stevens for being fiscally responsible with tax dollars, acknowledging his efforts to maximize funding for armory projects. Bumgarner emphasized the importance of addressing the poor condition of these armories, suggesting the need for immediate action, potentially through tours to raise awareness among other members and prioritize this issue. Bumgarner then inquired about the timeline for the armories before they become completely non-operational.

Mr. Stevens explained that the Texas Military Department has a system to prioritize which armories should be divested and reinvested in newer regional facilities. He noted that the decision to divest armory is significant, impacting local communities, and is made by the Adjutant General and senior staff. He assured us that with the necessary funding, they have a clear plan to address and upgrade the facilities.

Representative Bumgarner then asked how long it would take to get new regional armories operational if funding were available immediately. **Stevens** responded that with the requested

exceptional items funding for 10 full revitalizations and six designs, they could obligate all funds within the biennium. He outlined the process: design in the first year and construction contracts in the second year. For new regional armories, they could begin construction within the next biennium and be well underway by the following session. He added that improvements would include new barracks and dining facilities at Camp Bowie, Texas. Rep. Bumgarner assured Stevens of his full support for these efforts, to which Stevens expressed his gratitude.

Keith Graf Verbal Testimony – Executive Director, Texas Military Preparedness Commission

Keith Graf, the Executive Director of the Texas Military Preparedness Commission, testified before the committee to provide an overview of the Commission’s efforts and the significance of military installations in Texas. He explained that his role is to serve as a liaison between the state of Texas, active-duty installations, and the Department of Defense. The Texas Military Preparedness Commission (TMPC) and the Office of the Governor work to advise the Governor and the legislature on defense and military issues. The primary goal of the TMPC is to preserve, protect, expand, and attract new military missions and assets to installations across the state.

Graf provided an overview of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, which is used by the Department of Defense to optimize its installations to better support military forces and enhance operational readiness. There have been five rounds of BRAC, occurring in 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995, and 2005. Although there have been no recent BRAC rounds, the military has been able to shift missions and units without an official BRAC process. For example, Joint Base San Antonio and Fort Cavazos have received new missions recently.

He detailed the impact of past BRACs on Texas, noting that while some installations have been repurposed successfully, such as the transformation of Kelly Air Force Base into Port San Antonio, others, like NAS Chase Field in Beeville, have not recovered from closures. Graf highlighted that Texas has benefited from BRAC as well, with installations such as Fort Bliss seeing a significant increase in personnel and infrastructure investment after the 2005 BRAC.

Graf emphasized the economic importance of military installations in Texas, noting that the state’s 15 military installations and the headquarters of the Army Futures Command provide over 213,000 direct jobs and have a total employment impact of over 677,000 jobs. These installations contribute over \$151 billion to the state’s economy, as indicated by a recent report from the TMPC in partnership with the Comptroller’s Office.

The TMPC administers the Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant (DEAAG) program, which has evolved from a redevelopment focus to being proactive in funding infrastructure projects that enhance military value. Since 2015, the TMPC has awarded 55 grants totaling over \$129 million, leveraging almost \$300 million in additional funding to support over \$422 million in infrastructure projects. Graf cited the example of a DEAAG project that funded a SCIF at the Army Futures Command Headquarters in Austin, which helped secure the location for the command.

Graf stated that Texas has become a national model for supporting military installations and highlighted the state's proactive approach in leveraging grants to strengthen military value. He mentioned that the state of Georgia and other states have reached out to Texas to learn from its model of supporting military installations. He also noted the importance of factors such as quality of local schools, spousal licensure portability, and energy resiliency in future basing decisions.

He discussed the role of Intergovernmental Service Agreements (IGSAs) in enhancing collaboration between military installations and state agencies, such as TxDOT, to provide cost-effective services inside military bases. Graf concluded by emphasizing the collaborative efforts of various groups, including the Governor's Committee to support the military, the Texas Commander's Council, and the Texas Coalition of Defense Communities, in working together to support military installations in Texas.

Keith Sledd Verbal Testimony – Chairman, The Governor's Committee to Support the Military; Heart of Texas Defense Alliance

Keith Sledd, Chairman of the Governor's Committee to Support the Military, and Executive Director of the Heart of Texas Defense Alliance, testified about the organization's role in supporting Fort Cavazos and the surrounding communities. He emphasized that the alliance, which includes seven cities and three counties around the installation, works to enhance the military value of Fort Cavazos and support service members and their families.

Sledd explained that the Committee has released reports before each legislative session in 2018, 2020, and 2022, with another report planned for release in September. These reports have resulted in approximately 15 policy or legislative recommendations, many of which have been implemented to support military installations and communities.

Regarding the potential for a new round of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), Sledd stated that while he does not believe there will be a BRAC in the next three to five years, mission realignments and re-stationing are already happening. He noted that while BRACs are politically challenging, missions and units can still be relocated without an official BRAC process, as seen with the establishment of Space Command and the re-stationing of Army brigades and air defense battalions.

Sledd highlighted the importance of military value analysis, which evaluates installations based on capabilities and attributes. He explained that the last BRAC in 2005 eliminated weaker installations, leaving strong bases in Texas. He pointed out that the difference in scoring among top installations, such as Fort Bliss and Fort Cavazos, was minimal, indicating that future decisions might hinge more on factors like quality of life, spousal licensure portability, and other criteria beyond core military capabilities.

He emphasized the need for continued modernization and rapid implementation of new military capabilities in response to evolving global threats and technological advancements. He referenced the establishment of Army Futures Command as an example of the Department of Defense's efforts to accelerate modernization. Sledd stressed the importance of Texas' support for the

military and the state's capacity to accommodate new missions due to its space and military-friendly policies.

In conclusion, Sledd expressed optimism about Texas' ability to attract and retain military missions and assets, given its supportive environment and strategic resources. He noted that future decisions on military base would likely face influence by the quality of life and other support factors for service members and their families.

Following the prepared testimony, Chairman Wilson invited further comments, and Keith Sledd responded by emphasizing the significance of the Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant (DEAAG) program. He stated that DEAAG is a unique, leading initiative within the United States, unmatched by any other state program. Sledd noted that the federal Defense Community Infrastructure Program (DCIP) was modeled after DEAAG, reflecting its success and impact.

Sledd explained that DCIP functions similarly to DEAAG but operates at the federal level. He provided an example from Fort Cavazos, where the community has successfully competed for multiple DEAAGs, securing five grants over the years. These grants have primarily been directed toward enhancing installation protection and resiliency, including projects for energy and water resiliency. Sledd pointed out that DEAAG has been funded at \$30 million per biennium for the past three cycles, but he recommended increasing the funding to \$75 million due to rising project costs, which have doubled in recent years.

He underscored that DEAAG is a vital tool for demonstrating community support for military installations, as it directly benefits both the installation and the surrounding community. Sledd credited the Texas Military Preparedness Commission (TMPC) for their effective management of the program and stressed that DEAAG serves as a prime example of state-level support for military installations, enhancing their resilience and operational effectiveness.

General Ret. Juan Ayala Verbal Testimony – Director of Military and Veterans Affairs, City of San Antonio

General Ret. Juan Ayala, Director of Military and Veteran Affairs for the City of San Antonio, testified about his extensive experience in the Marine Corps and his current role in supporting the military community in San Antonio. Ayala, who served as a commander of all 24 Marine Corps installations globally and was involved in past Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) processes, emphasized the significant challenges faced by military installations and their host communities. He also serves as the President of the Texas Mayors and Military Communities, representing 14-15 Texas communities with military installations.

Ayala highlighted San Antonio's involvement in competing for the U.S. Space Command headquarters, where his department led efforts to meet the Air Force's comprehensive evaluation criteria. This process, which involved evaluating factors such as workforce availability, energy resilience, community support, and cost to the Department of Defense, mirrors the criteria used during BRAC processes. Despite not securing the Space Command headquarters, San Antonio remains committed to enhancing the military value of its installations and supporting military families.

Ayala underscored the economic importance of the military to San Antonio and other Texas cities, noting that the Department of Defense is the largest employer in San Antonio. He emphasized the role of military spending as an economic stabilizer, particularly during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, when military personnel and retirees continued to receive paychecks, providing economic stability to the community.

To mitigate the risk of realignment or closure of military installations, Ayala recommended several strategies. He stressed the importance of monitoring global base closures, advocating for the military in the absence of formal BRAC processes, and making tangible investments in infrastructure and support services. He highlighted the importance of community advocacy and political support, as military installations cannot advocate for themselves.

Ayala pointed out the significant role of community support in maintaining military missions. He mentioned that the community stepped up to preserve the Brooke Army Medical Center's Level One Trauma Center by ensuring it had enough trauma cases to maintain its readiness. He also emphasized the importance of bridging the military-civilian divide, as most military personnel live off-base and are integral members of the community.

Additionally, Ayala discussed the value of formal agreements and partnerships between the military and civilian entities. These include memorandums of understanding and [inter-service support agreements](#)⁴⁹, which allow military installations to leverage local resources for non-core functions, such as road maintenance. He stressed the need to protect against urban encroachment around military bases and to oppose legislation that undermines the military's ability to operate effectively.

Ayala concluded by advocating for increased funding for the Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant (DEAAG) program, which supports infrastructure projects that add military value to installations. He highlighted the need for continuous dialogue and collaboration between military and civilian leaders to address the needs of service members and their families.

Following the prepared testimony, Chairman Wilson opened the floor for further comments, and **Representative Frank** raised a question regarding the criteria used by the military for base closures or reductions. He pointed out that whoever sets the criteria essentially decides which base gets closed, as several factors—such as cost of living, airspace, or licensing—can significantly influence the decision. He asked whether these criteria are determined politically or behind closed doors.

Keith Sledd responded by explaining that in the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round, the Department of Defense (DoD) identified four capabilities, and the Army expanded this to 40 attributes for scoring and evaluation. Each service branch had its own set of criteria based on their unique requirements. Sledd emphasized that the services themselves determine these criteria,

⁴⁹ <https://dodiac.dtic.mil/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/IAC-MAC-Task-Order-Support-Agreement-DD-Form-1144-Guidance.pdf>

which should be based on factors like combat readiness and costs, rather than solely on political considerations.

Representative Frank acknowledged that it was reassuring to hear the criteria are primarily set by the services and driven by operational needs, though he recognized that political factors inevitably play a role. **Sledd** agreed, noting that while political influence remains, having a structured process helps mitigate its impact.

Juan Ayala added that the most heavily weighted questions in the decision-making process were related to the mission, which accounted for about 40% of the evaluation. Other factors included capacity, community support, and cost to the DoD. He highlighted that although there is currently no political will for a new BRAC, the services have been advocating for it due to overcapacity in installations, such as the Air Force, which has 19% overcapacity worldwide.

Keith Graf mentioned that they had analyzed the 2005 BRAC scores to understand how Texas installations compared to others, noting that while the data is now outdated, it provided insights at the time. He cited Goodfellow Air Force Base as an example of misalignment between criteria and mission, as it was scored on air components despite being focused on intel and firefighting training.

Chairman Wilson then brought up the criteria used in determining the location for the U.S. Space Command, noting that while Colorado Springs was initially chosen, the decision was later changed to Alabama for political reasons. **Ayala** confirmed this, reiterating that political factors ultimately influenced the decision.

Wilson emphasized the importance of public education in these decisions, noting that families often consider school quality when relocating, which the services take into account when deciding where to place or move missions. He also highlighted other community support factors, such as professional licensure portability, cost of living, and access to veteran support programs, which are increasingly influencing basing decisions. He concluded by stressing that while sunk costs are not a determining factor, the DoD bases its decisions on broader strategic considerations.

Jeff Webster Verbal Testimony – President and CEO, The Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce

Jeff Webster, President and CEO of the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, testified before the committee, emphasizing the strong ties between San Antonio and the military community. He began by inviting the committee members to visit San Antonio again under more favorable weather conditions to witness firsthand the positive developments at the local military bases.

Webster highlighted the Chamber's long history and involvement with every military installation in the city over the past 130 years, stressing that the military is not only a source of pride but also a significant economic driver for the community. He noted that Texas ranks third in personnel spending by the Department of Defense, with \$12.5 billion spent in FY23. Bexar County, in particular, is the top location in Texas for defense-related personnel spending, accounting for \$4.3 billion, and ranks third in defense contracting spending at \$5.5 billion.

Webster recounted his personal experience during a Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process in 1995, shortly after he was elected to the San Antonio City Council. He described the emotional impact on the community as they faced the potential loss of a military facility. This experience reinforced his commitment to supporting military installations and ensuring that San Antonio does not face a comparable situation again.

He pointed out that Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA) is the largest employer in the community, with over 90,000 personnel, including nearly 32,000 civilians. The base occupies more than 46,000 acres and 11 sites, training more students than any other Department of Defense installation. Webster emphasized the economic contribution of JBSA, with the Texas Comptroller's Office estimating that the base contributes at least \$55 billion to the Texas economy, impacting not just Bexar County but the entire state.

Webster praised the collaboration between the military and the community, citing examples such as the partnership with the Level 1 Trauma Center at Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC), which provides invaluable experience to medical personnel and benefits the local community. He also noted the Chamber's active role in supporting military families and transitioning service members, including organizing events, parades, and receptions to honor and integrate military personnel into the community.

In response to recent discussions about protecting and expanding military missions, the Chamber has formed a new task force, Supporting Military Families San Antonio (SMF.SA), focused on workforce development, healthcare, and childcare. The task force aims to address the unique needs of military families, such as improving access to medical care and supporting military spouses in the workforce. Webster mentioned that many military families struggle to find adequate healthcare providers who accept Tricare or TriWest due to lower reimbursement rates. He also discussed the importance of educating employers about the challenges faced by military spouses who frequently move, resulting in gaps in their resumes.

Webster emphasized that the Chamber's efforts are not just for the benefit of San Antonio but for the entire state of Texas. He expressed the hope that other military communities across the state would adopt similar initiatives to support military families and enhance their local economies. He concluded by highlighting the importance of continued collaboration between the military, local communities, and state leaders to protect and grow military missions in Texas.

In closing, Webster expressed his commitment to supporting the military community and ensuring that San Antonio remains a strong partner to the Department of Defense. He also noted the Chamber's recent hire of a retired deputy commander of JBSA to lead their military efforts, underscoring their dedication to fostering a robust and supportive environment for the military community in San Antonio.

Following the prepared testimony, **Vice-Chair Lopez** highlighted the strategic initiatives and successes of San Antonio in leveraging military and commercial investments. He referenced the closure of both Kelly Air Force Base and Brooks Air Force Base and emphasized how the city turned these closures into opportunities by developing complementary rather than competitive investments at Port San Antonio and Brooks City-Base. This strategic approach fostered a

collaborative environment that attracted significant investments in telecommunications and technology infrastructure, including a strong Air Force cyber presence and the largest Microsoft footprint globally.

Lopez emphasized the city's proactive efforts in creating a high-capacity technological infrastructure that supports defense-related activities, including the NSA and other cyber operations. He encouraged Port San Antonio and other stakeholders to maintain momentum in innovation and investment, urging them to communicate their needs and successes to ensure continued support and recognition for the region's accomplishments.

Jeff Webster, President and CEO of the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, then raised a key concern regarding the region's ability to support future growth and development. He pointed out that the local power transmission network, particularly the transmission lines and their coordination with ERCOT, is currently inadequate to meet the demands of both private and federal investments. Webster stressed that without significant improvements in transmission infrastructure, San Antonio risks losing future business opportunities and defense missions due to its inability to support expanding power needs, particularly with the increasing energy consumption by data centers and AI technologies.

Vice-Chair Lopez agreed with Webster's points and emphasized the importance of developing innovative solutions, such as small modular reactor (SMR) facilities, to address these infrastructure challenges. He highlighted the need for a balanced regulatory environment that supports innovation without becoming overly burdensome. He pointed to San Antonio's potential to lead in power transmission technology if it can successfully develop and implement these innovative solutions in partnership with entities like Southwest Research.

Juan Antonio Flores then provided specific details on the energy demands expected for future projects at Port San Antonio. He mentioned that they are currently discussing with CPS Energy, San Antonio's municipally owned utility, about the need for nearly 400 megawatts of additional load to support the expansion of the 16th Air Force and related facilities at Port San Antonio. He noted that this demand is in addition to the needs of the data centers in the area and emphasized that the primary challenge is not generating power but ensuring adequate transmission infrastructure to deliver it.

Representative Dorazio inquired about CPS Energy's infrastructure investments, specifically regarding transmission lines and generation capabilities. **Webster** explained that while CPS Energy is acquiring additional power generation facilities, the critical issue remains the development and timely implementation of transmission lines to meet growing demand. He expressed urgency in addressing these infrastructure needs to support both defense and commercial sectors.

Chairman Wilson closed the discussion by acknowledging that the challenges facing San Antonio extend beyond power to include water infrastructure as well, citing the example of Sheppard Air Force Base, where both water and power are crucial considerations.

Overall, the exchange highlighted the importance of robust infrastructure development, strategic investments, and collaborative efforts between local, state, and federal entities to support the growth of defense and commercial sectors in San Antonio and the broader Texas region.

Colonel Ret. Bryan Logan Verbal Testimony – Former Vice Commander of Joint Base San Antonio

Colonel Ret. Bryan Logan, who recently joined the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce as Vice President of Military Affairs after serving as the Vice Commander for Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA), testified before the committee to provide insights into the challenges and priorities affecting military families. Drawing from his experience as an Army officer in an Air Force command, Logan emphasized the critical role that quality of life plays in basing decisions and in the decision-making process for military families considering a move.

Logan explained that the military, particularly the Army, views the family unit as a crucial component in the decision-making process for stationing. Historically, leaders often made decisions solely based on the service member's assignment, with little consideration for family needs. However, the landscape has changed significantly, and the well-being of military families now plays a significant role in these decisions. He noted that the focus has shifted to "mission first, people always," highlighting the importance of supporting both service members and their families.

A new initiative called "[Five and Thrive](https://www.fiveandthrive.org/)"⁵⁰ has been introduced to address the top five concerns of military families when they receive orders to move. These concerns include the quality of schools, availability of medical care, employment opportunities for spouses, housing options, and childcare availability. Logan emphasized that these factors heavily influence whether a family will choose to relocate to a new assignment. Unlike in the past, when families moved without much consideration for these issues, today's military families expect to continue their careers, ensure quality education for their children, and access necessary medical and childcare services.

Logan praised the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3) for its work in supporting military children by ensuring their educational needs are met, such as transferring credits and accommodating special education needs. He pointed out that the majority of military families live off-base and are integrated into the local community, underscoring the importance of strong community-military partnerships.

He described the relationship between San Antonio and the military community as symbiotic, where the state and city provide a supportive environment for military families, particularly in the areas of medical, aerospace, and cybersecurity. Logan argued that promoting the quality of life in Texas and Military City USA would help retain and attract military families. He suggested that Texas could better advertise the advantages of living in the state to military families before they arrive, as this could influence basing decisions positively for Texas.

⁵⁰ <https://www.fiveandthrive.org/>

Logan also touched on some of the challenges facing military families, such as housing affordability and childcare. He mentioned the need for creative solutions, such as incentivizing private childcare providers to prioritize military families or considering federal aid programs similar to those for schools with military-connected children. He also discussed the importance of ensuring that medical facilities are equipped to handle the needs of families enrolled in the [Exceptional Family Member Program \(EFMP\)](#),⁵¹ which supports children with special medical or educational needs.

In conclusion, Logan emphasized the importance of continuing to address these quality-of-life issues to make Texas a desirable location for military families. This, in turn, would support the Department of Defense's mission by creating a stable and supportive environment for service members and their families. He encouraged ongoing efforts to strengthen community-military partnerships and explore innovative solutions to support military families, making Texas an attractive destination for future basing decisions.

Chairman Wilson thanked Logan for his service and for highlighting key areas for improvement, recognizing the importance of Logan's insights for shaping future initiatives to support military families in Texas.

Jeremy Hilton Verbal Testimony – Southwest Regional Liaison, Defense State-Liaison Office, Department of Defense

Jeremy Hilton, in his testimony before the committee, expressed his deep appreciation for the collaborative efforts between the Department of Defense (DoD) and the local communities, specifically highlighting the support provided by leaders such as Colonel Sledd and Keith Graf. Hilton acknowledged the significant contributions of community members, including Lori Stinson from the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, emphasizing the impact that local engagement has on the mission and support of military families.

Vice-Chair Lopez responded to Hilton's remarks by highlighting the positive transformation that has occurred in San Antonio due to the establishment of Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA). Initially perceived as a potential drawback, the consolidation and reorganization of military installations under JBSA have, in fact, strengthened the relationship between the military and the local community. This integration has led to a cohesive community where military and civilian sectors collaborate effectively, particularly in areas such as utility management and support for medical missions like the BAMC bill, which ensures level one trauma care.

Vice-Chair Lopez commended Hilton and the community for their efforts in creating a unified entity that supports military operations while enhancing the local economy. He noted the importance of maintaining this unity to protect against potential downsizing and Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) processes. The collaboration between the military and civilian sectors in San Antonio is seen as a model for how communities can effectively support military installations while benefiting from the presence and contributions of the military.

⁵¹ <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/special-needs/efmp/>

Vice-Chair Lopez concluded his comments by reaffirming the commitment of the community and the committee to continue working together in a joint manner to support military missions and ensure the sustainability and growth of the military presence in the region. He invited further input and suggestions from Hilton and others to strengthen the collaboration and address any potential challenges in the future.

Written Testimony Provided to the Texas House Committee on Defense & Veterans' Affairs

In addressing the interim charges assigned to the committee, **Defense State Liaison, Jeremy Hilton** provided the following written testimony:

“Chairman Wilson, Vice Chairman Lopez, committee members, and honored guests, thank you for inviting the Department of Defense to testify today. My name is Jeremy Hilton. I am the South-Central Regional Liaison in the Defense-State Liaison Office, or DSLO. We operate under the direction of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and within the office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy. I am based out of the New Braunfels area. It is always good to see so many neighbors who have such a strong interest in helping our military families.

The Defense State Liaison Office (DSLO) is committed to fostering strong partnerships with states to ensure seamless support for our service members and their families, through education, relationship building, and assisting with legislation. Our office serves as a critical bridge between the Department of Defense (DoD) and state governments, facilitating collaboration and addressing shared priorities. Our office breaks the country up into 8 distinct regions. At the appendix to this testimony, you will find a two-pager describing our office and our personnel.

We also collaborate with government agencies and stakeholders, like the Texas Military Preparedness Commission, the Governor’s Office to Support the Military and installation partners, like the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce.

The DSLO focuses on the top ten policy priorities identified through the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Military Departments, and the National Guard Bureau. These policy priorities represent areas where states play a crucial role in improving the quality of life for our families and significantly improve recruitment, readiness, resilience, and retention. In the upcoming 2025 legislative session, I am hopeful lawmakers will address the following DoD policy priorities: **Military Access to Quality Family Child Care, Concurrent Juvenile Jurisdiction, State Support for Military Families with Special Education Needs, and Defining Armed Forces in State Policy.**

In addition, and specific to the committee’s interim session charge related to spouse employment, I’d like to highlight what many of you know from personal experience. Frequent moves. Combined with cumbersome licensing and certification requirements limit career options for many military spouses. Many give up careers altogether or live separately from their service members.

Removing these barriers by creating reciprocity in licensing requirements can improve a military family’s stability, speed the assimilation of the family into its new location, and create an

experience that turns service members into veterans and retirees returning to Texas. Spouse licensure reciprocity remains one of DoD's top military family issues with over a third of working military spouses requiring a state license.

The DSLO originally focused on improving licensure portability using state specific laws to reduce the burdens associated with the occupational relicensing of military spouses as they transferred into a new state. The Texas legislature has worked with our office and developed policy for spouses and service members. Passage of SB 1200 in 2019, followed by an amendment to the statute in 2023, requiring boards to provide a license to military spouses within 30 days was a welcome piece of legislation, impacting the lives of military families stationed in Texas. DoD is proud to have partnered with this legislative body to develop this policy.

As our office continued researching licensure issues, we discovered an additional option, occupational licensure compacts. Occupational licensure compacts are agreements between states, providing full reciprocity but take multiple states signing on to become effective. When states commit to approving compacts, they provide true licensure reciprocity as each compact allows an individual to practice their profession in the different states who have adopted the compact.

Dominique Marsalek, of the Licensed Professional Counselor Compact notes: ***“compacts are the gold standard for licensure portability, allowing our professional counselors greater flexibility through in-person practice and telehealth while also maintaining a high standard of professional care that is safe, tracked, and uniform through a public commission and database system. Compacts are the most durable way to enhance services and provide flexibility long term while respecting individual state practice acts and regulations.”***

Interstate compacts offer an opportunity to standardize qualifications for interstate transfer, alleviating a barrier for military spouses and others in the profession transferring between member states, and allow licensing boards to simplify their process for assuring the qualifications of professionals. Compacts are also a significant workforce enhancer, offering licensure reciprocity for all members of a profession, increasing the availability of critical professionals in short supply. Attached to my testimony are the 16 occupational licensure compacts our office is currently tracking.

Texas is currently a member of 38 interstate compacts, including four occupational licensure compacts: the Nurse Licensure Compact, the Physical Therapy Compact, the Emergency Medical Services Compact, and the Psychology Compact.

In closing, I want to reiterate how much we appreciate the Chairman's invitation to have this discussion. Thanks to the committee for your time and I am standing by to assist on our policy priorities in the state.

Thank you and I am happy to answer your questions.”

Juan Antonio Flores Verbal Testimony – Executive Vice President of Government Affairs, Port San Antonio

Juan Antonio Flores, Executive Vice President of Government Affairs at Port San Antonio, provided testimony regarding the successful redevelopment of the former Kelly Air Force Base, which closed in 2000 after being identified for closure in 1995. He emphasized that despite the closure, Port San Antonio has flourished as a hub for defense-related industries and innovation. He highlighted that the port now serves as a thriving community, supporting a variety of industries, including aerospace, advanced manufacturing, cybersecurity, robotics, and artificial intelligence. Port San Antonio is home to about 80 public and private enterprises employing approximately 18,000 people, significantly more than the number of jobs that existed before the base closed.

Flores noted that in 2005, during a subsequent BRAC round, the Air Force began returning to the port, establishing a strong partnership between the port and the Department of Defense (DoD). This collaboration has contributed to a growing support ecosystem for defense operations, with entities such as the Air Force Cyber Command and the Air Force Medical Operations Agency operating out of Port San Antonio. Of the 18,000 people employed at the port, approximately 6,000 are involved in supporting the DoD through various uniformed and civil service roles.

Flores shared that the Texas Comptroller conducted an economic impact study in 2018, which estimated the port's annual economic impact at \$5.6 billion. He suggested that this figure is likely outdated, given the port's substantial growth in recent years. The success of the redevelopment, he said, is due in part to the Texas Legislature's foresight in passing Chapter 379B of the Texas Local Government Code, which allowed for the creation of a defense-based development authority like Port San Antonio.

He acknowledged the importance of the Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant (DEAAG) program, stating that Port San Antonio is likely the largest recipient of DEAAG funds in Texas, using these funds to stimulate job creation and economic growth. Flores also mentioned the Texas Military Revolving Loan Fund as another valuable tool, though he suggested improvements to make it more efficient and better suited to the speed of business.

Flores discussed a significant project proposal currently under consideration to build a consolidated campus for the 16th Air Force, Air Force Cyber Command. This project would provide a state-of-the-art facility to house the unit's operations, which are currently spread across multiple aging facilities at Security Hill and Port San Antonio. The proposal, which falls under an Intergovernmental Support Agreement (IGSA), aims to enhance the capabilities and infrastructure of the 16th Air Force and support related private sector enterprises. He highlighted the support from Senator Cornyn and other congressional leaders, who have advocated for an expedited review of the proposal by the Air Force.

Flores indicated that the Department of Defense has shown interest in expanding the use of IGSA's for broader strategic real estate optimization, potentially involving Port San Antonio in a wider array of community-based facility solutions. He noted that this project could reach a scale comparable to the development of Army Futures Command and recent investments in space-related facilities in Texas.

Flores concluded by reiterating the need for state support and collaboration to ensure the continued success and growth of Port San Antonio as a key asset in Texas' defense and economic landscape. Chairman Wilson thanked him for his insights and commitment to the development and support of military infrastructure in Texas.

Following the prepared testimony, the committee sought more information about the potential for future growth at Port San Antonio, beyond the focus on the 16th Air Force. In response, Juan Antonio Flores discussed the port's initiatives in advanced air mobility technology. He explained that Kelly Field is positioning itself as a key platform for the development of these technologies, which include electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) vehicles. These vehicles are seen as potentially transformational, particularly for urban mobility in a city like San Antonio, which might bypass traditional fixed rail infrastructure in favor of this innovative technology.

Flores highlighted the role of Port San Antonio's CEO, Jim Perschbach, who is actively involved in promoting these technologies through his service on a state advisory board appointed by the governor. This board focuses on developing advanced air mobility technologies within Texas. Flores emphasized that although these technologies have significant non-defense applications, they also present opportunities for defense-related research and development, particularly by the Air Force at Port San Antonio.

Representative Garcia added to the discussion by acknowledging the presence and impact of companies like Standard Aero and Leidos, whose technologies are widely used in airports across the country. She expressed pride in seeing these companies, which are part of Port San Antonio, contributing to national security and technology.

Flores then took the opportunity to highlight the work being done by Boeing in San Antonio, noting the company's efforts in modernizing the F-18 Super Hornet and the B-52 bomber, as well as maintaining and preparing the next generation of the executive fleet for the U.S. government. He pointed out that although this work was previously not widely publicized, it is now a source of pride for the community. Boeing's San Antonio operations employ around 4,000 workers, making a significant contribution to the local economy.

Representative Dorazio inquired about the involvement of Lockheed Martin, to which **Flores** responded that Lockheed had sold its share of a maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) contract to Standard Aero and no longer operates at the port. He also noted that Lockheed Martin Cyber Solutions, which had previously been on the property doing non-kinetic cyber work for the 16th Air Force, has since left.

Overall, the exchange highlighted the wide-ranging and expansive technological capabilities at Port San Antonio, the strong partnerships with major defense contractors like Boeing, and the potential for continued growth in both commercial and defense sectors.

Encroachment

Encroachment can significantly reduce the military value of an installation during BRAC considerations, especially when they directly interfere with a critical mission of the installation. Given the economic impact these military installations have on Texas, the potential closure or relocation of bases or missions poses a serious threat to both the local and statewide economy.

Blue Hills Wind Farm Project Update

The Blue Hills Wind Farm project, initiated by GH America Energy (GHAE), a company owned by Chinese billionaire Sun Guangxin, has been embroiled in significant legal and regulatory challenges due to concerns over national security and encroachment on military installations.

Between 2016 and 2018, GH America Energy acquired 130,000 acres in North Val Verde County, Texas, with plans to develop the Blue Hills Wind Farm Project. The project initially received approval from the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) and the Department of Defense Siting Clearinghouse.

However, in June 2021, Texas passed the Lone Star Infrastructure Protection Act, prohibiting companies owned by Chinese, North Korean, Iranian, or Russian nationals from accessing Texas' critical infrastructure, including the electric grid. This law effectively blocked GHAE from proceeding with the project.

In 2022, GHAE sold the project to Greenalia, a Spanish-owned company, while continuing to finance it. Despite the change in ownership, the project has faced ongoing legal disputes, including a lawsuit filed by GHAE against Greenalia for allegedly breaching contractual obligations.

In 2023, West Texas ranchers filed a lawsuit against ERCOT, GH America, and others for violating the Lone Star Infrastructure Protection Act. Despite the law, ERCOT approved a wind project by China-linked GH America, sparking local opposition. Plaintiffs argue the project endangers national security (particularly Laughlin Air Force Base), disrupts ecotourism, and harms wildlife. Conservation groups, including the Devils River Conservancy, support the lawsuit, emphasizing the need to protect the region's ecological and cultural resources.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has also been involved, entering into a mitigation agreement with GHAE to address potential conflicts with military training routes and other national security concerns. The agreement sought to limit the number of wind turbines and their locations to reduce interference with military operations.

Significance of Encroachment

Encroachment has been a critical issue throughout the development of the Blue Hills Wind Farm. The proximity of the project to military installations has raised concerns about the potential for wind turbines to interfere with military training and operations, particularly low-flying routes used by Laughlin Air Force Base. These concerns have led to increased scrutiny from both state and federal authorities, resulting in legal actions and calls for further restrictions on the project.

In July 2024, Senator John Cornyn requested that the DoD terminate or indefinitely suspend the mitigation agreement for the Blue Hills project, reflecting the ongoing national security concerns. Additionally, CFIUS has expanded its jurisdiction to include a broader review of foreign investments in real estate near military installations, further complicating the project's development.

Overall, the Blue Hills Wind Farm project showcases the delicate balance between foreign investment and the protection of national security interests, with encroachment issues playing a pivotal role in the project's regulatory and legal challenges.

Recent Legislation from Texas and Other States

In recent years, states have turned to legislation to address the growing challenges posed by foreign investments, infrastructure development, and their impact on military operations. Military installations play a crucial role in the national defense strategy and contribute significantly to local economies, making their protection a priority. However, energy projects – particularly wind farms – and real estate acquisitions by foreign entities have introduced risks, including interference with military training routes, radar systems, and flight operations.

Additionally, concerns of national security have intensified with the involvement of foreign investors from adversarial nations, raising the stakes for state governments to act. In response, states such as Texas, Utah, and Oklahoma have proposed or enacted legislation aimed at balancing economic growth with military readiness, ensuring that energy development and foreign ownership do not compromise national security or military missions. This legislative trend reflects the need to safeguard critical infrastructure while maintaining operational compatibility between civilian projects and defense activities.

Texas Senate Bill 147 (88R)

The previously proposed Texas Senate Bill 147 from the 88th Regular Session focuses on limiting the purchase or acquisition of real property by individuals, companies, or entities tied to certain foreign nations deemed to pose national security risks. By prohibiting land purchases near sensitive infrastructure and military facilities, the bill aligns with efforts to protect military missions from encroachment. It prevents the establishment of foreign-controlled projects, such as wind farms, which could interfere with low-flying routes, radar systems, or training operations.

Restrictions on Foreign Ownership of Critical Land:

The bill prohibits citizens, companies, or governments from designated foreign countries (those identified as national security risks by the U.S. Director of National Intelligence) from acquiring agricultural land, mines, or other critical real estate in Texas. This addresses potential encroachment concerns by limiting foreign access to strategic locations near military bases or sensitive infrastructure.

Targeting Control and Influence:

The bill defines "control" as ownership of at least 50% of voting interests and extends the prohibition to entities indirectly under the control of designated foreign governments or nationals. This ensures that foreign actors cannot bypass restrictions by creating subsidiaries or using third-party entities. This provision is crucial in preventing scenarios like the Blue Hills project, where even after the sale to a Spanish company, the original Chinese investor continued to finance the project, raising persistent concerns over national security.

Coordination with State Authorities and Legal Oversight:

SB 147 empowers the Attorney General to investigate suspicious real estate acquisitions and enforce compliance through court actions, including appointing receivers to divest foreign owners of their interests if violations occur. This legal oversight ensures that foreign ownership incompatible with state and national interests can be swiftly addressed.

Utah House Bill 117 (2024 Regular Session)

Utah House Bill 117 from the 2024 Regular Session addresses wind energy development and its interaction with military operations, which directly ties into the problem of encroachment described in the Blue Hills Wind Energy Development. In contrast to Texas's focus on foreign ownership, Utah H.B. 117 (2024) tackles encroachment from domestic energy projects as well.

Military Installation Assurance Siting Clearinghouse Requirements:

The bill mandates that any wind energy facility must go through the Military Aviation and Installation Assurance Siting Clearinghouse before construction begins. This ensures that the placement and operation of wind turbines do not conflict with military operations. The process evaluates the potential for projects to interfere with training routes, drop zones, and air traffic control operations, which are critical concerns.

Pre-Construction Coordination with Military Entities:

H.B. 117 requires project developers to notify and coordinate with both the Utah Department of Veterans and Military Affairs and the Utah Department of Natural Resources. This is aimed at early identification of any potential conflicts with military missions. This preemptive approach would prevent scenarios like those described for the Blue Hills Wind Farm, where projects proceed only to be halted later due to unforeseen conflicts with military installations.

Penalties and Compliance Enforcement:

The bill imposes penalties of up to \$1,500 per day for developers who fail to submit necessary documentation on time. This enforces accountability and ensures compliance with military airspace regulations and mission compatibility requirements.

Ensuring Operational Compatibility with FAA and DoD Standards:

Wind energy projects are prohibited from moving forward unless they receive a Determination of No Hazard from the FAA or demonstrate compliance with mitigation plans developed in

coordination with the Department of Defense (DoD). This safeguards against interference with critical military operations, like those at Laughlin Air Force Base, which were a concern in the Blue Hills Wind Farm case.

Confidentiality and Documentation Handling:

All submitted documentation is kept confidential, ensuring that sensitive military and security information is protected during the development process. This is particularly relevant when foreign investments are involved.

Oklahoma House Bill 2118 (2019 Regular Session)

The Oklahoma H.B. 2118 bill addresses wind energy development, with a strong focus on preventing encroachment and ensuring coordination with military operations.

Setback Requirements and Restrictions:

The bill enforces strict setbacks of 1.5 nautical miles from public-use airports, hospitals, and schools, preventing wind turbines from interfering with operations in critical areas. This helps prevent situations similar to the proximity challenges experienced by the Blue Hills Wind Farm with Laughlin Air Force Base

Coordination with Military Authorities:

H.B. 2118 mandates that wind energy facilities must not interfere with military operations. This is enforced through coordination with the Military Aviation and Installation Assurance Siting Clearinghouse and the FAA. Both agencies ensure that turbines do not interfere with military training routes, bombing ranges, and runway approaches.

FAA Approval and Mission Compatibility:

Similar to Utah’s H.B. 117, Oklahoma’s H.B. 2118 requires developers to obtain a Determination of No Hazard from the FAA and resolve any conflicts with military operations via a Mission Compatibility Certification Letter from the Clearinghouse. This ensures wind projects will not compromise the operational integrity of military installations, preventing post-construction disruptions.

Documentation and Compliance Requirements:

Facility owners must submit documentation to the Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission and the Oklahoma Corporation Commission (equivalent of the Texas Railroad Commission) to ensure transparency and proper oversight. The strict compliance requirements aim to prevent encroachment concerns from arising after construction begins.

Penalties for Non-Compliance:

Developers who fail to comply with documentation and approval processes face penalties of \$1,500 per day per violation. This enforces accountability, ensuring developers follow through on commitments to military compatibility.

Stakeholder Involvement and Public Transparency:

The bill requires public notifications and meetings before construction, engaging the Oklahoma Strategic Military Planning Commission (equivalent of the Texas Military Preparedness Commission) and local communities. This ensures that potential issues are addressed early and transparently, preventing conflicts with military and civilian interests.

Emergency Clause:

The bill’s inclusion of an emergency clause indicates the importance of these regulations for public safety and military security. This reflects the urgency in mitigating risks associated with projects like the Blue Hills Wind Farm, where national security concerns arose after foreign investment was involved.

	Texas S.B. 147	Utah H.B. 117	Oklahoma H.B. 2118
Primary Focus	Foreign ownership restrictions	Wind energy-military compatibility	Setbacks & coordination with military
Target Issue	Foreign influence on infrastructure	Military mission interference	Interference with airspace and military routes
Regulatory Oversight	Texas Attorney General	Military Affairs & FAA	Aeronautics Commission & Military Planning Commission
Compliance Mechanism	Divestiture and legal action	Penalties for documentation lapses	Penalties for non-compliance and public engagement
Public Engagement	Limited	Limited	Public meetings and notifications
FAA/Military Involvement	Not emphasized	Required for project approval	FAA/Military compatibility required

Quality of Life

[The U.S. Army describes quality of life programs](#)⁵² as enhancing the health and well-being of the military's personnel, which in turn boosts recruitment, retention, and helps reduce overall stress and uncertainty. By improving the quality of life for Soldiers, civilians, and their families, these programs directly contribute to greater Army readiness. The [Army People Strategy](#)⁵³ lists the following issues as vital to quality of life: housing, health care, child care, spouse employment, and pcs (permanent change of station) moves.

The attributes associated with these programs specifically address factors that directly affect living conditions, safety, economic opportunities, and overall well-being, making them key considerations in assessing quality of life for the military community.

Of the 40 Military Value Attributes utilized by the Department of the Army in their 2005 BRAC analysis, the following attributes are considered measures of Quality of Life:

- Air Quality
- Noise Contours
- Crime Index
- Employment Opportunity
- Housing
- Medical Care Availability
- In-State Tuition Policy

It is important to note that the committee evaluated compliance with Section 19 of the Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-333, 50 U.S.C. §4025a), concerning the portability of professional licenses of service members, as part of the interim charges assigned by the Speaker of the House. This charge directly relates to the quality-of-life issue of employment opportunities.

Federal Legislation on Military Family Readiness

[10 USC 1781b: Department of Defense Policy and Plans for Military Family Readiness](#)⁵⁴

Background:

Title 10 of the United States Code, also known as U.S.C. Title 10, outlines the roles of the United States Armed Forces, including the Department of Defense (DoD). It provides the legal basis for the organization, missions, and roles of each service. Title 10 also gives the federal government

52 <https://www.army.mil/qualityoflife/#priorities>

53 https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/the_army_people_strategy_2019_10_11_signed_final.pdf

54 <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title10-section1781b&num=0&edition=prelim>

authority over service members, including active duty, reservists, and Guard members who are ordered to federal-level missions.

Recent developments in federal legislation have resulted in the following amendments to Title 10 (also known as the Armed Forces Act), Subtitle A – General Military Law, Part II – Personnel, Chapter 88 – Military Family Programs and Military Child Care, Subchapter I – Military Family Programs:

This section of Title 10 mandates the Secretary of Defense to create a comprehensive policy and plans for supporting military family readiness across the Department of Defense (DoD).

The purpose of this section is to ensure that military family readiness programs are comprehensive, effective, and well-supported. It aims to provide continuous support to military families during peacetime, war, and periods of force structure changes and relocations. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of making military family readiness a central element in DoD plans, programs, and budgeting activities. Continuous evaluation of these programs is essential to ensure that resources are allocated and used effectively.

Elements of Policy:

The policy includes several critical elements designed to enhance military family readiness. It outlines a comprehensive list of military family readiness programs and activities, accompanied by DoD-wide goals aimed at supporting military families effectively. The policy also establishes guidelines on access to these support programs, considering the specific needs of different military family populations and their geographic locations. To ensure the effectiveness of these programs, metrics are introduced to measure their performance. Additionally, the policy provides a summary of the allocation of funds for military family readiness, with detailed breakdowns by each military department.

Policy Regarding Remote Military Installations (Public Law 117-81)

Public Law 117-81 outlines a policy to address the unique challenges faced by military personnel and their families stationed at remote military installations.

By December 1, 2022, the Secretary of Defense was required to develop a uniform policy aimed at identifying, assessing, and managing these challenges. This policy was to consider numerous factors, including morale, welfare, and recreation activities; the availability of housing and educational services; the accessibility of healthcare; and employment opportunities for military spouses. Additionally, the policy needed to address the risks associated with insufficient support services at these remote locations. A report detailing the developed policy was required to be submitted to Congress by March 1, 2023.

Consideration of Military Family Readiness in Basing Decisions (Public Law 116-283 and 117-263)

Public Law 116-283, as amended by Public Law 117-263, mandates that military family readiness issues must be a key consideration in basing decisions for certain military units and major headquarters.

This legislation requires that basing decisions take into account the availability and accessibility of housing, healthcare, and other critical services for military families, as well as the interstate portability of licensure and certification credentials for military spouses. An analytical framework, utilizing both DoD data and reliable external data, will guide these decisions to ensure they are informed and comprehensive. Additionally, a scorecard will be established and updated annually to assist in evaluating military family readiness in these basing decisions, with the scorecard being made publicly accessible online. The Secretary of Defense was also required to brief Congress on the impact of these considerations by April 1 of each year from 2021 to 2023.

For the purposes of this legislation, a "covered military unit" refers to a unit that requires an environmental impact statement for its basing decision, and "major headquarters" refers to the headquarters of a general officer or flag officer command.

Air Force Support of Military Families Scorecard Methodology

The 2023 Public Education Methodology for the Department of the Air Force (DAF) is designed to assess the quality of public education and licensure portability available to service members and their families. This comprehensive analysis includes not only the quality of schools but also the ease with which military spouses can transfer their professional licenses when moving between states. The methodology covers schools located within Military Housing Areas (MHAs) and evaluates state licensure portability based on specific criteria.

The 2021 results of this methodology can be found [here](#).⁵⁵

Public Education Evaluation

School Evaluation Criteria

Schools are assessed based on nine criteria, which are grouped into three categories: Academic Performance, School Climate, and School Service Offerings.

Academic Performance (60% of the final score)

- **Graduation Rates:** Reflects the percentage of students who complete their education.

55 https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/2021SAF/09_Sept/External_CASH_single_map_file_v4.2.pdf

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- **Students' Average Annual Learning Rate:** Measures the progress in student learning over a year.

School Climate (20% of the final score)

- **Chronic Absenteeism Rate:** The percentage of students who are frequently absent.
- **Suspension Rate:** The frequency of student suspensions, indicating disciplinary climate.

School Service Offerings (20% of the final score)

- **Student to Teacher Ratio:** Reflects classroom size and individual attention.
- **Student to Counselor Ratio:** Measures the availability of counseling resources.
- **Student to Mental Health Support Ratio:** Indicates the accessibility of mental health support.
- **Student to Nurse Ratio:** Reflects healthcare availability in schools.
- **Availability of Free or Universal Pre-Kindergarten:** Evaluates access to early childhood education.

Each school is assigned a percentile ranking for each criterion, which shows how it compares to other schools. These percentiles are weighted according to their category's importance and summed to produce a final score for each school.

Installation Score Calculation

Schools within a 60-minute drive of an Air Force installation are included in the evaluation. The installation score is calculated by averaging the scores of all eligible schools, weighted by student enrollment. This method ensures that larger schools have a greater impact on the installation's overall score. The final installation score is then compared to other installations to generate a relative performance ranking.

State Licensure Portability Evaluation

In addition to evaluating school performance, the methodology also assesses the ease with which military spouses can transfer their professional licenses between states. This evaluation is crucial for military families, as frequent relocations can disrupt career continuity for spouses in licensed professions.

Licensure Portability Criteria

The state licensure portability score is based on five criteria:

- **Recognition of Out-of-State Licenses:** Whether the state recognizes licenses from other states without additional requirements.
- **Temporary Licensure Availability:** The availability of temporary licensure for incoming spouses.
- **Processing Time:** The speed at which licenses are processed and approved.

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- **Fee Waivers:** Whether the state waives licensure fees for military spouses.
 - **Support Programs:** Availability of state-run programs to support military spouse licensure.

Each state is scored on these criteria, and the scores are combined to create an overall licensure portability score. This score is then factored into the overall installation ranking, providing a holistic view of the support available to military families.

Integration of Education and Licensure Portability Scores

The final installation score combines the public education and licensure portability scores, reflecting both the quality of local schools and the ease of professional transition for military spouses. This integrated approach ensures that the unique needs of military families are considered comprehensively, supporting both educational and career stability.

Data Integrity and Limitations

Missing data is handled through weighted adjustments to ensure fairness. For example, if a school lacks data for a specific criterion like graduation rates, that criterion's weight is redistributed among the remaining criteria. However, schools that should have the data but do not provide it receive a score of zero for that criterion.

Similarly, for licensure portability, states that do not offer any of the evaluated support measures receive lower scores, impacting the overall ranking of installations in those states.

Professional License Portability Overview

Frequent relocations are an inherent aspect of military life, often causing significant disruptions to the careers of military spouses. These individuals frequently encounter complex and varying licensing and certification requirements in each new state, a burden that can compel many to either forgo their professional careers or live apart from their service members in order to maintain employment. This issue underscores the critical need for establishing reciprocity in licensing requirements across states.

Facilitating license portability is essential to enhancing the stability of military families, expediting their integration into new communities, and reinforcing their connections to Texas, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will choose to settle in the state as veterans and retirees. Given that over one-third of working military spouses require a state license to pursue their careers, addressing license portability remains a top priority.

Texas has made considerable progress in this area in recent years. The passage of [Senate Bill 1200](#)⁵⁶ in 2019, followed by [Senate Bill 422](#)⁵⁷ in 2023, represents a pivotal advancement. This

⁵⁶ <https://tlis/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=86R&Bill=SB1200>

⁵⁷ <https://tlis/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=88R&Bill=SB422>

legislation mandates that state licensing boards issue licenses to military spouses within 30 days, a provision that has greatly benefited the military families stationed in Texas. This legal framework demonstrates Texas's ongoing commitment to supporting the service members and their families who contribute so much to the state.

Another robust strategy for enhancing licensure portability is through the adoption of occupational licensure compacts. These agreements between states offer full reciprocity for licensed professionals, enabling them to practice across multiple states that have adopted the compact. Such compacts, which require the participation of several states to become effective, are widely regarded as the gold standard for licensure portability. They provide a balance of flexibility and rigorous professional standards, all while respecting the unique regulatory frameworks of individual states.

Currently, Texas is a member of 38 interstate compacts, including five occupational licensure compacts. These agreements have already begun to mitigate barriers for many professionals, not only benefiting military spouses but also strengthening the overall workforce by increasing the availability of essential professionals across the state.

Recent Developments in License Reciprocity Legislation

Senate Bill 1200 (86th Regular Session) marked a significant legislative milestone in Texas, having been signed into law by Governor Greg Abbott on June 10, 2019, and coming into effect on September 1, 2019. This bill was a critical step forward in supporting military families, particularly by expediting the licensing process for military spouses, thus allowing them to continue their professional careers with minimal disruption upon relocating to Texas.

Building on this momentum, the [Servicemembers Civil Relief Act](#)⁵⁸ was enacted on January 5, 2023. This federal legislation further reinforced protections and support mechanisms for servicemembers and their families, complementing the measures introduced by SB 1200.

In the same year, Senate Bill 422 (88th Regular Session) was signed by the Governor on June 18, 2023. This bill introduced additional provisions aimed at enhancing the portability of professional licenses for military spouses and other affected individuals. The provisions of SB 422 became effective on September 1, 2023, further strengthening the legal framework established by its predecessor.

Following the enactment of these legislative measures, the [U.S. Department of Justice issued a notification letter to state licensing authorities on July 13, 2023](#)⁵⁹. This communication emphasized the importance of compliance with federal and state laws regarding license portability and provided guidance on implementing these provisions effectively.

Governor Abbott continued to demonstrate his commitment to supporting military families by [addressing Texas State Agencies directly in a letter dated August 30, 2023](#).⁶⁰ In this letter, the

58 <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/benefits/servicemembers-civil-relief-act/>

59 <https://www.justice.gov/opa/file/1305481/dl?inline>

60 https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/State_Agency_Leaders_Servicemembers_Civil_Relief_Act.pdf

Governor reiterated the state's dedication to ensuring that the licensing processes for military spouses are streamlined and that agencies adhere to the legal requirements set forth by SB 1200 and SB 422.

A [significant development occurred on November 20, 2023](#)⁶¹, when a court case involving the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in Del Rio brought further attention to the implementation of these laws. The court's decision underscored the necessity for state agencies to fully comply with the legislation and highlighted the legal implications of non-compliance.

Finally, the Texas Commanders Council, representing the interests of military leadership in the state, sent a letter to Governor Abbott on January 30, 2024. This letter requested that an interim study be conducted on state licensures in the Texas House and Senate in order to effectively detect instances where servicemembers and their spouses are having issues using their licenses in Texas.

Section 19 of the Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-333, 50 U.S.C. §4025a)

The committee was charged with evaluating compliance with Section 19 of the Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-333). This act introduced provisions to enhance the portability of professional licenses for service members and their spouses. The key elements of this section are as follows:

Portability of Licenses

If a service member or their spouse holds a professional license or certificate (referred to as a "covered license") and relocates to a new state due to military orders, the license will be recognized as valid in the new state. This allows them to continue practicing their profession under the same scope and discipline without the need to reapply for licensure in the new state.

Conditions for Validity

To maintain the validity of the license in the new jurisdiction, the servicemember or spouse must:

- Provide a copy of the military orders to the licensing authority in the new state;
- Remain in good standing with the original licensing authority and any other authority that has issued them a license; and
- Comply with the standards, disciplinary measures, and continuing education requirements of the new state's licensing authority.

Interstate Licensure Compacts

If the servicemember or spouse is already part of an interstate licensure compact, the compact's rules take precedence over the provisions of this section. This means that the licensee must adhere to the compact's requirements rather than the specific rules of Section 19.

61 <https://www.militarytimes.com/pay-benefits/mil-money/2023/07/24/justice-department-sides-with-military-wives-texas-license-lawsuit/>

Definition of a Covered License

A "covered license" is defined as a professional license or certificate that:

- Is in good standing with the issuing licensing authority;
- Has been actively used by the servicemember or spouse in the two years immediately before the relocation; and
- Does not include a license to practice law.

Testimony Gathered on Professional License Portability

Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation

On August 21, the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) presented to the committee on the implementation of Senate Bill 422 (SB 422) and the recent changes to the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA). The presentation provided an overview of how these legislative changes impact licensing for military service members and their spouses in Texas.

Overview of Senate Bill 422 and the Federal Service Members Relief Act

SB 422 amends existing Texas laws to allow military service members to work in Texas using licenses obtained in other states. Previously, this privilege was extended only to military spouses under Senate Bill 1200. SB 422 now provides a three-year, non-renewable license option to service members, broadening the scope of license portability in the state.

In January 2023, amendments to the SCRA introduced new provisions to facilitate the recognition of out-of-state professional licenses for military service members and their spouses when they relocate due to military orders. This change allows licenses to be considered valid in a new state under certain conditions, providing more flexibility and support for military families.

The SCRA provision states that for a license to be valid in a new state, the licensee must have moved due to military orders, provide a copy of these orders, have used the license in the past two years, remain in good standing, and agree to abide by the new state's regulations. If these conditions are met, the license remains valid for the duration of the military orders.

Conflicts Between Senate Bill 422 and the SCRA

The presentation explained that the new SCRA provision sometimes conflicts with [Texas Occupations Code §55.0041](#)⁶², especially regarding licensure standards and requirements for license recognition. TDLR aimed to reconcile SB 422 and the SCRA to minimize obstacles for military families, ensuring they can benefit from both laws.

Conflicts between SB 422 and the SCRA arise due to differing requirements, such as the need for substantial equivalence in licensure standards under Texas law, which is not required by federal

⁶² <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/OC/htm/OC.55.htm>

law. TDLR’s goal was to harmonize these discrepancies, ensuring a streamlined process that reduces the burden on military service members and their spouses.

To address these conflicts, TDLR adopted new rules, including [Chapter 16 of the Texas Administrative Code § 60.518](#)⁶³. These rules remove the substantial equivalence requirement, simplifying the process for recognizing out-of-state licenses. The rules also extend the validity of a recognized license for the duration of military orders, with extensions available in case of divorce.

Implementation Steps Taken by Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation

In August 2023, TDLR formed a bill implementation team to draft rule changes and create an implementation timeline. The team worked on rule amendments, updated the TDLR website, and developed FAQs to ensure clear communication and a smooth transition for military families navigating the new regulations.

TDLR amended Chapter 60 Rules, Subchapter K, which pertains to military service members, veterans, and spouses. The initial draft of the rules was completed by August 2023 and finalized in September 2023. The Texas Commission of Licensing and Regulation adopted these rules in October 2023, and they became effective on January 1, 2024.

Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation Military Webpage

[TDLR’s military webpage](#)⁶⁴ serves as a resource for servicemembers and veterans transitioning to civilian occupations by matching their military training with civilian licensing requirements. It also provides information and support for those starting new careers in Texas.

The webpage offers specific guidance for military spouses on how to transfer their out-of-state licenses to Texas or work in the state using their existing licenses. This support aims to simplify the process and provide clarity for spouses looking to continue their professional careers in Texas.

Steps to Work in Texas with an Out-of-State License

Military service members and their spouses can work in Texas using their out-of-state licenses by submitting necessary documents, including military orders, identification, and proof of good standing. This streamlined process helps ease their transition and enables them to work more quickly after relocating.

Once a license is recognized, the licensee may work in Texas for the duration of their military orders. In cases of divorce, the spouse can continue working for up to three years after the license is recognized, ensuring stability and continuity of employment.

63

[https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=16&pt=4&ch=60&rl=518](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=16&pt=4&ch=60&rl=518)

64 <https://www.tdlr.texas.gov/military/>

TDLR requires that the licensee remain in good standing to maintain their license recognition. Licensees must inform TDLR if their status changes, ensuring compliance and adherence to Texas licensing standards.

Military service members, veterans, and their spouses who hold licenses in other states can transfer these licenses to Texas. Some licenses are pre-approved for transfer, while others are evaluated on a case-by-case basis, depending on the specific requirements and qualifications.

Since 2021, TDLR has issued 878 licenses at no cost to military members, veterans, and their spouses, demonstrating its commitment to supporting military families and easing their transition into civilian careers.

“We Hire Vets” Program Participation

TDLR actively participates in the “We Hire Vets” program, with 12% of its workforce being military veterans. This initiative underscores TDLR’s dedication to supporting veterans and integrating them into its workforce.

TDLR Veterans Association

The TDLR Veterans Association supports veteran employees within the organization, providing resources for camaraderie, transition to civilian life, and advocacy on veteran-related issues. The association is a key component of TDLR’s efforts to create a supportive work environment for veterans.

Legislative History of Military Licensing Legislation

76th Legislature, Regular Session (1999)

- House Bill 3155 - Provided additional time, without penalty, for an individual, who was on active duty in the United States armed forces serving outside of Texas, to renew a license that expired while the individual was on active duty. (Texas Occupations Code §55.002)

79th Legislature, Regular Session (2005)

- Senate Bill 143 – Allowed a member of the state military forces or a reserve component of the armed forces of the United States who is ordered to active-duty additional time to complete any occupational licensing continuing education requirements. SB 143 stated that it applied to an affected member who was ordered to report for active duty on or after September 1, 2004 (retroactive applicability). (Texas Occupations Code §55.003)

82nd Legislature, Regular Session (2011)

- House Bill 2643 – Allowed TDLR to credit military experience towards the licensing of air conditioning and refrigeration contractors, and it applied to applications filed on or after November 1, 2012. (Texas Occupations Code §1302.255)

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- Senate Bill 1733 – Relating to the occupational licensing of spouses of members of the military. This law applies to a spouse of a person serving on active duty as a member of the armed forces of the United States. This law allows the spouse to obtain an occupational license through a variety of alternative license procedures. (Texas Occupations Code §55.004)

83rd Legislature, Regular Session (2013)

- House Bill 2029 – Allows military service members and veterans to receive credit for verified military service, training, or education toward fulfilling the licensing requirements, other than examination requirements, for an electrician license 18 issued by the Department. This law directs the Department to expedite the issuance of a temporary license or license by endorsement or reciprocity under the electrician statute to an applicant who has verified military experience and holds a current license issued by another jurisdiction that has licensing requirements that are substantially equivalent to the Texas license requirements. (Texas Occupations Code §1305.1645)
- Senate Bill 242 – Requires the Department to credit verified military service, training, or education toward fulfilling the licensing requirements, other than examination requirements, for a license issued by the Department. (Texas Occupations Code §51.4013)
- Senate Bill 162 – Allows military service members and veterans to receive credit for verified military service, training, or education toward fulfilling the licensing requirements, other than examination requirements, for a license issued by the state agency. Allows a military spouse who holds a current license in another jurisdiction with licensing requirements substantially equivalent to the Texas licensing requirements to obtain a Texas license in an expedited manner. (Texas Occupations Code §§55.005, 55.006, 55.007)
- Senate Bill 1892 – TDLR added to Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans’ Services (TCCVS)

84th Legislature, Regular Session (2015)

- Senate Bill 1307 – Streamlined Chapter 55 of the Occupations Code to ensure that every military spouse, veteran, and active-duty service member gets credit for their skills and as their occupational licenses expedited.

86th Legislature, Regular Session (2019)

- Senate Bill 1200 – Allowed military spouses to engage in a business or occupation for which a license is required without obtaining the applicable license if the spouse is currently licensed in good standing by another jurisdiction that has licensing requirements

that are substantially equivalent to the requirements for the license in this state. (Texas Occupations Code §55.041)

87th Legislature, Regular Session (2021)

- HB 139 – Amended the Occupations Code to require a state agency, in adopting rules for the issuance of a license to applicants who are military service members, military veterans, or military spouses, to ensure that a military veteran or military spouse receives appropriate credit for the individual's experience, including clinical and professional experience, in a licensed profession. (Texas Occupations Code §55.004)

88th Legislature, Regular Session (2023)

- SB 422 – Extended licensing reciprocity created in SB 1200 (86-R) to military members who often must station in states outside of where they originally obtained their license. (Texas Occupations Code §§55.004(d), 55.041, 55.005)

Doug Jennings Verbal Testimony – General Counsel, Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation

Doug Jennings, General Counsel for the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR), testified before the committee regarding the implementation of Senate Bill 422 from the 88th session. Jeff Copas accompanied him, **TDLR's Government Relations Officer, and Yvonne Lopez, a Licensing Manager**. Jennings explained that TDLR is the largest professional licensing agency in Texas, responsible for over a million licensees and various equipment like boilers and elevators.

He described TDLR's longstanding commitment to supporting military veterans, service members, and their spouses by implementing more than a dozen legislative measures to improve licensing access and portability over the past 25 years. Jennings noted that TDLR was one of the first agencies to implement both SB 422 and federal provisions under the SCRA.

Jennings detailed the challenges in reconciling state and federal laws. SB 422 requires Texas licensing agencies to recognize out-of-state licenses if the originating state's standards are substantially equivalent to those of Texas. In contrast, the SCRA does not include a substantial equivalence requirement. To address this, TDLR removed the substantial equivalence provision from its rules to simplify the process and provide maximum benefit to applicants, thus avoiding subjective evaluations of other states' standards.

Representative Frank questioned whether TDLR had the legal authority to make such changes, expressing concern that state agencies should not override legislative intent. **Jennings** explained that the agency conducted a preemption analysis to ensure compliance with federal law while also prioritizing the needs of military families. He noted that this approach attempted to avoid potential federal litigation and to better support veterans, service members, and their families.

Another key difference between SB 422 and the SCRA discussed by Jennings was the term of recognition for out-of-state licenses. SB 422 limits recognition to three years, while the SCRA provides recognition for the duration of a service member's orders. Jennings stated that TDLR chose to align with the federal standard, which offers greater flexibility and support for service members.

Jennings emphasized that TDLR prioritized implementing these changes even before receiving a directive from the governor, underscoring the agency's dedication to reducing barriers for military families. He concluded by inviting committee members to ask any further questions about the rules or the processing of licenses, with his colleagues Copas and Lopez available to provide additional details.

Grant Minix Verbal Testimony – Policy Analyst, Council of State Governments

Grant Minix, a policy analyst at The Council of State Governments (CSG), provided testimony before the committee, expressing gratitude for the opportunity to discuss licensure portability for military members and their families. He emphasized the importance of license portability in improving the well-being of military families and strengthening the U.S. military.

Minix highlighted two primary tools that support license portability: the Veterans Auto Improvement and Education Act (VAIEA) and interstate professional licensure compacts. He explained that CSG has played a significant role in developing licensure compacts through a [cooperative agreement with the Department of Defense \(DoD\)](#)⁶⁵. Since 2016, over 360 pieces of professional licensure compact legislation have been enacted across the United States, and Texas is currently a member of 5 out of the 18 available licensure compacts. These compacts are considered the "gold standard" for license portability by the DoD, providing the most efficient and least burdensome way to facilitate license portability for military families.

Minix noted that while the VAIEA has potential to assist with licensure portability, CSG maintains that professional licensure compacts are still an essential policy priority for military families. Compacts offer a clear and consistent process for licensing agencies, require less effort from the licensee, and avoid creating a separate pathway specifically for military spouses. The VAIEA, on the other hand, has certain limitations that can lead to delays and confusion. For example, the Act requires that military spouses be licensed in a state with a "substantially similar scope of practice" to the new state, a determination that is left up to the state licensing board. This process can be subjective and may vary from state to state, leading to a "patchwork" of interpretations and further complicating the situation for military spouses.

Additionally, Minix pointed out that under the VAIEA, military spouses must submit an application to the new state, demonstrate that their license is in good standing, prove that they have practiced within the past two years, and complete any required continuing education. This process can be lengthy, causing delays in employment for military spouses. He emphasized that although these pathways exist to help military spouses, they often remain underutilized because spouses

65 <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/release/article/2537098/dod-receives-approval-for-grants-to-develop-interstate-compacts-for-licensure-p/>

may be unaware of them, or licensing boards may not be familiar with these non-traditional pathways.

Minix argued that licensure compacts provide a more efficient and standardized solution. Compacts set clear participation requirements and establish a uniform pathway for license approval across states. This creates regulatory certainty and treats all practitioners equally, eliminating the need for military spouses to navigate each state's unique implementation of the VAIEA.

He acknowledged the efforts of Texas and other states to support military families through various legislative actions, including the enactment of licensure compacts. While Congress has taken steps to address some of the issues with the VAIEA in the current version of the National Defense Authorization Act, Minix reiterated CSG's recommendation for states to consider the benefits of licensure compacts. These compacts promote license portability not only for military personnel and their spouses but for practitioners more broadly, facilitating mobility and workforce participation across state lines.

Minix concluded his testimony by thanking Chairman Wilson and the committee for the opportunity to discuss this critical issue and expressed his willingness to address any questions from the committee members.

Corie Weathers Verbal Testimony – Licensed Professional Counselor and Active-Duty Military Spouse

Corie Weathers, a licensed professional counselor and active-duty military spouse, testified about the challenges she has faced in obtaining and maintaining her counseling licenses across various states due to her husband's military service. She described the complex and often frustrating process of transferring her professional license as they moved between duty stations over the past 16 years.

She shared her experience of applying for licenses in multiple states. In Colorado, her paperwork was delayed for two years. After finally receiving her license, they moved back to Georgia, where it took six years to resolve a dispute between Georgia's requirements and her educational credentials from Kentucky. In Virginia, the process was smoother, taking only two months due to an expedited military spouse program, but the transition to Kansas posed new challenges even with a provisional license.

Weathers highlighted the additional difficulty of credentialing with insurance providers, particularly TRICARE, which took two years due to confusion over her frequently changing address. This experience led her to create a video about her struggles, which went viral and helped bring attention to military spouse licensing issues at the federal level.

Upon moving to Texas, she faced further obstacles despite a military spouse-specific form meant to expedite the process. After months of unresponsive communication, she was told she didn't meet the state's experience requirements, despite 16 years of practice and being a supervisor in another state. In contrast, she noted that Texas regulations allow military service members to get

credit for their service, potentially granting her husband, an Army chaplain, a license more easily despite having no supervision experience.

Weathers expressed frustration that these licensing challenges deter qualified professionals from serving Texas communities and contribute to military families leaving the state. She emphasized that the issue is not just about accommodating a small population but offers multiple benefits: addressing provider shortages in Texas, supporting military spouses in building careers, and strengthening national security by maintaining the stability and morale of military families.

She concluded by linking these issues to broader concerns of military recruitment and retention, stating that the difficulties experienced by military families could discourage future generations from serving. Weathers advocated for practical, low-cost solutions to make it easier for military spouses to continue their careers and contribute to their communities.

Erica Mays Verbal Testimony – Licensed Master Social Worker; Navy Veteran, Navy Spouse

Erica Mays, a Navy veteran and Navy spouse of 15 years, shared her challenges in transferring her social work license to Texas. She described how her journey began in 2010 after she separated from the Navy while her husband deployed to Afghanistan. With a young child and no support system, she relied on daycare and friends to complete her education at San Diego State University. Determined to finish her studies, she continued attending classes while pregnant with her second child, taking only two weeks off after giving birth.

When her husband received orders to Hawaii, Mrs. Mays transferred to the University of Hawaii at Manoa to complete her social work degree. She graduated with her BSW in 2015 and went on to earn her MSW from the University of Southern California in 2016, despite the challenges of balancing motherhood, education, and military life. It wasn't until 2020, while stationed in Japan, that she finally obtained her clinical hours, a process hindered by the frequent relocations inherent to military life.

In June 2023, Mrs. Mays relocated from Japan to Texas with hopes of continuing her career. At the time, she was a Licensed Social Worker (LSW) in the state of Illinois. She successfully transferred her LSW to Texas, becoming a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW). She completed her clinical hours in Japan and passed the clinical exam in March 2024, becoming a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) in Illinois. However, when she tried to transfer her LCSW to Texas, she encountered significant obstacles.

Mrs. Mays assumed Texas participated in the military spouse licensure compact, which would have facilitated her license transfer. After submitting her application, she contacted the Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council multiple times, seeking clarification on whether she needed to complete the clinical supervision verification form, which she believed did not apply to military spouses already licensed in another state. Despite her efforts, the responses she received indicated minimal differentiation between the process for military spouses and the general civilian population. The only benefits seemed to be expedited processing and a potential fee waiver.

Frustrated, Mrs. Mays ultimately decided to wait a year before reapplying, as she was informed the supervision verification requirement would be lifted. The inability to transfer her license has negatively impacted her family. Despite saving nearly \$30,000 for their move from Japan, they incurred substantial debt, and her inability to work in Texas has prevented her from offsetting these costs through private practice.

Mrs. Mays emphasized that the challenges she faced in transferring her license were not unique to her but reflected the broader struggles of military spouses navigating professional licensing. She expressed her frustration at not being able to use the license she fought so hard to obtain, especially since she hoped to contribute to her family's financial stability.

In her testimony, Mrs. Mays highlighted the impact of these licensing issues on military families, noting that frequent relocations create significant barriers for military spouses seeking to maintain their professional credentials. She called for better support and clearer guidance for military spouses in Texas, as well as a reevaluation of the state's participation in military spouse licensure compacts.

Her story underscores the need for policies that recognize the unique challenges faced by military families and provide pathways for highly qualified professionals, like herself, to continue their careers and contribute to the communities in which they live.

Bryan Mares Written Testimony – Director of Government Relations, National Association of Social Workers, Texas Chapter

Bryan Mares, Director of Government Relations for the National Association of Social Workers – Texas Chapter (NASW-TX), provided written testimony to the committee, emphasizing the unique challenges faced by military families due to frequent relocations. Mares explained that military families typically move to a new duty station every two to three years, creating significant barriers to employment and career development for military spouses in licensed professions.

Mares highlighted that the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), recognizing the need to promote licensure portability for military spouses, awarded a \$500,000 grant in 2021 to support the development of an interstate licensure compact for social workers. NASW-TX believes that the adoption of this social work interstate compact through legislation in 2025 would be the gold standard for addressing these barriers. Such compacts would allow military spouses to move freely across the country during active-duty service without needing to obtain a new license each time they relocate.

He acknowledged that Texas has made some progress in this area with the passage of SB 1200 during the 86th legislative session, which allows military spouses to practice their profession for up to three years while their spouse is stationed at a Texas military installation. However, he noted that this solution is only temporary and does not fully address the challenges faced by military families.

Mares also discussed the recent federal legislation requiring states to recognize military spouses' licenses from other states. While this is a positive development, he pointed out that military spouses still face numerous hurdles under the new law. These include submitting an application, proving that their license is in good standing, demonstrating recent practice experience, and waiting for the new state's licensing board to assess whether the previous state's scope of practice is similar—a process that varies by state and can be subjective. Additionally, they must complete any required continuing education specific to the new state.

Mares emphasized that the majority of military bases are located in healthcare deserts, where access to both medical and mental health providers is limited. This exacerbates the difficulties military families face in accessing the services they need, especially given the current mental health workforce shortage in Texas. These factors, combined with the complexity of existing licensure processes, underscore the urgent need for Texas to join the social work interstate compact.

He concluded by urging Texas lawmakers to file and pass legislation in the 2025 session that would allow the state to participate in the social work interstate compact. This, he argued, would provide a sustainable, long-term solution for military spouses and their families, enhancing their access to employment and critical mental health services.

Mares invited committee members to reach out with any questions or for more information on the social work interstate compact, emphasizing NASW-TX's commitment to supporting military families and improving their quality of life in Texas.

Kristy Dean Verbal Testimony – Regional Director, Endeavors

Kristy Dean, a Licensed Professional Counselor and Marriage and Family Therapist, testified before the committee on behalf of Endeavors, a national faith-based nonprofit headquartered in San Antonio. As a state Board-approved supervisor for both of these licenses, Dean outlined the organization's 55-year history of providing essential services to vulnerable populations in crisis, including veterans, families, children, and individuals struggling with mental health issues, disabilities, disasters, and emergencies.

Dean described Endeavors' significant work with veterans, mentioning their operation of three Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinics in San Antonio, El Paso, and Killeen as part of the national Cohen Veterans Network. These clinics aim to provide short-term, evidence-based mental health services to veterans, service members, and their families, ensuring they receive timely care to help them "get back to better." In 2023 alone, Endeavors provided mental health care to over 3,000 veterans, service members, and their families, but Dean stressed that thousands more are in need of support.

Dean emphasized the organization's commitment to hiring veterans and military spouses as clinical providers. Since opening its first Cohen Clinic in 2016, Endeavors has employed 78 veterans and military spouses as clinical providers and trained 31 graduate-level interns who are veterans or military spouses. Endeavors currently employs 86 licensed mental health providers in

Texas, and Dean highlighted the organization's dedication to cultivating the highest caliber of mental health professionals to serve the veteran community.

Dean presented data to illustrate the critical need for improved mental health services for veterans in Texas. The state has the second largest veteran population in the nation, projected to become the largest by 2030 and maintain that ranking into 2040. She expressed concern over the increasing suicide rates among active-duty service members and veterans, noting that suicide is currently the second leading cause of death for veterans under the age of 45. Dean pointed out that more military members are lost to suicide than to combat and mentioned that veteran suicide rates are likely underreported due to issues in identifying veteran status and misreporting of deaths as overdoses or accidental self-injuries.

Dean highlighted the severe shortage of mental health professionals in Texas, stating that 249 of the state's 254 counties are designated as Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas, contributing to Texas ranking last in the nation for access to mental health care. This shortage makes it difficult to recruit qualified mental health providers, particularly in rural areas. Dean recounted instances where clients in Las Cruces, New Mexico, drove an hour to receive mental health care at Endeavors' El Paso clinic, but noted that during the COVID-19 lockdown, licensing rules prevented Endeavors from providing services to these clients remotely due to state boundaries.

She also illustrated the impact of these limitations on military families, who often face geographic separation. Current licensing restrictions mean Texas mental health providers cannot offer family therapy to families separated across state lines or couples counseling to spouses in different states due to training orders. Dean emphasized that Texas cannot afford to turn away qualified mental health professionals who want to bring their skills to the state, given the growing veteran population and significant mental health needs.

Dean advocated for the adoption of the Interstate Counseling Compact in Texas, explaining that it would allow independently licensed and fully trained providers in participating states to offer both in-person and telehealth services in Texas without additional licensure. She clarified that this compact is only for fully qualified providers and does not apply to those still under supervision. She emphasized that this would be particularly beneficial for military families, who often move frequently, and for providers who want to continue their work without disruption.

The Interstate Counseling Compact also includes a shared licensing data system that tracks qualifications and any complaints against a license, enhancing transparency and trust in the system. Dean noted that 38 states have enacted legislation to participate in the compact, with three more currently considering it. If Texas joined the compact, it would significantly expand the pool of mental health providers, enabling organizations like Endeavors to hire more qualified candidates and improve access to mental health care for veterans and their families.

In closing, Dean urged the committee to support the Interstate Counseling Compact, stressing that it would strengthen Endeavors' ability to provide high-quality mental health care to veterans and save lives. She emphasized that supporting this compact is not only the right thing to do for those who have served the country but also the right thing for Texas.

Ben Miranda Verbal Testimony - Corporate External Affairs Officer, Endeavors; Commissioner, Texas Military Preparedness Commission

Benjamin Miranda, representing Endeavors, provided testimony on the importance of consistent mental health care for veterans. He emphasized that Endeavors is the largest veteran supportive service organization in Texas, offering numerous services, including mental health care and wellness programs. Miranda highlighted a significant challenge faced by veterans relocating to Texas or moving out of the state: the disruption in their mental health treatment due to the need to change counselors mid-treatment.

He explained that when veterans move to Texas from another state, they often have to switch to a new counselor, even if they were already receiving care from a counselor they trusted. This change forces veterans to relive their trauma as they rebuild trust with a new provider, which can decrease their likelihood of continuing with treatment. Similarly, if veterans in Texas move to another state, they lose access to their existing counselor unless the state is part of an interstate compact that allows counselors to continue providing care across state lines.

Miranda, speaking as both a veteran and a father of an active-duty Air Force member, urged the committee to consider the impact of these disruptions on veterans' mental health. He advocated for Texas to join such compacts to ensure that veterans can maintain continuity of care and receive the best quality treatment, regardless of where they move.

Leticia Bland Verbal Testimony – Director at Large, Texas Academy of Physician Assistants

Leticia Bland, representing the Texas Academy of Physician Assistants, testified about the challenges faced by physician assistants (PAs) in maintaining licensure across multiple states, particularly for those affiliated with the military. Bland, a 2002 graduate of the Interservice Physician Assistant Program (IPAP) at Fort Sam Houston, has over 22 years of experience in various medical fields. She shared those frequent relocations due to her military service—nine times in total—created significant challenges in maintaining her PA licensure. Each move required her to navigate different state licensing requirements, including varying educational and supervisory criteria, which created barriers to her ability to work and serve her community.

Bland stated that, while she was able to practice without a state license in federal clinics as an active-duty military PA, these restrictions limited her ability to provide care in civilian facilities or to volunteer in her community. She noted the difficulties these licensing barriers create, especially for military families who already face significant logistical and financial burdens due to frequent moves.

She emphasized that interstate occupational licensure compacts could alleviate these issues by allowing PAs to practice in multiple states without obtaining new licenses each time they move. This would not only benefit military families but also improve public health by ensuring continuity

of care for patients. Bland cited the recent legislative efforts in Texas, including [HB 2544](#)⁶⁶ and SB 1200, aimed at easing licensing burdens for military spouses and service members. However, she pointed out that the process remains cumbersome and can take several months, impacting the ability of healthcare professionals to provide timely care.

Bland concluded by stressing the importance of compact agreements, which could streamline the licensure process, support workforce retention, and enhance access to care for both the military and civilian populations in Texas. She urged the committee to support initiatives that reduce barriers and promote economic opportunities for healthcare professionals, ultimately benefiting the broader community and ensuring high-quality care for all Texans.

Leslie Roste Verbal Testimony – Future of the Beauty Industry Coalition

Leslie Roste, representing the Future of the Beauty Industry Coalition, shared her insights on the challenges faced by licensed professionals, particularly cosmetologists, in transferring their licenses across states. As a trained nurse with a multi-state compact license, she emphasized the benefits of such compacts in facilitating professional mobility. However, she noted that the beauty industry lacks similar consistency and standardization, making it difficult for cosmetologists, including many military spouses, to transfer their licenses between states.

Roste explained that cosmetologists often face significant barriers due to the lack of uniform education and testing requirements across states. Unlike other professions, cosmetology training can vary widely—from apprenticeships to private, unaccredited schools—and licensure exams differ as well. This lack of standardization complicates license portability, making it a cumbersome and often frustrating process for those seeking reciprocity. She provided a detailed spreadsheet showing the disparate reciprocity requirements across states, illustrating how complex and inconsistent the process can be.

Roste highlighted the specific challenges military spouses face when moving between states. She explained that while Texas offers several options for military spouses to expedite licensing—such as a military supplemental application, a three-year license, or a three-year authorization letter—each comes with its own set of hurdles, including the need for a licensing good standing certification from the previous state. This certification often involves long wait times; for example, obtaining such a letter from Illinois can take six months, significantly delaying a military spouse’s ability to work.

Roste advocated for the adoption of occupational licensure compacts, similar to the Nursing Compact, which would allow licensed professionals to move freely between member states without the cumbersome process of re-licensing. She argued that a compact would enable states to access a professional's license history through a national database, ensuring transparency and safety while allowing professionals to start working immediately upon relocation.

⁶⁶ <https://tlis/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=88R&Bill=HB2544>

Roste concluded by urging the committee to support the establishment of more occupational licensure compacts, including a cosmetology compact, to streamline the process for licensed professionals and help military spouses continue their careers without unnecessary delays.

Findings

Problems Identified:

1. Deteriorating Military Facilities:

- Texas National Guard armories are aging, with the average age being 55 years, and many are in poor condition.
- Rising costs for construction and utilities, along with increased operational tempo, have exacerbated maintenance issues.
- The Texas Military Department requested \$176 million last biennium for armory renovations but received only \$20 million. The full cost to upgrade all armories is approximately \$685 million.

2. Power and Energy Resilience Issues:

- Several armories lack backup generation capabilities, leaving them vulnerable during natural disasters.

3. Compliance and Funding Challenges:

- Difficulty in securing federal matching funds for facility maintenance and upgrades due to historical underinvestment by the state.
- Complex regulatory compliance requirements when using federal funds for construction projects.

4. Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Process Risks:

- Potential for Texas military installations to be realigned or closed, impacting local economies and community support.
- Taking into account that the formal BRAC process has not been used for some time, the risk to the State of Texas is now in losing or gaining new mission.

5. Quality of Life for Military Families:

- Issues such as affordable housing, childcare availability, and employment opportunities for military spouses affect the basing decision-making process.

6. Encroachment:

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- The need for stronger collaboration between military installations and civilian communities to support military operations.

7. Concurrent Juvenile Jurisdiction:

- Military installations subject to exclusive federal jurisdiction often handle juvenile offenses through the federal court system where access to juvenile-focused interventions is absent.

Solutions and Recommendations:

1. Facility Upgrades and Maintenance:

- Support the plan to fully renovate 10 armories every session with a budget of \$40 million per biennium to maintain a 25-year maintenance cycle.
- Fund full renovations of 10 armories, each with a dual-fuel backup generation system, and plan for six more each biennium.
- Support TMD's plan for new regional armories to consolidate older facilities and improve operational efficiency.

2. Energy Resilience:

- Invest in microgrids at Camp Mabry and Camp Swift to enable operations without external power for up to 14 days.
- Focus on developing innovative solutions like small modular reactor facilities to address infrastructure challenges.

3. Increased State Funding:

- Increase the state funding request for armory renovations and upgrades to secure additional federal matching funds.
- Support a budget uplift to \$50 million for the Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant (DEAAG) program to address rising project costs.
- Amend Government Code Title 4, Subtitle C, Chapter 436, Subchapter A to allow Texas Military Preparedness Commissioners to evaluate and score Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant applications.

4. Higher Education:

- Establish a committee/council/workgroup to serve as a platform for promoting the standardization of best practices and policies that will benefit students utilizing

educational incentives such as the Hazelwood Act and the Texas Armed Services Scholarship Program.

5. Quality of Life Initiatives:

- Improve access to affordable housing, childcare, and employment opportunities for military families.
- Expand the Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood program by exempting DoD certified family childcare providers from duplicative state licensure.

6. Enhanced Collaboration and Partnerships:

- Utilize Intergovernmental Service Agreements (IGSAs) to enhance collaboration between military installations and state agencies.
- Continue proactive engagement with local communities and stakeholders to support military operations and economic development.
- Modify requirements for wind energy developments.
- Create a mechanism to fund natural infrastructure projects that enhance local resilience to wildfire, drought, flooding, and extreme weather by establishing a Camp Bullis Military Investment District.

7. Professional License Portability:

- Promote the adoption of occupational licensure compacts to support military spouses and improve license portability, enhancing employment opportunities for military families.

8. Concurrent Juvenile Jurisdiction:

- Modernize state policy to allow military installations to retrocede or transfer jurisdiction to enhance the state's ability to increase access to justice for juveniles.
- This could include a mechanism for the federal government to transfer its jurisdiction to the state on a case-by-case or installation-by-installation basis.
- Granting state authorities the ability to enforce laws with respect to civilian family members of service members allows opportunities for more suitable, youth-focused approaches.