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**Vermont Legislature
Senate Committee on Education
115 State Street Room 28
Montpelier, VT**

Senator Brian Campion, Chairperson

**Remarks of
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Support of: Senate Bill S105, An act relating to purple star school programs.

Testimony

Mister Chair and distinguished committee members, the Department of Defense is grateful for the opportunity to support the policies reflected in Senate Bill S105, by Senator Kesha Ram Hinsdale, which addresses the need to alleviate the challenges military-connected students face due to constant moves during their K-12 education years and beyond.

I am Christopher Arnold, the Northeast Region Liaison at the United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office, operating under the direction of Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy.

With each move, military service members face numerous challenges as they bring their spouses and children to resettle into new communities and attend new schools. Mobile military students face issues such as gaps and overlaps in curriculum, different graduation requirements, course placement disruption, and many other hurdles when changing schools. Besides the academic issues, these students also face social and emotional challenges of relocation, such as leaving supportive social networks and activities, to start new again.

Senate Bill S105 will help schools aggregate and centralize knowledge so that critical information is easily accessible to students, families, faculty and staff by creating a statewide recognition program for military-friendly schools which demonstrate a major commitment to students and families connected to our nation's military.

Designated schools have met specific state designed requirements to support the unique situations facing military students and their families. The legislation gives Vermont the potential to build upon its robust network of local, state, and national stakeholders and cultivate statewide competency in the area of military-connected student transition, offering schools the opportunity to demonstrate their cultural fluency to parents and families.

The Department is hopeful the Green Mountain State will soon join the twenty-eight (28) states that have established a statewide policy utilizing the approach set forth in Senate Bill S105 since 2017. A study of four such programs by the Center for Public Research and Leadership at Columbia University reported positive impacts for military readiness and retention following recognition of the capacity of schools and districts to serve military-connected students and families and helping families identify the schools and districts that are best prepared to meet their needs.¹

While the majority of these districts already had programming in place for military-connected students before seeking a formal designation, staff and faculty indicated “they have benefitted from the ... application process and the encouragement to refine and expand programming related to the program designation requirements.”²

As our military members and their families move from state to state, providing for a smooth educational transition for their children is key to eliminating one of the largest concerns the parents face. The Department has identified as a best practice that states utilize their discretion to design and administer a statewide program for recognition of military schools, with efficaciousness through research-driven components, such as those set forth in Senate Bill 234:

- Designated Point-of-Contact: Vermont’s designated schools will appoint a staff member to act as a liaison between military families and the school, easing military-connected students’ enrollment and acclimation period;
- Professional Development: Vermont’s designated schools will train staff on the unique considerations for and needs of military-connected students;
- Dedicated Webpage: Vermont’s designated schools may develop a dedicated page on the school or district website with easily accessible information and resources for military-connected families;
- Transition Programs: Vermont’s designated schools will implement a transition program to welcome and socially acclimate incoming military-connected students; and
- Military Recognition Events: Vermont’s designated schools will host, at least once per year, programming and events to celebrate and honor service members and military-connected students, families, and community members.

Subject-matter experts from the education department and the Vermont Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission retain discretion, through rulemaking, to further tailor the program to local requirements and needs to ensure equal opportunity to earn the designation for schools with varying levels of resources. The clarity and precision derived from Vermont communicating clear expectations and responsibilities at the state level ensures standardization and creates consistency as the program scales and families move more frequently between designated schools, even to and from other states.

¹ Columbia Law School Center for Public Research and Leadership. *A Study of the Purple Star School Designation Program: Summary Report*. January 4, 2021. Retrieved from <https://cprl.law.columbia.edu/content/study-purple-star-school-designation-program-summary-report>

² *Id.* p. 1

The Department recommends a state-level implementation effort, with local opt-in for schools and districts, to ensure that designated schools act with reasonable fidelity, provide models for core components including feedback to applicant schools that miss the mark, develop measurement systems to evaluate programmatic impact, and leverage the program to establish formal networks.

As Vermont is already home to 247 active-duty service members, 107 active-duty spouses, 210 active-duty children, 3,313 National Guard and reserve members, 1,627 National Guard and reserve spouses and 2,448 National Guard and reserve children as of 2022, it has the benefit of being able to draw upon existing expertise and engagement with existing stakeholders.³ The policy proposed by Senate Bill S105 also creates an opportunity for military-impacted schools to bridge the gap between educators and evaluators of granular K-12 metrics utilized in basing decisions by the military services, such as the Department of the Air Force.⁴

In closing, let me say that we are grateful to Senator Ram Hinsdale for helping shepherd this important legislation through the Vermont Senate, as well to the members of the Education Committee. On behalf of the Department of Defense, we thank you for considering the policies articulated in Senate Bill S105.

Yours etc.,

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³ DMDC, Dec. 31, 2021.

⁴ Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission. *2020 Annual Business Meeting Minutes*. p. 13. Thursday, October 1, 2020. https://mic3.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-ABM-MINUTES_DAY1-DRAFT.pdf