



# Dereliction of Duty

MILITARY SPOUSES STRUGGLE TO EARN A  
LIVING DESPITE 'FEEL-GOOD' LICENSING LAWS



POLICY BY

*Goldwater Institute*

WRITTEN BY

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BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS TO WORK







# “My turn.”

THE WORDS ECHO THROUGH THE FRUSTRATED MINDS OF MILITARY SPOUSES EVERY DAY.

It's not out of resentment or self-pity.

Rather it is out frustration that they are effectively being frozen out of their own careers because of a disjointed patchwork of state-to-state occupational licensing laws.

Every state has its own laws requiring people in certain professions to secure the government's approval before they can work in their chosen occupations.

The problem for military families is that they move around so much, typically every two to three years. As a result, spouses in licensed professions either have to give up their careers or go through the long, cumbersome, and bureaucratic process of getting relicensed every time they move.

By the time they get through the paperwork, complete the testing, get their license, and find a new job in the new state, new orders will likely come through that they will have to move again and start the process all over.

At some point, they begin to ask when it will be their turn to put their careers first. Some talk about it. Some don't.

“I thought about it every day,” said Debbi Chapman, an open-heart intensive care unit nurse who eventually gave up her profession because it became unworkable to maintain her license as she moved from state to state. “Did I voice it? No. But I'm sure there are many spouses out there that are not as accepting as I was.

“It's like, which career is more important?” said Chapman, whose husband recently retired as an Army sergeant and bomb disposal expert. “My career is very important to the patients I work with. But his job is important to the country and to what he believes in and what he feels. We agree on that. He did a job that not many other people could do or would do. So it was important that he was highly trained. My job is important. I'm highly trained, but so is he, and in the grand scheme of things he was protecting the greater good.”

Chapman is one of more than a dozen military spouses interviewed by the Goldwater Institute who struggle to work in various professions that require a state license because of the frequent moves and short-term deployments that come with military life. All described similar frustrations in trying to navigate the licensing laws of the various states, even those states that claim to have laws and policies friendly to military spouses.

Most said they've thought about when it would be their turn to pursue their careers, though for the most part they say they've kept those thoughts to themselves.

“It's a huge stressor on relationships for military families,” said Elizabeth Jamison, a lawyer who has had the discussion about whose career comes first with her husband, a Navy commander and pilot. “I love my husband's heart for service and I love that he wants to serve his country, and I want to support him in that. But sometimes it does feel like that means I have to completely sacrifice my own career aspirations.”

## Qualifications Quagmire

All 50 states have laws or policies meant to ease the transition for military spouses in licensed professions. But those laws are so riddled with vague language, conditions, and exceptions as to render many virtually worthless.

For the most part, a license from one state is not good in another. Some occupations can be practiced freely in one state yet carry extensive licensing requirements in others.

Complicating things further, there is rarely any standardized set of requirements for the education, testing, and experience needed to qualify for a license. So a person who has worked for years in a given occupation in one state may not qualify for a license in another.

Arizona took a unique approach in 2019, when it passed a law scrapping virtually all of the

bureaucratic caveats. The law basically allows any person with a license in good standing in another state for at least a year to obtain the equivalent license in Arizona.

The benefit of Arizona's approach is that it minimizes hurdles for anyone seeking to transfer their license from another state, not just military families, said Jonathan Riches, director of national litigation at the Goldwater Institute. It recognizes that people qualified to practice a profession in one state are qualified to practice it in any state, he said.

"It recognizes the simple fact that we don't forget how to safely and effectively practice a trade or profession because we crossed a state line," said Riches, a lieutenant commander in the Navy Reserve.







## Bleak Prospects

The bleak employment prospects for military spouses are borne out in government statistics. The Department of Labor, which measures those actively seeking work, puts the unemployment rate for military spouses at 13 percent, more than three times that of the civilian workforce. The most recent survey by the Department of Defense's Office of People Analytics estimates the unemployment rate for military spouses closer to 24 percent.

One explanation for the disparity is that many military spouses have simply given up and are no longer seeking work. Slightly more than half of military spouses participate in the labor market, compared to about three-fourths of the general population, according to the Labor Department.

About a third of all military spouses who do work are in professions that require a government-issued occupational license, according to congressional estimates. Of those, about 56 percent are in the healthcare industry and another 29 percent are educators.

In the civilian world, about a fourth of all jobs require a license to practice.

But those statistics do not capture the financial and emotional strain of being a licensed professional and military spouse.

Many of those with years of experience in highly skilled professions such as nursing end up taking entry-level positions. Others simply give up and either stay at home or find some other job outside of their professions just to help pay the bills.

They have no career path. Experience usually counts for nothing. And in many cases, the unemployed or underemployed military spouses would be making far more money than their husbands or wives if only they could practice the professions they were trained for.

"If you move, you are typically starting again at the bottom," said Leah Love, who gave up her career as a schoolteacher because of the hassles of getting relicensed as she followed her husband through five postings in four states over the past 10 years. "You don't necessarily get credit for the years you have already taught. You are never going to get tenure because you are never going to be someplace long enough to achieve that."



“It’s frustrating, especially when you are losing money because you have to take this amount of time off because your license is not going through.”

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DEBBI CHAPMAN, NURSE

# Jumping Through Hoops

DEBBI CHAPMAN SPENT YEARS JUMPING THROUGH THE HOOPS, AS SHE CALLS IT...

Debbi Chapman spent years jumping through the hoops, as she calls it, of trying to maintain her specialized nursing license amid frequent moves from state to state. Both she and her husband, Matthew, were well into their highly skilled, life-and-death careers by the time they married in 2003.

He was an explosive ordnance disposal specialist in the Army, trained to defuse bombs and other improvised explosive devices that would later bedevil American troops in Afghanistan and Iraq. She had been a licensed nurse in Pennsylvania since 1992, specializing in intensive care treatment for patients immediately after open heart surgeries.

Early in their courtship, Matthew was stationed in Germany. In 2001, he received his transfer back to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, so Debbi moved there to be with him. She got a job as a nurse in the base hospital. Because it was a federal facility, she was able to use her Pennsylvania nursing license rather than get one in North Carolina.

Matthew was flying home from Germany on September 11, 2001, when terrorists crashed airplanes into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a field in Pennsylvania.

After about a year working on base, Chapman got a job at a civilian hospital in Cape Fear, North Carolina, which had a large open heart surgery center. Because the Chapmans were not married at the time, she did not qualify for any special treatment under the state’s otherwise military-friendly laws and policies. Despite her experience in specialized nursing, it took about six months to wade through the paperwork and get her state license.

Three days after their 2003 wedding, Matthew Chapman was notified he was being deployed to Iraq.

Ironically, given her later experiences, Debbi Chapman recalls attending a conference in 2004 in which military and North Carolina state officials outlined new policies that states were developing to make it easier for military spouses to transfer their professional licenses when they moved. Particularly encouraging was an effort launched about 2000 called the Nurse Licensure Compact, an agreement among member states which was supposed to allow a nurse licensed in one state to practice in another without having to get a new license.

Then reality set in.

In 2005, the Chapmans were transferred to Florida. At the time, Florida was not in the nurses' compact. It joined in 2016. That's one of the main shortcomings of the compact and similar agreements: they do the military spouse no good if the state they are moving to or from does not participate. Currently 34 states are in the compact. "None of the states we have ever lived in have been compact states where the license would transfer," Debbi Chapman said. "So every state I would have to redo the process."

It took several months to get her Florida license, but since she'd started the application process early she was able to get it approved and start working with little downtime.

She was in Florida until 2010, when her husband got new orders and they moved to Korea, where she was unable to work because of restrictions on employing non-Korean nationals.

Then in 2012, the Chapmans' new orders sent them to Savannah, Georgia.

Debbi Chapman said she looked into getting a new license in Georgia, but the process would have taken months and, as she puts it, cost a small fortune. In the end, she "just gave up" and left the profession. Chapman said she "absolutely" would have gotten a new license in Georgia if she could have simply transferred her nursing credentials. It wasn't an easy decision, both professionally and financially, she said. Military pay is not great, especially for enlisted personnel.

"That became a joke in my house because I made exceedingly more than Matthew was making," she said. "It's frustrating, especially when you are losing money because you have to take this amount of time off because your license is not going through."

Chapman, like other nurses interviewed by the Goldwater Institute, said the difficulty in transferring their licenses from state to state makes no sense. The job they do does not change. The standards for patient care do not change. And nurses, like people working in most other health-related professions, take the same national standards tests.

So why, they ask, does each state need its own set of rules to qualify for a license?



Matthew and Debbi Chapman





## Reciprocal Red Tape

Things have not improved much since Chapman got out of the nursing profession, according to other nurses who described different hoops they had to jump through in transferring from state to state.

Many of the gripes are the same: States that will not allow existing licenses to be easily transferred, either because they are not in the nursing compact or because they have their own set of rules or qualifications. Nursing board websites are confusing or have no useful information about transferring a license. Bureaucrats are unable to explain the licensing process or any policies to expedite procedures for military spouses. Extensive and expensive paperwork and background checks must be repeated in each state. Different requirements for such things as education or experience make transferring a license from another state virtually impossible.

Even states that are in the nurse licensure compact don't always make the moves easy, said Lindsey Evans, a registered nurse (RN) whose husband is an Air Force major and pilot.

Evans spent five years as a licensed practical nurse (LPN), and in 2018 became a licensed RN.

Her original LPN license was issued in Tennessee. Since her wedding in 2015, Evans has lived and been licensed in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Florida. Every move had its own unique difficulties.

The first move was from Tennessee to Kansas. Tennessee was part of the multistate compact at the time, but Kansas was not. So Evans needed to get a new license there, a process that took about four months.

Two years later she moved to Oklahoma, which was not in the nurse licensure compact at the time but has since joined.

So Evans had to go through the licensing process again. Oklahoma made it easier to transition than Kansas did, allowing Evans to obtain a temporary license good for six months and processing her paperwork before she moved there.

It was in Oklahoma that Evans was first licensed as an RN.

Next came Florida. Since both Oklahoma and Florida were by then in the multistate compact, Evans figured moving her RN license would be easy. She was wrong.

Florida only allowed state residents to apply for the multistate license. That meant Evans, who was living in Oklahoma when she wanted to start the application process, did not qualify. So she spent several months out of work while she secured the Florida license.

None of it made any sense, she said.

"So even though they are all in this compact and agreed the requirements are the same ... that's pretty much all they've agreed on," Evans said. "They each have their own application process."

Evans and her husband have had the "my turn" conversation. His term of enlistment expires soon, and a big factor in whether he stays in the military will be the difficulties she has in building a nursing career, she said.

"A large reason for why they get out is that it's a toll on the family to move so frequently, and it's a toll on the spouse's career," Evans said. "I worked really hard to get through school and become a nurse, and I couldn't use it. When I did get a job I couldn't use it to the full potential of what it could be."







# Flaws in the Law

Every state claims to have policies to ease the licensing transition for military spouses, whether it be in statute or the procedures of state regulatory boards.

Many of the reforms that have been adopted were driven by a 2012 Department of Defense report recommending three policies states should pass to ease the transition of military spouses when they move.

The most favorable category is licensure by endorsement. Similar to reciprocity, endorsement allows a military spouse licensed in one state to qualify for a new license in the new state when they move. Reciprocity is an agreement among states that allows a person licensed in one state to work off that same license in multiple states, but only if they are all in the compact.

Short of that, states were encouraged to allow temporary or provisional licensing for military spouses. This would allow them to immediately secure a temporary license and find a job while they go through the application process for a license in the new state.

The third recommendation was to at least have procedures to expedite the process for military spouses, essentially prioritizing their applications to minimize occupational downtime.

To gauge the effectiveness of its initiative, the defense department worked with the University of Minnesota's Center for Research and Outreach, which in November 2017 published a report assessing the extent and implementation of the laws.

That study found that 48 states had laws enacting at least one of the three tiers of reform. About half of the states adopted all three of the Defense Department's recommendations in its statutes, and another 16 had two of the three.

But the university study found many flaws in the laws, as well as evidence that the lofty language in the statutes was not being implemented by state regulatory boards and benefitting military spouses as intended.

The most basic flaw is that many states say their regulatory boards "may" grant a license by





endorsement or reciprocity, but do not mandate that they “shall.”

Researchers found that 35 states used the word “shall” attached to language to ease military transfers, seven states used the word “may,” and four states used both.

A variant of that distinction is some state laws include language that its regulatory boards “shall” or “may” develop policies to allow licensure of military spouses by endorsement or reciprocity, issue temporary licenses, or expedite the processing of their applications. The laws don’t specify what those policies must be.

For instance, New Hampshire law requires boards to “facilitate the issuance of licenses,” but doesn’t specify a policy and leaves the board complete discretion on whether to issue a license.

Other problematic language is that many states allow licenses to be issued by endorsement if the education and testing requirements in the first state are “substantially equivalent” to those in the new state. Minimum standards for a particular

license vary greatly from state to state. For instance, a cosmetology license in Massachusetts and New York requires 1,000 hours of classroom education. Thirty states require 1,500 hours or less. Yet six states require 2,000 hours or more of education, meaning a military spouse transferring from Massachusetts probably would not qualify for a license in other states, even those with laws that say a license “shall” be issued by endorsement.

“The wording of legislation is crucial and has implications not only for the occupational boards’ rules regarding portability, but the experiences of military spouses,” the University of Minnesota study concluded. “One phrase that was frequently observed during the review of state legislation is ‘substantially equivalent’ when describing education requirements military spouses need to transfer their licenses. Although using this phrase allows each board to determine the necessary requirements to meet before issuing licenses, due to its ambiguity, the phrase is also likely to lead to a lack of clarity for military spouses about the experience or information they must possess.”





## Failure to Launch

Even in states that have strong statutory language, many regulatory boards are unaware of the benefits mandated for military spouses, have imposed onerous restrictions, or have simply not implemented them, according to the university study.

Hawaii is a good example.

According to the Hawaii statutes, military spouses “shall be permitted licensure by endorsement or reciprocity” if they are already licensed in another state that has requirements similar to Hawaii’s. In addition, the law requires boards to expedite the processing of applications for military spouses, and to issue temporary licenses.

All of the half-dozen state regulatory boards surveyed in Hawaii were aware of the law. Yet “no board allows for licensure by endorsement or offers temporary licenses,” the study found.

The Goldwater Institute sought an explanation from the Hawaii Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs, which oversees state regulatory boards, but it did not respond.

Beyond the laws themselves, there are other roadblocks to the easy transfer of licenses thrown up by regulatory boards, some of which are mentioned in the university report but not discussed in detail.

Some states require a person seeking a license through endorsement to have been continuously licensed in another state for a certain period, usually the previous two to five years. That’s not always easy for military spouses who move around so frequently and sometimes let their licenses lapse because of short-term or overseas postings.

Using the university study’s summaries of individual states, the Goldwater Institute identified boards in at least six states that have language requiring continuous licensing.

For example, a dental hygienist in Arkansas can qualify for a license through endorsement if they have “been practicing continuously for the past five years in other states.” New Jersey’s mental health counseling board has similar language.

Other boards in other states require an “active license” in another state that has been valid for periods ranging from one to three years.

Some state boards allow licensure through endorsement if the applicant has a certain number of years of previous experience, usually five years, but do not specify that it be continuous or the years immediately prior to the application. Others have more flexible language, such as that a person must have been licensed in another state for five of the past seven years to qualify for endorsement.

*(Story continues on page 15)*

# LICENSING LAWS LEAVE EMT TRIED AND TESTED, AND TESTED, AND TESTED

Sean O'Driscoll proved one thing as he followed his wife's Navy career around the country: He can pass the standardized national test to be an emergency medical technician (EMT).

He's passed it six times since 2011.

"My ongoing joke is to get EMT licensure in all 50 states," he said.

The O'Driscolls married in 2004, and were living in Nevada when she was called to active duty as a lieutenant seven years later. She has since had postings in Virginia, Maryland, Florida, and Washington.

When the couple moved from Nevada to Virginia in 2011, O'Driscoll had been a licensed EMT for about six months. At the time, the states did not have any sort of reciprocity agreements that would allow him to bypass Virginia's licensing requirement.

That meant O'Driscoll had to get a new license in Virginia if he wanted to continue the profession he'd trained for.

Virginia required new applicants to first get a temporary license valid for one year. O'Driscoll also needed to complete about 60 hours of continuing education training that was required in Virginia but not in Nevada. He also was required to take the two certification tests required by the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians, even though he'd just taken them less than a year earlier to get his license in Nevada.

It took almost the full year to catch up on his continuing education requirements so he could qualify for a four-year EMT license in Virginia. He also had to pass the tests again.

After securing his regular Virginia license, O'Driscoll worked for a private ambulance company doing hospital transports until his wife got new orders in 2014 sending them to Maryland.

O'Driscoll found a job at a hospital in Washington, D.C., that allowed him to work on his Virginia license, so did not get one in Maryland.

The stint in Maryland was a short one, and in 2015 his wife was reassigned to Florida, which did have reciprocity with Virginia. Sort of. While Florida allowed O'Driscoll to transfer his Virginia license, it also required him to take the national tests again. So he took them for the fourth time.

Next came Washington state in 2017, which required him to apply for a "pending" license and take the tests again. Then when he applied for a permanent license, he had to take the same tests yet again because at that point his pending license was more than six months old.

It took more than a year for O'Driscoll to finally get his full license in Washington.

O'Driscoll said he can't understand why he's had to take the same national standards tests every time he moves.

"I don't think it's a stupid question," he said. "I think it's a very important question. If this is all the same from state to state, why are all of the requirements different? This makes no sense at all. Nobody has the actual answer to it, which I don't get."

O'Driscoll recently got hired by a local fire department and is going through the training academy. He and his wife have had the conversation about how stifling military life has been on his career, and she's decided to leave the Navy when her commitment is up.

"She appreciates everything that I've sacrificed over the last eight years," O'Driscoll said. "I have two awesome jobs right now that I've busted my butt over that I don't want to leave. She understands that."



**"My ongoing joke is to get EMT licensure in all 50 states."**

**SEAN O'DRISCOLL, EMT**







# More Hoop-Jumpings

Professor Lynne Borden, one of the authors of the University of Minnesota study, said her sense is that the failure of regulatory boards to fully implement state laws to benefit military spouses has more to do with ignorance and bureaucratic procedures than mean-spirited efforts to thwart the law.

Some boards are not aware of their own state's laws, she said. Others are in states with small military populations, and so never bothered to post clear instructions on their websites or implement effective internal procedures.

Some states also might pass an overarching law that is supposed to apply to all regulatory boards, but then each board is also governed by a different section of the statute that imposes different restrictions.

The cumulative effect of these additional requirements is to weaken the effectiveness of well-meaning laws and make it difficult for military spouses coming into the state.

"The problem for military spouses is the number of hoop-jumpings that prohibit them from continuing what they're doing in their careers, and that's the big problem," Borden said. "You've got to have a way so that when they hit the door they can quickly begin to work. Otherwise, they are going to be gone again in three years, and they are going to have to start all over again."

Despite all of the problems identified in the university report, some state policies do make the transition easier for military spouses, Borden said. One of the most effective is a temporary or provisional license that allows the spouses to go to work immediately while they complete additional requirements a state may have to get fully licensed. To be effective, the temporary licenses need to be

valid for six months to a year—a long enough period to allow the spouse to complete the full licensing process.

Many state boards allow applicants to substitute years of experience to meet minimum education requirements.

Others defer to testing by national accrediting organizations, rather than imposing their own state-specific exams. This is most common in health-related professions like nursing, occupational therapy, and mental health counseling—industries that already have rigid national standards and accrediting organizations for anyone practicing the profession.

Some states with large military populations seem particularly resistant to accommodating the transfer of professional licenses for military spouses, according to several people interviewed. California is the state most cited as problematic.

California's military spouse accommodation statute is particularly vague, saying only that regulatory boards "shall expedite the licensure process" for qualifying applicants. The state also does not participate in the nurse licensure compact, or other multistate compacts reviewed by the Goldwater Institute.

California has the nation's largest concentration of active duty military personnel on domestic deployment, almost 130,000.

Some of the other states with large military populations are beset with similarly vague language, give their boards broad discretion, or limit license endorsement and other benefits only to certain professions.

*(Story continues on page 17)*



# MILITARY LIFE PROVES COSTLY TO DENTIST'S CAREER

Allie Long was ready for a promising career as a dentist when she finished school and got her license to practice in Texas. The expensive training and rigorous tests were behind her, and now came the task of building a stable practice.

But there was a hitch. Long's husband, who is also a dentist, is a lieutenant in the Navy. That meant he would be moving around a lot.

And moving, as it turned out, would mean more money and more testing that she hadn't anticipated.

When Long finished her studies in Texas, she had to pass the same two-prong tests that all dentists have to pass: a written test and a hands-on practical exam. The written test is standard nationwide. But the practical exam is not. The one Long took in Texas is administered by the Western Regional Examining Board (WREB), one of five organizations accredited to give the practical licensing exams to dentists. The WREB exam is accepted in all but a dozen states.

Long was licensed in Texas in May 2018. Four months later she got married to a Navy dentist, and within a year her husband got orders transferring him to South Carolina, one of the states that did not accept the WREB.

After haggling with bureaucrats over whether she could go to work based on her Texas credentials, Long finally obtained a one-year temporary license in September 2018 and was soon working in a local dental office.

By the summer of 2019, Long was anticipating her husband would be moved again in a matter of months, and sought to extend her temporary license. At first the South Carolina board could not give her any decision, but ultimately it refused to grant any extension. The rules said the temporary license was only valid for a year and could not be renewed. If she

wanted to continue working, she would have to get a permanent South Carolina license.

Since the state did not accept the WREB, that meant Long would have to re-take the practical exam.

"They don't want to make accommodation," she said. "They want it all to be very black and white, and they don't want to have to make the exceptions. The frustrating thing for me was that (from) the people that I spoke to I got a lot of attitude, like I was trying to skirt the system."

By then Long's temporary license was nearing its expiration. And since the tests are administered in different locations around the country at different times of the year, the only one she could take and still beat the deadline was in Chicago.

For the practical test, applicants need to bring their own dental assistants and even their own patients. Long found a couple of co-workers willing to participate. They all traveled to Chicago at Long's expense for a weeklong stay so she could take the practical exam that was accepted by the South Carolina board. The whole trip cost her about \$8,000.

It's all so senseless, she said. She'd already passed the practical test little more than a year earlier in Texas, and it was virtually identical to the one she had to take in Chicago. She had also been practicing dentistry for a year in South Carolina under the temporary license, and she expects she will be moving again when her husband receives new orders early in 2020.

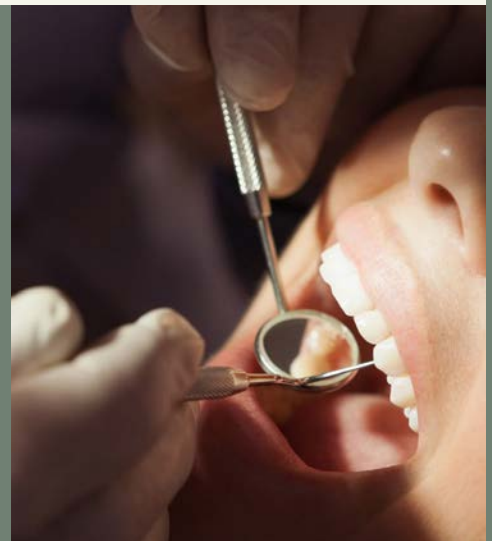
Rules are rules, she was told. There was no flexibility, even for military spouses.

"It makes absolutely no sense," she said. "There's no reason that I am qualified to practice in the state of Texas but not qualified to practice in the state of South Carolina."



**"There's no reason that I am qualified to practice in the state of Texas but not qualified to practice in the state of South Carolina."**

**ALLIE LONG, DENTIST**





## Starting Over

Jamison, the lawyer married to a Navy pilot, has spent her entire legal career dealing with the shortcomings of her California law license.

She was fortunate in that after she got married in 2003, her husband was posted in California for the next nine years. That allowed her to complete law school and get licensed in both California and Washington State, and eventually establish her own law practice in San Diego.

In 2012, new orders sent the couple to Florida. Since California did not have reciprocity agreements with Florida or any other state, Jamison would have to get a new license if she wanted to take Florida cases.

Jamison ultimately decided not to get a Florida license. She suspected the posting would not be a long one. And to get a Florida license, she would have to take the state's bar examination, which is only offered twice a year.

So instead, she used her old legal contacts to scrape together jobs working remotely to assist California lawyers on California cases, essentially doing legal

research and helping them write briefs.

"You have the same sort of thought process every single time," Jamison said. "Am I going to invest thousands of dollars and a whole bunch of time to become relicensed for what we knew was going to be a two-year period?"

Jamison was right about the short deployment, and within a couple of years the family got a new posting to Rhode Island, where they stayed a little more than a year before being reassigned to Virginia. Again, Jamison concluded that by the time she took the state bar exam and got her license, it would be time to move again, so she continued to work remotely for California lawyers.

While living in Virginia, Jamison got a job as a lawyer with the Department of Veterans Affairs, a federal position that did not require a Virginia state license.

Now she's back in California.

Technically, Jamison has been able to work as a lawyer without getting new licenses every time she moved. But the difficulty in getting relicensed meant she had to piece together odd jobs that would accommodate the lifestyle of a military spouse rather than build a sustainable legal practice like she would if married to a civilian.

"There's a sense of always having to start over and prove yourself, and that comes in the licensing context and the reemployment context," she said. "It's certainly frustrating to essentially feel like your experience and credentials are being challenged each time you move.

"We know we're capable of more. We know we are professionals just like our peers. But because of some of these barriers, you are underemployed or unemployed a lot of the time. That's super frustrating."



*Elizabeth Jamison and her husband, Navy Commander Brian Jamison*





# Surrender

THE STORIES GO ON AND ON. THE OCCUPATIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE.  
THE ROADBLOCKS AND FRUSTRATIONS DO NOT.

Several of the military spouses interviewed by the Goldwater Institute said the difficulties of moving their licenses from state to state finally drove them out of their chosen professions.

“It was like jumping through 500 hoops,” said Danielle Carrier, a mental health clinical social worker whose husband, a lieutenant in the Navy, has had postings in Texas, Florida, Virginia, Massachusetts, and Maryland since 2010. “Basically the whole process stunk so much and was so much of a nightmare that I had gotten to the point where I’m just done. I just can’t do this. This is ridiculous. I can’t jump through this many hoops.”

Carrier gave up trying to get her license in Maryland after moving from Massachusetts, and decided to go back to school to become a psychologist. Part of the morass was the two states classify their licenses differently, meaning the level of work she was doing in Massachusetts would not be permitted in Maryland.

“I just assumed I was going to be able to move to Maryland and find a job that was really similar to the job that I had in Massachusetts and keep going,” she said. “It was really painful to realize that that wasn’t going to be the case. I cried over this. I couldn’t figure out what was going on here.”

Amse Heck, wife of an Air Force colonel, thought it would be easy to transfer her real estate agent’s license from Pennsylvania to Virginia because the two states had a reciprocity agreement. However, when it came time to move, no one in either state’s regulatory agency had any idea how to make the reciprocity work. So she was told she would have to go through the entire licensing regime, including retaking the classes and testing, to get a new license in Virginia.

“We kept banging our heads against the wall trying to make this reciprocity work,” Heck said. “It’s great to pass the law. But if you don’t implement it effectively, it doesn’t exist. You guys solved the issue on paper, but you didn’t actually solve it.”







## ‘Arrogance and Ignorance’

Beth Conlin of the group [Blue Star Families](#), which advocates for military families, said states are not doing any favors when they pass laws that are supposed to make licensing transitions easier but then fail to follow up by ensuring regulatory boards fully implement the policies. In some ways they make the situation worse because military spouses believe license transfers will be simple, only to get stuck in an intractable bureaucracy when it comes time to get their license.

“The execution of what’s out there has been so poorly done a lot of times, that adds to that feeling of complete hopelessness,” Conlin said. “On the surface, you could say it’s feel-good, absolutely.”

Surveys of military families show that the inability of spouses to find work is their second most cited cause of stress, and has been for the past five years, Conlin said. The top stress factor is extended periods of separation.

Conlin routinely hears complaints that regulatory boards are not implementing laws passed to help military spouses move their licenses from state to state. That might be out of ignorance of the statutes. But in some cases it is out of pure arrogance from boards unwilling to surrender their power or give up a stream of revenue that comes from licensing fees. “It’s arrogance. It’s ignorance. And it’s a little bit of that’s their protective nature,” she said. “Arrogance and ignorance for sure.”

Reciprocity, endorsement, temporary licenses, and expedited processing are all good efforts if boards are implementing them effectively. But even at that, too many states impose additional restrictions, such as education requirements, limits on which professions are eligible, or requiring military spouses to work under the supervision of someone with an in-state license, Conlin said.

Those hoops do nothing to ensure competency or protect the public, but simply add delays and layers of red tape that military spouses on short-term postings have trouble wading through.

Arizona’s new law is a better approach, Conlin said. It recognizes that people qualified to practice a profession in one state are qualified to practice it in any state.

There are still a few hoops. Licensing boards can require fingerprinting and background checks. And applicants can still be required to pass a test on state-specific laws and procedures that apply to certain professions, such as lawyers and real estate agents. But those are minimal.

The new law was drafted and backed by the Goldwater Institute, and [signed by Gov. Doug Ducey](#) in April 2019.

Establishing separate rules for military families is good in theory, but in execution it leaves states with yet another layer of confusing regulations that makes it difficult for everyone, including military spouses, to practice their professions from state to state, said Riches of the Goldwater Institute.

“When it comes to inter-state licensing mobility, simplicity is key,” Riches said. “Most states have attempted to provide some form of licensure recognition to military members and their families. But those efforts have largely been ineffective in actually reducing regulatory barriers because the laws are patchwork and many are riddled with exemptions.”

Of the Arizona law, Riches added:

“The law’s simplicity and regulatory certainty ensures that not only our military families but others who move to this state can quickly find work in their chosen field with as little red tape as possible.”

*(Story continues on page 23)*





# TANGLE OF LICENSING LAWS GIVES TEACHER A LESSON IN BUREAUCRACY



Nikaila Brown is trying hard to break into nursing and get some experience.

It's not gone well.

Brown is a military wife, married to an Army captain who moves around a lot. That means getting a new license in each state before she can even begin looking for a job.

Brown is from Arizona but went to nursing school in Maryland, where her husband was stationed until earlier this year. By the time she graduated in December 2018, Brown and her husband had been notified they would be transferred to Texas.

It made no sense to go through the rigorous and expensive process of getting licensed in Maryland if they would be moving. And since she did not yet live in Texas, she wasn't able to apply for her initial license there.

The only solution was to get her license in Arizona, then attempt to transfer it to Texas. All three of the states are in the national nurse licensure compact, so it should have been relatively easy.

It wasn't.

First there was the hassle of getting the Arizona license. The Maryland school's standard practice was to recommend its graduates for licensure in that state. So the procedure she finally worked out after dealing with the nursing boards in the two states was to have the school recommend her for licensure in Maryland, then have the Maryland

board essentially defer and recommend her for licensure in Arizona.

Complicated as that sounds, she was able to work it out, but within a couple of months Brown moved to Texas.

She got her Arizona license after taking the required tests and paying her licensing fees. Brown was able to transfer her license to Texas under the licensure compact, but she was still required to get a Texas license within six months. For that, she had to undergo a background check and pay all the licensing fees again.

It took about five months to get her Texas license.

"It's tough. It's just an awkward situation to approach having a skill set but not being really sure if you can use it because of the legal requirements of having your license," Brown said.

Now that she has her license, Brown is trying to build up her resume. That too is going to be tough because of the frequent moves military spouses live with.

"Being a nurse, a lot of places don't want to hire you until you've got two years of experience," Brown said. "But getting that solid two years of experience is going to be a bit of a fiasco. Moving like every two to three years, it takes time to get the license done, and then to find someone who will hire you, and then to be there long enough to make it worthwhile putting on your resume."

# Meaningless Paperwork

States are under increasing pressure to reform their licensing laws and regulations to benefit military families. Both the Obama and Trump administrations have tried to get states to make accommodations for military spouses so they can easily move their professional licenses. Former First Lady Michelle Obama in 2011 launched the Joining Forces initiative, which sought among other things to “reduce or eliminate licensing and credentialing barriers.”

Karen Pence, wife of Vice President Mike Pence and mother of a Marine pilot, has continued to champion the effort.

In February 2018, the secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force ratcheted up the pressure on states to reform and standardize their licensing laws. They warned in a letter to the National Governors Association that two key factors they would use in making decisions about where to station military personnel would be the quality of local schools and the ease with which military spouses can transfer their professional licenses.

But time is running out for many military spouses interviewed by the Goldwater Institute. Allie Long, a dentist in South Carolina whose husband is a Navy lieutenant, said they are already having the “my turn” conversation.

While he loves his job, and would prefer to make the Navy a career, he’s now leaning toward finishing his commitment and leaving the service.

“After dealing with all of these struggles with my licensure, our big talk was ‘are we going to pick your career or are we going to take my career?’” she said. “Because it doesn’t look like both are going to mesh.

“I’m a very type-A personality. I like rules. I like structure. But what I don’t like is laws and regulations that don’t have any meaning behind them. They’re not worried about if I’m a qualified dentist or if I’m taking care of patients or if I’m morally or ethically responsible. All they’re worried about is the paperwork.”







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