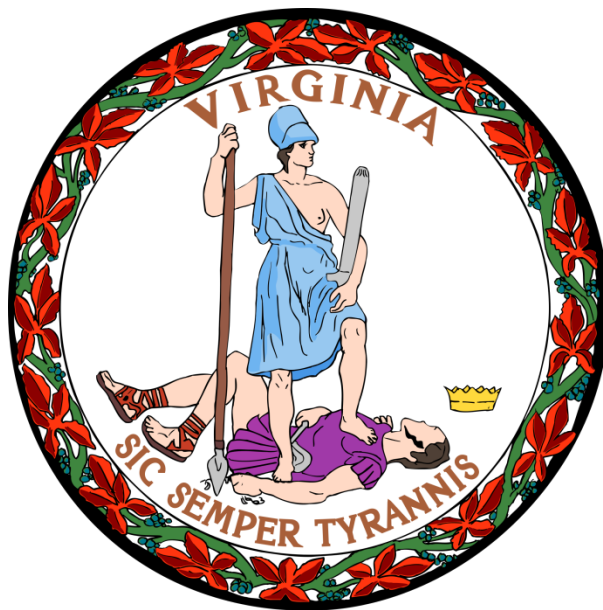


Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs Year in Review and Virginia Military Advisory Council 2019 Annual Report



Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs
January 2020

2019 Year in Review and VMAC Annual Report

Preface: The Virginia Military Advisory Council was created by the Code of Virginia through §2.2-2666.1. The legislation requires an annual executive summary of interim activity and work of the Council to be submitted to the Governor and General Assembly.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Virginia Military Advisory Council (VMAC) was created as an advisory council to: maintain a cooperative and constructive relationship between the Commonwealth and the leadership of the Armed Forces of the United States and the military commanders of such Armed Forces stationed in the Commonwealth, encourage regular communication on continued military facility viability, and encourage the exploration of privatization opportunities and issues affecting preparedness, public safety, and security.

In 2019, the VMAC, led by the Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, Carlos L. Hopkins, was comprised of thirty-one (31) military officers representing major military commands and installations in the Commonwealth. The House of Delegates and Senate of Virginia each appointed members to serve on the VMAC during 2019. Governor Ralph Northam appointed four (4) individuals, with backgrounds dealing with the military and the quality of life for military families. Through the normal rotation of installation commanders, there were eight (8) new members in 2019.

Under the leadership of the Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, the focus of the VMAC in 2019 was on continuing efforts to make the Commonwealth of Virginia the most military-friendly state in the Nation. Virginia continues to work on finding opportunities for those service members and their families who are transitioning from active duty in order to keep these valuable citizens and resources within the Commonwealth.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

The 2019 VMAC met three (3) times during the year; however, the Secretariat conducted a significant amount of additional work in separate engagements with the military community throughout the year. In addition to the three meetings, the Governor hosted a holiday reception for all military leaders at the Governor's Mansion.

During the three VMAC meetings, there were briefings to the military installation commanders on the federal budget updates and the progress the Commonwealth is making to grow the military mission in Virginia. Additional topics included:

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- a. The Virginia Department of Education presenting information on the Purple Star Program. The Virginia Purple Star Designation is awarded by the Virginia Interstate Compact Council to military-friendly schools that show a major commitment to students and families connected to our Nation's military. For the School Year 2019-2019, 66 Schools received the Purple Star Designation;
- b. Comfort Crew for Military Kids, a national non-profit organization, committed to creating programs and resources that provide children with strategies to manage and express their feelings, thereby increasing the communication within the family. The Comfort Crew supports military families' requests for resources to support them through deployments, reintegration, injuries, and loss;
- c. Briefing by a School Liaison Officer (SLO) assigned to Navy Region Mid-Atlantic who shared the important role SLOs provide to military families with school-aged children;
- d. The Department of Motor Vehicles provided a valuable update on Virginia's implementation of the REAL-ID and the impacts that may have on access to the bases; and
- e. A report on the occupational and professional licensure of military spouses and the steps Virginia implemented, such as, being one of the first of nine states that established an expedited application process and the issuing of temporary licenses.

The VMAC met on August 15, 2019, at Fort Belvoir, Virginia to specifically address partnerships and Intergovernmental Support Agreements (IGSA). Over the past few years, the Secretary attended several events and conferences where senior military and civilian leaders of each of the military services discussed the critical need for military bases to create partnerships, both public and private, as a way to be able to continue to sustain military readiness. These partnerships enhance the military value of the installations and bases and reinforce the working relationships the military has with the community. As such, the VMAC meeting provided the installation/base commanders the opportunity to share accomplishments and challenges, and to identify specific areas where the Commonwealth may be able to step forward to support. Several commanders inquired about possible support from the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). Mr. Rob Cary, Deputy Commissioner of VDOT, discussed how VDOT was willing to work with the installations in using VDOT contracts.

The VMAC also welcomed the Commonwealth enhancing its support of military spouses during their transition and search for employment opportunities when their service member is reassigned to Virginia. The Secretariat worked closely with the leadership of Virginia's licensing

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agencies to develop proposed legislation that improved Virginia's existing process for the expedited occupational and professional licensure of military spouses for Virginians, and also added an additional provision for the spouses of service members assigned to installations in bordering states (and D.C.) to be eligible for expedited licensure. The legislation grants more authority to its licensing boards to waive certain "time in practice" requirements for military spouse applicants if the item was the only criteria barring a determination of substantial equivalence.

Due to the nature of Virginia's close relationship with its military and veteran communities, the Commonwealth was named as the best state for military retirees. In 2019, Virginia was named by WalletHub.com as the best state for military retirees for its support of Veterans and their families because of its economic environment, quality of life, and access to quality healthcare for Veterans and military retirees. One of Governor Northam's top priorities is to ensure Virginia remains the top state for Service members, Veterans, and their family members. With over 714,000 Veterans; 130,000 Service members; and 25,000 Guardsmen and Reservists, it is critical to ensure the Commonwealth's communities and industries are responsive to the changing defense environment.

Secretary Hopkins requested an analysis of what it means to be military friendly. The Matrix Design Group, as part of an annual agreement with the Commonwealth, compared the twenty-five (25) states with the greatest military presence on areas where they support the service member and their families. A survey of more than 800 military connected individuals from across the services was conducted to determine which of the compared benefits are considered most important. Virginia ranked among the top states; however, the analysis provided specific areas where the Commonwealth could consider taking steps to provide additional benefits that service members consider important.

Through the collaborative efforts between Virginia and its military installation communities, the Commonwealth was awarded a \$2.5 million grant from the Department of Defense's Office of Economic Adjustment.

- a. Of these funds, \$1.5 million is to help ensure a Navy fleet that is ready, relevant, and sustainable over five- and ten-year increments – making Hampton Roads a national center of excellence for ship building and repair. The Maritime Industrial Base Enterprise concept is closely aligned with the National Defense Strategy priority for a ready, reliable Navy fleet, and supports the economic and workforce development in Hampton Roads area; and
- b. An additional \$1.0 million is being used to help small defense companies to become compliant with federal cyber-security requirements to ensure they can continue to

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compete for defense contracts. This effort is critical for the Commonwealth to retain its position among the top states for defense contracts, which stood at more than \$50 billion per year over the past several years.

The Secretary of Defense annually distributes a list of Ten Key Quality of Life Issues that states can address. See the attachment, Key Personnel and Readiness Issues Supporting Service Members and Families; 2019. These issues, surrounding quality of life and family well-being, are best addressed at the state level. The Commonwealth continues to focus on addressing all of the 2019 issues, and continues to remain among the lead states based on this metric.

Conclusion

Over the past year, the VMAC focused most of its efforts to support the many service members who are transitioning out of the military and seeking civilian employment. The VMAC continues to foster a collaborative working environment with military leadership, the Commonwealth, and the Office of the Governor. Over the years, the benefits to the military community have excelled and have remained extremely valuable. As potential future cuts to the Department of Defense may negatively impact the Commonwealth, it is critical to maintain this valuable line of communication and cooperation with military leaders in the state.



Key Personnel and Readiness Issues Supporting Service Members and Families 2019

State policy to support identification and reporting of child abuse and neglect: State laws do not require child protective services to identify military families in cases of child abuse and neglect, or to report cases to the appropriate military authorities. Changes in State law can support both local government and the Military Departments concurrently assisting in child abuse or neglect cases involving military families.

Allow Service members to retain their earned priority for receiving Medicaid home and community care waivers: Because States frequently have long waiting lists, Service members face large gaps in service every time they transfer across state lines. Allowing Service members to enroll their exceptional family member in the State they designate as their legal residence (e.g., where they pay taxes, vote) can stabilize their request for support.

Facilitate military spouse teacher certification: Military spouse teachers often encounter difficulty-acquiring licensure in a state after a move. Providing flexibility in states accepting an existing standard certificate, establishing a temporary certificate, or expediting application and adjudication processes may alleviate the delays in garnering certification to teach in that particular state.

Advance enrollment: Military children attend an average of 6-8 schools during their school life. Military families transferring on official military orders are usually not eligible to register in courses, programs or lotteries for charter/magnet school entry until they are physically located within district boundaries. Schools could allow preliminary registration/enrollment, or application pending military relocation and waive proof of residence until the family has moved.

In-State tuition continuity: In many States, students with a military sponsor stationed in a State are considered in-State for tuition purposes. However, if the sponsor has a change of station out of State between receiving their letter of acceptance and start of classes the student loses this status. States can alleviate this burden by allowing a spouse or child of an active Service member assigned to duty out-of-State to be deemed an in-State resident for purposes of determining tuition/fees at all State learning institutions as long as the spouse or child resides continuously in-State.

National Guard employment protections during state-sponsored activation: State laws that cover Guard members during State-sponsored mobilizations impact employers within the state. States can modify their laws to protect rights of members of the National Guard during state-sponsored mobilizations who drill outside of the State which they are employed.

Licensing Compacts recognizing separating Service members and military spouses: An increasing number of occupations are establishing compacts that facilitate portability of licenses and opportunities to work in member states with an existing license. Having States enact laws approving these compacts further expedites licensure in these occupations for separating Service members and military spouses.

Pro-bono legal representation for military families: Military families have access to legal assistance attorneys for advice and help with important documents, but they must generally obtain their own counsel to represent them in court. State governments can assist by organizing pro-bono programs that can connect qualified attorneys with Service members and their families in need.

Implementation of supportive licensure laws: Most States have established laws that support licensure requirements for transitioning Service members and active duty military spouses; however, research has shown that some licensing boards have not fulfilled the intent of these laws. State legislatures can assist by requesting occupational licensing boards report on their efforts to implement these laws.

Increase protection under State Supplemental Service members Civil Relief Act provisions: Many Service members find difficulty terminating or suspending certain service contracts when transitioning from one duty location to another, when mobilized or when deployed. Certain provisions could be enacted eliminating or reducing the penalties associated with termination of service on short notice.

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