



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Veterans Services

Daniel M. Gade, PhD
Commissioner

Telephone: (804) 786-0220
Fax: (804) 786-0302

December 1, 2023

The Honorable Glenn Youngkin
Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia
Richmond, Virginia 23219

The Honorable Craig Crenshaw
Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs
Richmond, Virginia 23219

The Honorable C. Todd Gilbert
Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates
Richmond, Virginia 23219

The Honorable L. Louise Lucas
President Pro Tempore, Senate of Virginia
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Delivered via electronic mail

Re: 2023 Overview of the Activities of the Virginia Military Spouse Liaison

Dear Governor Youngkin, Secretary Crenshaw, Delegate Gilbert, and Senator Lucas:

The Code of Virginia, §2.2-2004 (18) directs that DVS provide an overview of the activities of the Military Spouse Liaison (MSL), as outlined in § 2.2-2002.2, including any legislative recommendations, on or before December 1 of each year to the Governor, Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, and the General Assembly. Ms. Kayla LaFond serves as the Commonwealth's military spouse advocate in accordance with the Code of Virginia. In this role, the MSL collaborates with key stakeholders within federal, state, local government, military installations, and the private sector to develop and implement a resource system to provide access to employment, childcare, licensure, and community resources. The MSL is also responsible for outreach and provides advocacy for military families. The Military Spouse Liaison gives a voice to military spouses within the Commonwealth to make Virginia the most veteran and military spouse friendly state.

This year, one of the program's primary objectives was to establish partnerships to expand outreach to military spouses across the Commonwealth, informing them of all the services and

opportunities Virginia offers. These partners included veteran service organizations, employers, community leaders, military installations, and local, state, and federal agencies.

The second objective for the Milspouse program was to promote resources, referrals, and information available to military spouses at events, community engagement meetings, and one-on-one interactions. Areas of focus were childcare, licensure reciprocity, employment, and other spouse benefits.

Of the many activities and efforts conducted by the MSL this year, a few are highlighted here:

- The Milspouse program added two part-time Regional Military Spouse Liaisons to the team. Located in the North and Central Regions, the Regional MSLs assist the state MSL with presence at outreach events, identification of common trends and barriers of the spouse community within region, and other tasks as assigned. Due to the added positions, the milspouse team increased outreach by over 3,700 people and significantly increased the number of events attended across the Commonwealth. The Military Spouse newsletter distribution list began in April 2022 with less than 300 contacts and has almost doubled in total contacts with an average open rating of 48% at the end of the FY23.
- Collaborated with the Virginia Values Veterans (V3) program and recorded a military spouse hiring webinar specifically for V3 certified employers to learn the importance of why and how to hire military spouses. The webinar has been taken by 42 V3 certified employers. The state MSL is exploring ways to establish a formal partnership between V3 and Hiring Our Heroes' Military Spouse Fellowship Program, which is a paid internship specifically for military spouses seeking full-time employment post-internships.
- The state MSL was a guest speaker at the Community Engagement Council meeting at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Fort Gregg-Adams Spouse Symposium, and the USS George H.W. Bush Family Readiness Group meetings. The Liaison provided an overview of the Military Spouse Initiative and overview of the DVS services and programs as they relate to the military spouse community. The MSL was a panelist for the first Blue Star Families Welcome Week EXPOs in Hampton Roads held at Langley AFB and Norfolk. The panel discussion was focused on employment, connecting to your new community, and other Virginia specific resources. The MSL team also provided a resource table for the 160 military spouses in attendance at the Welcome Week EXPOs.
- Secured a resource table for DVS at the MilspouseFest events in Arlington and Norfolk, which had over 200 military spouses in attendance combined. The team also had resource tables with other DVS service lines at the Norfolk Ombudsman Resource Fair, Ft. Gregg-Adams Transition Resource Fair, Naval Special Warfare Spouse Seminar, Ft. Gregg-Adams Spouse Club Super Sign-up, and Bourbiz DC Networking Event.
- Hosted four military spouse round table discussions with emphasis on military spouses (spouses of those currently serving), veteran spouses, and surviving spouses. Each round

Governor Youngkin, Secretary Crenshaw, Delegate Gilbert, and Senator Lucas
December 1, 2023

table focused on a different demographic and had almost 100 spouses in attendance. This allowed for open conversation and comradery, along with insight to the barriers and needs of that specific cohort. The MSL also attended and provided resources at the virtual Town Hall with Virginia Delegate Kathy Tran and Military Spouse Roundtable with Chief of Navy Operations (CNO) spouse, Linda Gilday, in person on Naval Station Norfolk.

- Initiated the first cross-state agency “Purple Up Day” with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) on April 19, 2023, for Month of the Military Child. A banner with both logos was created by VDOE and both agencies joined together in the auditorium of the James Monroe Building with their respective Secretaries and First Lady Suzanne Youngkin.
- Participated in three working groups focused on childcare for military families. Two of these working groups are in the Hampton Roads region: Peninsula Military Childcare Working Group and Hampton Roads Military Advisory Council Childcare Subcommittee. The third working group brings together advocates, mostly military spouses, who are focused on improving the childcare situation for all military families regardless of where they are living.
- The MSL presented three legislative suggestions for FY23-24 to DVS leadership to include military spouse preference for state employment, verbiage changes regarding the definition of surviving spouse for the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP), and amendments to the Military Spouse Liaison section of the Code of Virginia. The Military Spouse Liaison also recommended Virginia to join licensure compacts to support the military-affiliated workforce who are not covered by the recent addition to the federal Servicemember Civil Relief Act (SCRA) regarding licensure reciprocity.

Please let me know if we may provide additional information.

Sincerely

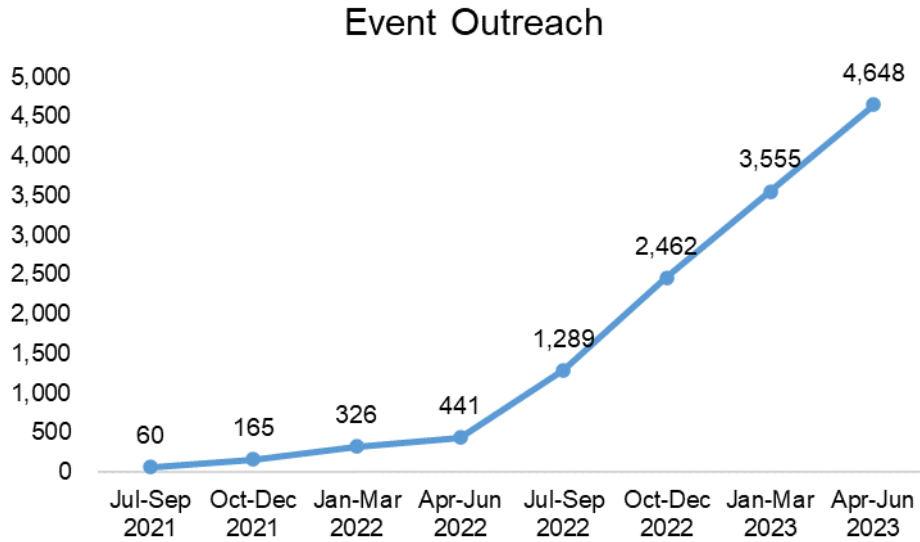


Daniel M. Gade, PhD

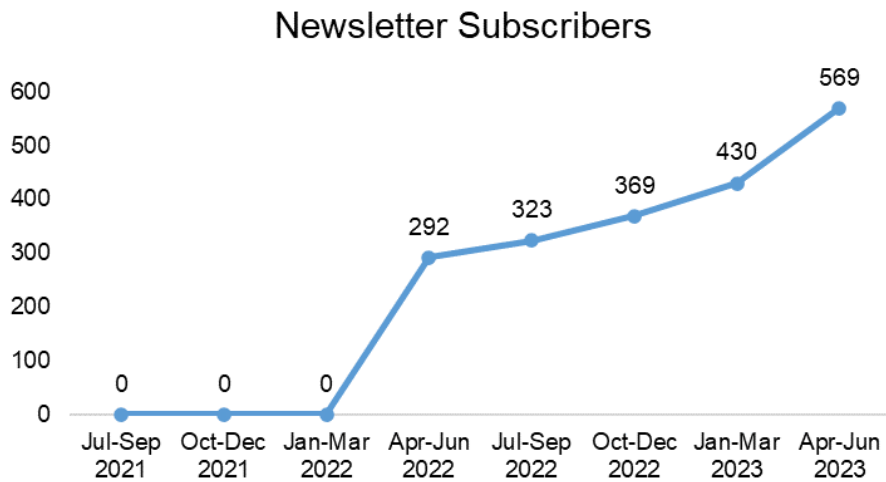
Cc: Mr. Michael Dick, Chairman, Board of Veterans Services
Mr. Kevin Hoffman, Chair, Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations

Appendix 1: Metrics

Military Spouse Cumulative Metrics



The first two years have been focused on building the milspouse program, connecting to key stakeholders, and establishing networks with Virginia military spouses.



First newsletter publication was sent in April 2022 for Month of the Military Child with a 35% open rating.