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**OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF WAR**  
1500 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-1500

February 10, 2026

**Committee on Veterans and Military  
Representative Rick James, Chairman**

**Remarks of  
Michelle Richart  
Midwest Region Liaison  
Defense-State Liaison Office**

**Proponent Testimony – HB 2626 Expanding veterans preference in government employment to include current members of the national guard and such members’ eligible spouses**

The Department of War appreciates the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 2626, Expanding Hiring Preference in Public Employment to Include Current Servicemembers and Eligible Spouses. The Department of War supports the policies reflected in HB 2626, though we respectfully offer an amendment.

Our service members are crucial to protecting the interests of the United States and ensuring our national security. By implementing these changes, Kansas can ensure our service members are ready to support the military mission because the state is supporting their families. This creates an environment that enhances recruiting, readiness, and retention for our entire force.

**Closing a Critical Gap for Guard and Reserve Members**

This bill makes both practical and meaningful updates to Kansas law by extending public sector hiring preference to current members of the National Guard and Reserve. Under current statute, many Guardsmen and Reservists do not qualify as “veterans” for hiring preference, even after years of honorable service. HB 2626 closes that gap.

This preference is both an equitable policy and a strategic investment. Civilian career stability is the bedrock of retention for our Guard and Reserve. By providing this preference, the State of Kansas directly fortifies readiness, improves retention, and models strong community-military partnerships.

**Strengthening Military Families and Spouses**

HB 2626 also delivers a win for military families by extending the hiring preference to eligible spouses. Military spouses are a highly skilled and educated demographic, with 49% of active-duty spouses and 37% of reserve and guard spouses holding a bachelor’s degree or higher. Yet, they face an unemployment rate of 21%—significantly higher than their civilian counterparts.

Due to the demands of military service, most military families relocate every two to three years. According to a 2021 Department of Defense survey, 48% of active-duty spouses reported that finding employment was one of the most critical problems they faced during a move. This employment instability creates undue financial stress that can disrupt the overall readiness of our military units. HB 2626 creates stronger pathways to public employment for these talented individuals, helping to address this unique and critical challenge.

### **Enhancing Public Hiring and a Recommended Amendment**

By expanding public hiring preference, Kansas sends a clear message that the state values the service and sacrifice of its military members and their families. This policy will help the state attract and retain top talent for its own workforce while demonstrating leadership in supporting the local military community.

Regarding the bill's implementation, it proposes a method for verifying eligibility for military spouses: a certificate signed by the service member's unit commander. While a standardized form for service members is a sound concept, we respectfully request an amendment to remove this specific requirement for military spouses.

Military spouses are independent professionals, and their pursuit of public employment should not be contingent on the administrative processes of their service member's command. Requiring a spouse to obtain a form signed by their service member's commander is an unnecessary burden that perpetuates an outdated "dependent" mindset. By simplifying the verification process, the state can further its goal of being a leader in efficient government hiring. Standard documentation, such as a military ID card or a copy of the service member's orders, is more than sufficient for verification and is already widely used for other benefits. This amendment would affirm the professional autonomy of military spouses and align with best practices for efficient government hiring.

### **Conclusion**

With the recommended amendment, HB 2626 becomes an even stronger, more effective policy. It is a proactive step that strengthens Kansas' public workforce, supports military families and service members, and improves retention and readiness. It is an investment in the state's workforce and a powerful recognition of the sacrifices made by our military community. We thank the committee for its consideration and respectfully urge you to advance this bill as favorable for passage, with the inclusion of our recommended amendment.

Sincerely,

Michelle Richart  
Defense-State Liaison Office  
Midwest Region Liaison  
(CO, IA, KS, NE, ND, SD)