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Acting Adjutant General

Laura Kelly, Governor

February 12, 2026

Committee on Veterans and Military
Kansas House of Representatives
Chairman, Representative Rick James
Attn: Debra Heideman, Committee Assistant
State Capitol, Room 281-N
300 SW 10th Ave
Topeka, KS 66612

Name: Lt. Col. Keith Marshall
Organization: The Adjutant General's Department
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Bill: HB 2627, Expanding Permissive Preference in Private Employment to Include Current Servicemembers and Eligible Spouses
Position: Proponent
Type: In-Person
Date: February 12, 2026

Dear Chairman James and Members of the Committee,

The Adjutant General's Department respectfully submits the following written testimony for the hearing on House Bill 2627, Expanding Permissive Preference in Private Employment to Include Current Servicemembers and Eligible Spouses, on February 12, 2026. My Legislative Liaison, Lt. Col. Keith Marshall, will testify on my behalf.

This bill differs from our other bill, HB 2626 regarding public sector employment. This bill, HB 2627, is for private sector employers. It is also important to note, the underlying state statute this bill updates is permissive rather than directive – employers may adopt a preferential hiring system if they choose, and those who do not wish to are under no obligation to do so.

In the private sector, a veterans-hiring preference is only lawful if state statute explicitly authorizes it. Without that statutory protection, a private employer who gives preference to veterans, or to any specific class of applicants, could be exposed to claims of hiring discrimination under state or federal equal employment laws. In other words, even well-intentioned efforts to support veterans could be interpreted as treating non-veteran applicants less favorably, which is prohibited unless the state has carved out a clear legal exception. By codifying that employers *may* offer a preference, the Legislature removes that ambiguity and gives businesses the confidence to support those who have served without fear of litigation.

This bill makes a practical, meaningful update to Kansas law by extending permissible private sector hiring preference to the very people who serve our state every day: current members of the National Guard and Reserve, and to the spouses who stand behind all military members in Kansas. Under current statute, not all Guardsmen and Reservists qualify as “veterans,” even if they have served honorably for years. To be considered a veteran for hiring preference, an individual must have served on federal active duty or deployed under Title 10 orders. Many of our Soldiers and Airmen serve their term of enlistment or even entire careers without a federal deployment, yet they respond to tornadoes, wildfires, floods, cyber incidents, and emergencies in Kansas year after year. They are essential to the safety and resilience of our communities, but they are excluded from the very preference designed to support those who serve. HB 2627 closes that gap.

Extending this preference is not only fair, it is strategically smart. Civilian job stability is one of the strongest predictors of Guard and Reserve retention. RAND’s long-standing research¹ shows that predictable schedules, supportive employers, and reduced conflict between military and civilian obligations significantly increase reenlistment. When a Guardsman works close to their unit, the benefits multiply: shorter commutes to drill, fewer scheduling conflicts, and a workplace that understands and supports their service. Across states, commanders consistently observe that long-distance commuters are among the first to separate when civilian life becomes more demanding. Conversely, units with a high percentage of locally employed members have markedly lower attrition. Local employment also strengthens employer-unit relationships because employers know the mission, know the commander, and are more willing to accommodate the sacrifices necessary when employing Guardsmen and Reservists. This creates a reinforcing cycle: supportive employers lead to fewer conflicts, which leads to higher retention and stronger readiness for Kansas.

HB 2627 also delivers a major win for military families by extending preference to eligible spouses. Spouse employment remains one of the top challenges facing military families nationwide. Kansas has taken important steps in recent years – licensing compacts, fee waivers, and streamlined credentialing – but employment remains a barrier to stability and retention. Providing hiring preference to spouses aligns perfectly with the state’s broader military-family initiatives and sends a clear message that Kansas values not only the servicemember, but the family that makes their service possible. This is a powerful recruiting and retention tool for the Guard, for active-duty families stationed here, and for the communities that rely on them.

Finally, the bill proposes a simple, uniform method for verifying eligibility: a certificate signed by the unit commander. There are other ways to verify service: PCS orders, military records, personnel rosters, etc., but those documents can be confusing or inconsistent for hiring authorities. A single, standardized form keeps the process clean, clear, and easy to administer. This concept is modeled after the Department of Revenue form used to verify military service for motor vehicle property tax credit. That said, we are fully open to whatever direction the committee prefers on this point. Our goal is to ensure that verification is straightforward for both applicants and employers.

House Bill 2627 strengthens Kansas’ workforce, supports military families, and improves retention in the National Guard and Reserve, all while honoring the service of those who protect our state. We

thank the committee for its consideration, and respectfully urge the committee to advance this bill as favorable for passage. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this matter. You are always welcome to reach out to me if you need anything. You may also contact my legislative liaison, Lt. Col. Keith Marshall, at 785-646-0011 or keith.marshall.1@us.af.mil.

PAUL W. SCHNEIDER
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ⁱ https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA852-1.html