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**Testimony  
for Montana House Bill 257  
Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children**

**The Department of Defense State Liaison Office** operates under the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, and the Deputy Under Secretary for Military Community and Family Policy. We serve as a DOD resource to state policymakers in their efforts to address the quality of life issues of military families. DOD believes state policy is the best technique to address these important issues.

**Jacline Harriman**

Ms Harriman joined the DoD-State Liaison Office as a Regional Liaison in 2005. She has been in service to the military community in some capacity since 1983. As a licensed professional counselor she has served veterans, military families and children during deployments and transitions. In this position, Ms Harriman monitors quality of life issues for military families in CO, MT, ND, SD, UT and WY. As a military child herself she attended 4 elementary schools, two middle schools and 2 high schools during her early academic career. She is a Gulf War veteran, a military spouse and the mother of two children.

**Testimony**

Mr. Chairman and members of this Committee, my name is Jackie Harriman and on behalf of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today on the *Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children*. I've been in service to the military community since 1983. I know firsthand about the challenges that the children of our military members face as they encounter frequent moves. I experienced many of these issues as a military child; I attended 4 elementary schools, 2 middle schools and 2 high schools. I also witnessed the challenges of military children as a school counselor in Colorado school districts.

On average, most military children will move at least twice during their high school years, and most will attend six to nine different school systems between kindergarten and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. These frequent moves result in some educational obstacles. Though many states, including Montana, have made progress in addressing these educational concerns, there is a lack of consistency in standards *between* states that continues to create difficulties for our military families. Examples of these recurring issues include kindergarten start age, participation in extracurricular activities, timely transfer of records, placement in appropriate courses, missed or redundant entrance and exit testing support for children of deployed service members, and on-time graduation. Though one state may do several things right, the next move to another state can create a new set of problems since the procedures are not the same. The *Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children* successfully addresses these issues.

DoD, in conjunction with the Council of State Governments, worked with groups and individuals representing legislators, educators, and educational organizations and associations over a period of two years to create this compact.

There have also been efforts to address these issues informally. DoD sent out Tool Kits that included action plans for parents, educators and the installation. The Army and the Air Force have worked to create school liaison programs to advocate for the needs of military children. Military Impacted Schools Assn, has promoted the needs of military children. The Military Child Education Coalition has provided education to school counselors, peer mentoring and parent support. They also have a Memorandum of Agreement with 317 military impacted school districts. Unfortunately, that did not resolve the problems. We found that when superintendents or commanders leave, the Memorandum of Agreement was lost in the shuffle. The MOA seems to be dependent on a local champion in the district. The Compact is a chance to make these necessary changes institutional. It addresses the need for consistency in procedures for military children across state borders.

The *Compact* is an agreement among member states to a set of practices that will allow for the uniform treatment of military children transferring between school districts and between states. The Interstate Compact does not ask for special privileges for military children. It DOES ask that states create a level playing field for their scholastic achievement. The compact provides a forum to discuss concerns affecting military children that have not existed before and then set consistent guidelines. Military children often end up making sacrifices because their parents are serving our country. The language and intent of the Compact will provide consistency for our military children as they move from state to state and alleviate some of the unneeded hardships they encounter.

Though there has been some discussion among members of Congress to introduce such guidelines on a federal level, which would then be implemented by states, DoD believes states are the appropriate entities to determine and execute this type of policy, in a cooperative, multi-state manner. Thankfully, many of your fellow state leaders recognize this potential. Thirty-five states have passed legislation to adopt the Compact, and eight states have introduced legislation to consider adopting the compact this year.

DoD recognizes that military families work, go to school and live outside the installation gates. So they are impacted by the laws and policies of the state. DoD also wants to retain their experienced, voluntary armed forces. To retain servicemembers we have to retain the families. The decision to stay in the service is made around the kitchen table not in a recruiting office.

I believe you will hear some compelling testimony from military families here today. *Our hope is that this compact will allow our children to be warmly received and their academic transition will appear seamless as they move from one military community to the next...Thank you in advance for your time and energy and interest in making a difference in the lives of our military families."*

Of course, I stand ready to answer any questions you may have.