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RESERVE AFFAIRS

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

**February 12, 2025**

**Rhode Island General Assembly  
House Veterans' Affairs Committee  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903**

**Representative Samuel Azzinaro, Chair**

**Remarks of  
Melissa J. Willette  
New England Region Liaison  
United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office**

**Support of: HB 5387 – An Act Relating To Military Affairs and Defense – Rhode Island Veterans' Home**

Representative Azzinaro and honorable members of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee; the Department of Defense is grateful for the opportunity to support the policies reflected in HB 5387, which proposes to add the military branch of the United States Space Force to definitions of "armed forces" that involve programs and services for which members of the armed forces are eligible.

My name is Melissa Willette. I am the New England Region Liaison at the United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office.

With the creation of the Space Force in 2019, changes in force structure have occurred at the federal level. To ensure that state laws align with federal changes, the Department perceives that states can minimize disruptions in benefits and services for service members and dependents by updating various definitions of military service in statute to include the Space Force.

Right here in Rhode Island, this policy would allow Guardians to access the Rhode Island Veterans' Home and the Veterans' Cemetery; both are benefits earned through distinguished service to our country.

We thank the Committee for considering the legislation before you, and your advocacy on this committee in supporting our service members and their families. And another thank you to the Chairman, for both his military service and sponsorship of HB 5387. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

**Melissa J. Willette**  
New England Region Liaison  
(CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT)  
Defense-State Liaison Office