



MANPOWER AND  
RESERVE AFFAIRS

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

**April 09, 2026**

**Rhode Island General Assembly  
House Committee on Veterans Affairs  
Providence, RI 02903**

**Representative Samuel Azzinaro, Chair  
Representative Deborah Fellela, Vice Chair**

**Remarks of  
Melissa J. Willette  
New England Regional Liaison  
Defense-State Liaison Office**

Chairman Azzinaro and honorable members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee; the Department of War is grateful for the opportunity to provide comment on the policies reflected in HB 8125, which aims to increase access to flexible enrollment options for military families with school-age children.

My name is Melissa Willette. I am the New England Regional Liaison at the Defense-State Liaison Office, operating under the direction of the Under Secretary of War for Personnel and Readiness. We represent the Department and establish relationships with state and local leaders on issues currently impacting our service members and their families.

Approximately 185,000 U.S. military children move between schools annually. Military service members are routinely reassigned to new duty stations in the summer due to mission and training requirements. As a result of these summer moves, those service members may potentially miss their child's school registration and other important application dates that occur in the spring. Long-term negative impacts include having to shift their planned courses of study, which may require the student to take courses in summer school, or even force that military-connected child to graduate later than their peers.

Allowing military families to enroll their children, register for classes, and apply for specialized programs at the same time as their peers, prior to physically arriving at their location, will help to facilitate uninterrupted educational progress during the family's transition between military duty assignments.

With 1900 active-duty military children in this state, Rhode Island is in a unique position to have a positive effect on the educational experiences of military children and families. While Guard and Reserve service members do not typically move as often, this policy will also positively impact these families when they do. The intent of this policy is not to offer an advantage or

priority over other students, but simply to provide military families access to educational programs and courses at the same time as their in-state peers.

In closing, we are grateful for the tremendous efforts Rhode Island has historically made to support our military members and their families. We appreciate the opportunity to support the policies reflected in HB 8125 and thank Chairman Azzinaro for his sponsorship.

Thank you for taking the time to consider and deliberate on these policies. Should you have any questions, I can be reached at [melissa.j.willette3.civ@mail.mil](mailto:melissa.j.willette3.civ@mail.mil) or by phone at 703-623-2035.

Sincerely,

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