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**Minnesota State Legislature
Veterans and Military Affairs Finance Policy
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155**

Representative Jerry Newton, Chair

**Remarks of
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United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office**

Support of: HF 4451 – Purple Star Program designation established

Testimony

Honorable Chairman Newton and distinguished Committee members, the Department of Defense is grateful for the opportunity to support the policies reflected in House File 4451, sponsored by Representative Peggy Bennett, which establishes the Purple Star Program in Minnesota.

I am Shane Preston, the Great Lakes Region Liaison at the United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office, operating under the direction of Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. We represent the Department and establish relationships with state leaders across the country who are concerned for our troops and their families' welfare by harmonizing state and federal law and regulation on policy problems of national significance. I thank you for the opportunity to address you today and thank you for your support of our service members and their families.

With each move, military service members face numerous challenges as many bring their spouses and children to resettle into new communities and attend new schools. Mobile military students face issues such as gaps and overlaps in curriculum, different graduation requirements, course placement disruption, and many other hurdles when changing schools. Besides the academic issues, these students also face social and emotional challenges of relocation, such as leaving supportive social networks and activities, to start new again.

Purple Star Program

Purple Star Schools are military-friendly schools that have demonstrated a commitment to students and families connected to our nation's military. Designated schools have met specific state requirements to support the unique situations facing military students and their families. This legislation gives Minnesota the potential to create a robust network of local, state, and national stakeholders and cultivate competency in the area of military-connected student transition, offering Minnesota's Purple Star Schools the opportunity to demonstrate their cultural

fluency to parents and families. A Minnesota Purple Star School is not only a badge of honor for the school and district, it is a recognition of effort that signals to incoming families that they will be welcomed and well-supported.

The Department is hopeful Minnesota will soon join the over 40 states that have established a statewide Purple Star School policy since 2017. A study of four such programs by the Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL) at Columbia University reported that the Purple Star program is anchored by two parallel goals: (1) building and recognizing the capacity of schools and districts to serve military-connected students and families; and (2) helping families identify the schools and districts that are best prepared to meet their needs.¹

Data from the CPRL study indicates that that state-level initiatives have made considerable progress on the first aim.² The process of creating and implementing a statewide Purple Star program has naturally become easier with each new state to embark upon such an initiative. The founding program in Ohio did much of the legwork, bringing together stakeholders from different military branches and schools to formulate the basic requirements seen in most iterations of the program, including the version proposed in this legislation, which utilizes the DoD best practice for Purple Star programming.

The report noted that as a local opt-in, the Purple Star program already gained traction with hundreds of school districts. While the majority of these districts already had programming in place for military-connected students before seeking the formal designation, staff and faculty indicated “they have benefitted from the Purple Star application process and the encouragement to refine and expand programming related to the program designation requirements.”³

As our military members and their families move from state to state, providing for a smooth educational transition for their children is key to eliminating one of the largest concerns the parents face. Purple Star is of course, a bottom-up initiative that has no central governing body. Thus, DoD has identified as a best practice that states utilize their discretion to design and administer a statewide version of the program, to ensure efficaciousness through research-driven components:

- Designated Point-of-Contact: this legislation will appoint a staff member to act as a liaison between military families and the school, easing military-connected students’ enrollment and acclimation period;
- Professional Development: this legislation have districts train staff on the unique considerations for and needs of military-connected students;

¹ Columbia Law School Center for Public Research and Leadership. *A Study of the Purple Star School Designation Program: Summary Report*. January 4, 2021. Retrieved from <https://cpri.law.columbia.edu/content/study-purple-star-school-designation-program-summary-report>

² *Id.* p. 7

“Hundreds of schools and districts have opted into the program, with those in our sample citing as incentives for participation both the relative ease of enacting program components and the value of being recognized. Better yet, schools and districts report that their efforts to refine existing programming and launch new initiatives have fostered more supportive environments for military-connected students and families. In fact, 77 percent of school staff survey respondents report that the Purple Star program has had a positive impact on their school.”

³ *Id.* p. 1

- Dedicated Webpage: Minnesota’s Purple Star schools may develop a dedicated page on the school or district website with easily accessible information and resources for military-connected families;
- Transition Programs: Minnesota’s Purple Star schools will implement a transition program to welcome and socially acclimate incoming military-connected students; and
- Military Recognition Events: this Purple Star program will host, at least once per year, programming and events to celebrate and honor service members and military-connected students, families, and community members.

In the CPRL study, “Seventy-seven percent of schools report that the program has had a “positive” or “very positive” impact on the school overall, with no schools reporting a “negative” or “very negative” outcome. Further, 77 percent observe that the program has specifically helped improve their relationships with military-connected families, again with no schools reporting a negative impact.”⁴ “Fifty-seven percent and 53 percent of schools link an improvement in their students’ social-emotional development and academic experience to Purple Star programming, with no schools reporting a detrimental impact. Though a close to half of respondents noted no change, this is likely partially attributable to the fact that many schools had Purple Star-required programming in place before earning the designation.”⁵

In a set of parallel surveys aimed at families, “broadly speaking, a majority of families reported having better experiences at Purple Star schools than at non-designated institutions. Fifty-seven percent of parents and 50 percent of students noted that their experience at a designated school had been better than their experiences at non-designated institutions. This result is particularly notable in light of the fact that many families were reporting on Purple Star schools that they had only attended remotely due to COVID-19 restrictions.”⁶ Parents also reported that Purple Star programming had a positive social-emotional impact on their children.”⁷

The clarity and precision derived from Minnesota communicating clear expectations and responsibilities at the state level ensures standardization and creates consistency as the program scales and families move more frequently between Purple Star schools, even to and from other states.

DoD recommends a state-level implementation effort to ensure that designated schools act with reasonable fidelity, provide models for core components including feedback to applicant schools that miss the mark, develop measurement systems to evaluate Purple Star impact, and leverage the program to establish formal networks.

⁴ *Id.* p. 31

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Id.* p. 32

⁷ *Ibid.*

“Of particular interest is the notable difference between parents whose children had attended a Purple Star school and those who had not: 77 percent of parents in Purple Star schools were satisfied with their children’s social-emotional experience, compared to just 54 percent of their peers in non-designated schools. This result is echoed in the student data: 61 percent of students reported that they felt welcomed when they first started attending their Purple Star school. These results suggest that designated schools are offering strong social-emotional support.”

As Minnesota is already home to over 1,000 active duty service members and over 21,000 members in the Guard and Reserves, it has the benefit of being able to draw upon existing expertise and engagement with existing stakeholders.⁸ Purple Star also creates an opportunity for military-impacted schools to bridge the gap between educators and evaluators of granular K-12 metrics utilized in basing decisions by the military services, such as the Department of the Air Force.⁹

In closing, let me say that we are grateful to Representative Newton for having this legislation drafted and shepherding this up until this point and we are also grateful for Representative Bennett for sponsoring and being our champion. On behalf of the Department of Defense, we thank you for considering HF 4451 and urge a yes vote today.

Sincerely,

Shane Preston

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⁸ DMDC, Dec. 31, 2022.

⁹ Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission. *2020 Annual Business Meeting Minutes*. p. 13. Thursday, October 1, 2020. https://mic3.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-ABM-MINUTES_DAY1-DRAFT.pdf