

## **Strengthening Military Households by Decreasing the Barriers to Work**

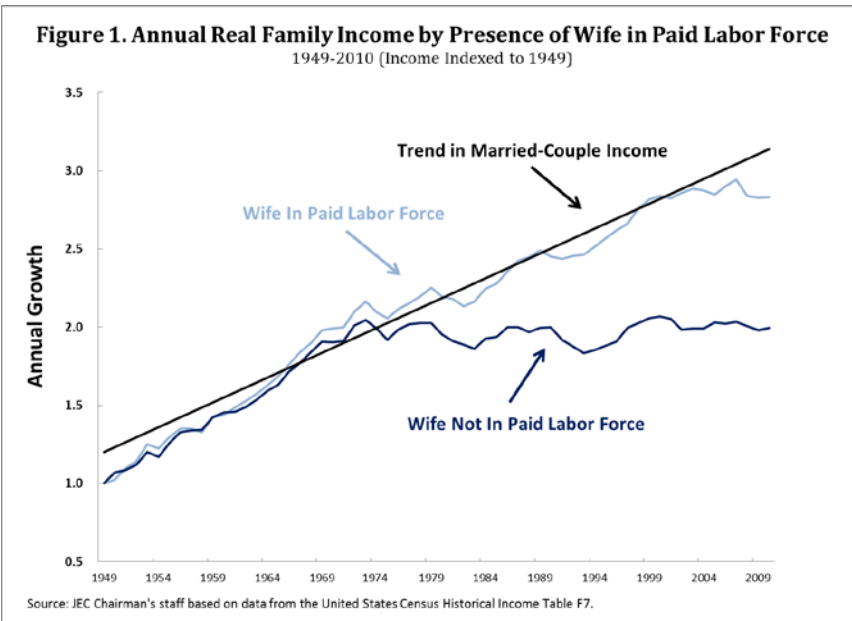
The majority of active duty servicemembers are married with spouses who are either working or looking for work.<sup>1</sup> However, the unique challenges of military life can make having a successful career difficult for military spouses. The frequent moves required of military families disrupt career progression, and are especially challenging for those in professions that require state-level certification or licensing. Recognizing that military spouses' career satisfaction is crucial to the recruitment and retention of servicemembers, Congress, the Department of Defense and the states should continue to work together to alleviate barriers that impede military spouses from securing employment and building fulfilling careers.

---

**REPORT BY  
THE U.S. CONGRESS JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN'S STAFF  
Senator Bob Casey, Chairman**

## The Importance of Dual Earners

Decades ago, families could rely on one income to support their households. During the 1950s and 1960s, a single-earner family experienced essentially the same rate of income growth as a dual-



income family. (See **Figure 1.**) But, during the past four decades, families in which both spouses work outside the home have achieved faster rates of income growth.

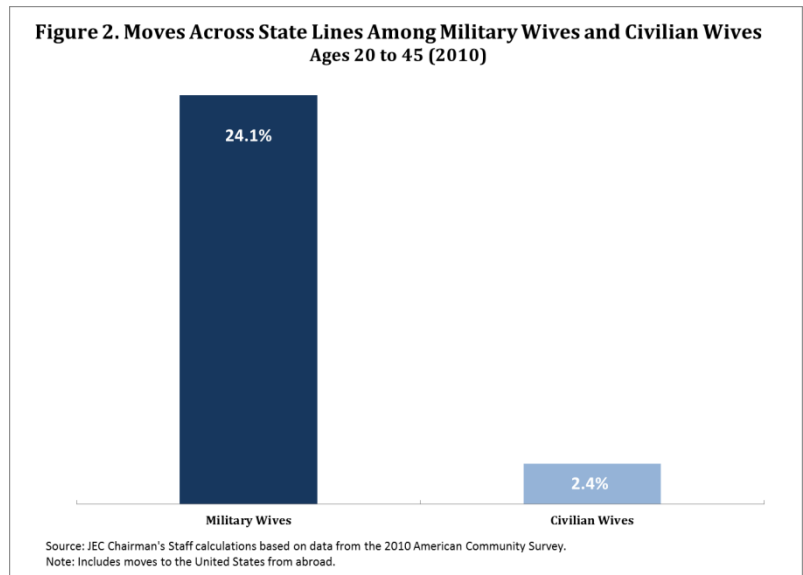
Because a single income may not be sufficient for a family's economic security, many spouses choose to work outside the home. This is true for military and civilian families alike. Though military compensation provides extra benefits to support servicemembers and their families, many military families rely on two

incomes to maintain financial stability.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, a military spouse's satisfaction with his or her career likely plays an important role in the servicemember's decision to remain in the military.<sup>3</sup>

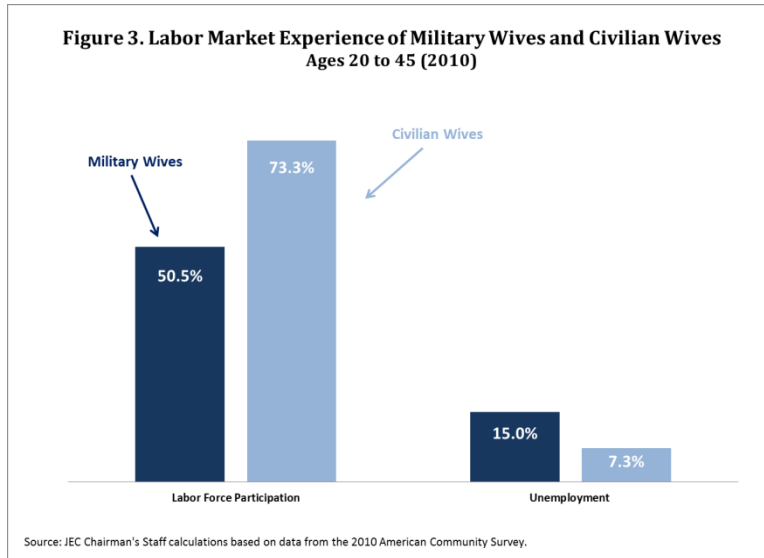
## Frequent Relocations

Relocation due to a spouse's career is not unique to military families. What is unique for spouses of servicemembers is the frequency of moves throughout his or her spouse's military career. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that about one-third of all members of the military move each year.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, 60 percent of servicemembers with a spouse indicated that they stayed at the same location only 1 to 3 years before moving.<sup>5</sup>

Because the vast majority of military spouses are women between the ages of 20 and 45 (94%), the following discussion compares military and civilian wives of that age.<sup>6</sup> Data on mobility from the American Community Survey (ACS) show the stark difference in the number of moves military wives make compared to their civilian peers. In 2010, 24.1 percent of military wives moved across state lines compared to only 2.4 percent of civilian wives.<sup>7</sup> (See **Figure 2.**) Those frequent relocations make it difficult for military wives to find employment and build their careers.



## Military Spouse Employment



Military wives have much lower rates of labor force participation than civilian wives: only 50.5 percent of military wives participate in the labor force, compared to 73.3 percent of civilian wives.<sup>8</sup> (See **Figure 3.**) The requirement to pack your bags, relocate children, find temporary living arrangements and new schools—for assignments that are often as short as a year—does not leave a lot of time to find new employment. Military wives participating in the labor force face a significantly higher unemployment rate than their civilian counterparts. In 2010,

the unemployment rate for military wives was 15.0 percent compared to 7.3 percent for civilian wives.<sup>9</sup> That large difference reflects the difficult labor market situation in which military wives find themselves.

The situation is particularly difficult for those military spouses who pursue professions that require state-level licensing or certification. At least one-third of military spouses in the labor force are in professions that require licenses or certification.<sup>10</sup> (See **Table 1.**) The top three occupations for military spouses – teachers, child care workers and registered nurses – each require licenses or certifications. As a result of frequent moves, military spouses often face re-certification requirements and licensing fees that can be time-consuming and costly. The need to be recertified or licensed when moving on such a frequent basis can hamper a military spouse’s ability to continue to provide the income that he or she provided at the family’s previous location.

Table 1. Top 20 Occupations for Military Spouses in the Labor Force		
Rank	Occupation	Percent of Total
1	Teachers (PreK-12 Grade)*	5.2%
2	Childcare workers*	3.9%
3	Registered nurses*	3.7%
4	Retail salespersons	3.6%
5	Secretaries and administrative assistants	3.5%
6	Waiters and waitresses	3.0%
7	Receptionists and information clerks	2.8%
8	Cashiers	2.8%
9	First-line supervisors/managers of retail sales workers	2.5%
10	Customer service representatives	1.8%
11	First-line supervisors/managers of office and administrative support workers	1.6%
12	Accountants and auditors*	1.6%
13	Nursing, psychiatric and home health aides*	1.5%
14	Managers, all other	1.3%
15	Tellers	1.3%
16	Dental assistants*	1.2%
17	Financial managers	1.2%
18	Postsecondary teachers	1.2%
19	Stock clerks and order fillers	1.2%
20	Other teachers and instructors	1.2%

Source: JEC Chairman's staff calculations based on data from U.S. Departments of Treasury and Defense.

Note: \* denotes occupations that require licenses or certifications.

## Actions to Reduce Barriers to Employment

One barrier to being recertified or relicensed is the cost, which can reach several hundred dollars. The Military Spouse Job Continuity Act (S. 697) would provide a tax credit up to \$500 to any military spouse who has to renew or transfer a professional license or certification.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, there are a number of ways states can facilitate the recertification process due to a military move. These include (1) providing a temporary or provisional license to a military spouse while he or she is completing state license requirements; (2) facilitating the transfer of a spouse's current license or certification which allows the spouse to continue to work in the new location; and (3) expediting application procedures. Eleven states have already introduced legislation, incorporating one of these practices, to allow military spouses greater career mobility.<sup>12</sup>

Frequent moves will continue to be a basic fact of military life. Reducing employment barriers for military spouses will help to ensure that wives and husbands are able to find jobs and build careers during their spouse's military service. In a 2008 Defense Manpower Data Center survey, nearly 40 percent of military spouses indicated that an "easier state-to-state transfer of license" process would have assisted them as they moved.<sup>13</sup> A major part of a servicemember's decision to stay in the military is whether his or her family is able to thrive in the military setting. It is important, therefore, that policymakers at the federal and state levels take actions to ensure that military spouses have the ability to find and maintain employment in the easiest ways possible.

## Sources

<sup>1</sup> JEC Chairman's staff calculations based on data from the 2010 American Community Survey.

<sup>2</sup> For example, servicemembers with dependents receive an increase in their basic housing allowance.

<http://www.military.com/benefits/military-pay/basic-allowance-for-housing/basic-allowance-for-housing-rates.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Lim, Nelson, and David Schulker. "Measuring Underemployment Among Military Spouses." RAND Corporation. [www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND\\_MG918.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND_MG918.pdf). Pg. 4-5. 2010. A 2006 Defense Manpower Data Center survey found that over 60% of military wives felt that they had a strong influence on whether or not their spouse remained in the military.

<sup>4</sup> Government Accountability Office. "Longer Time Between Moves Related to Higher Satisfaction and Retention." <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d01841.pdf>. Pg. 1. August 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Pg. 8.

<sup>6</sup> JEC Chairman's staff calculations based on data from the 2010 American Community Survey. Ninety percent of military spouses are 20- to 45-year-old women.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. The survey asks respondents whether they resided at their current residence one year ago and if they did not, it asks the location from which they moved. Because the ACS is a continuous survey, this sample is based on moves that could have occurred at any point between January 2009 and December 2010. The ACS generally provides higher estimates of mobility than do other surveys.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. In addition, "Supporting our Military Families: Best Practices for Streamlining Occupational Licensing Across State Lines," a joint report of the U.S. Departments of Treasury and Defense, finds that 35% of military spouses are in jobs that require a license or certification.

<sup>11</sup> The Military Spouse Job Continuity Act of 2011, S. 697, 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session. (2011).

<sup>12</sup> USA4Military Families. Department of Defense State Liaison Office.

[http://www.usa4militaryfamilies.dod.mil/pls/psgprod/f?p=USA4:ISSUE:0::::P2\\_ISSUE:2](http://www.usa4militaryfamilies.dod.mil/pls/psgprod/f?p=USA4:ISSUE:0::::P2_ISSUE:2).

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Departments of Treasury and Defense. "Supporting our Military Families: Best Practices for Streamlining Occupational Licensing Across State Lines." Pg 4. February 2012.