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# Continued Eligibility for Developmental Disability Services for Dependents of Military Service Members

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## Senate Bill 55

The policy assures that a child of a service member who has been determined to be eligible for developmental disability services provided by the Department of Health and Human Resources (“DHHR”) shall retain eligibility for those developmental disability services as long as he or she remains a legal resident of the state, regardless of having left the state due to the military service member’s military assignment outside the state. In addition, the DHHR shall permit a dependent who resides out-of-state for military purposes to be placed on the waiting list for developmental disabilities services upon his or her return to the state. Implementing this bill will be a means to not only say we are grateful to our service members but a way to live by them.

## Support for this Bill

The West Virginia Legislature should adopt Senate Bill 55 because of the benefits to those with developmental disabilities and their families, and provides support for military families while doing service to this country.

### Benefits to Families

Military families are assets to national defense and their local communities. They are central to the health and capability of the all-volunteer force and are good neighbors actively engaged in making their civilian communities great places to live. In fact, 78% of military family members have volunteered in their civilian communities in the past year (Blue Star Families, 2017). Yet, service members cannot focus on their military responsibilities if they are concerned about their family at home. Recognizing that so many of our service members have children with developmental disabilities to serve and care for in addition to their nation, our country and state must help them in turn.

### Benefits to People with Developmental Disabilities

People with developmental disabilities benefit from comprehensive long-term services. With such services, people with disabilities are often able to be more active, productive, and independent, which benefits their communities as well. However, these long-term services are difficult to maintain when families relocate. This is especially pressing on military families because they move more frequently than do general population families. As military families transition from one duty station to another, children often attend many different schools. In fact, the average child in a military family will move six to nine times during a school career; that is an average of three times more frequently than non-military families (Department of Defense Department of Education Partnership, 2018).

### Supportive Needs

Managing the needs of children with developmental delays and disabilities and meeting their caregivers’ needs requires collaboration across the health system as well as intersectoral cooperation; however, this collaboration is difficult to establish and maintain when military families routinely relocate. In truth, 56% of military personnel feel that the Department of Defense does not provide adequate support to help children cope with unique military life changes. More significant to Senate Bill 55, 57% of military personnel with a child with special needs do not feel supported by the DoD and their chain of command (Blue Star Families, 2017).

## Summary Statement / What is the Impact?

West Virginia should provide continued services because military families are an asset to our nation, early identification and intervention with developmental disabilities has a significant impact on quality of life, and coordinating services is paramount to maximize the growth and development of children with developmental delays and to assure that they and their caregivers can lead full lives.