

SB 208 Proponent Testimony

Cassie B. Barlow, PhD and Colonel (retired), USAF

President, Strategic Ohio Council for Higher Education

December 9, 2024

Chairwoman Manning, Vice Chair Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of SB 208. I am Cassie B. Barlow, Colonel (retired), United States Air Force. I am also the President at the Strategic Ohio Council for Higher Education. I write to you today in several of my roles – retired AF member, former Commander of Wright Patterson AFB and President of SOCHE.

My family and I were honored to serve our country for 26 years, moving 13 times to different locations all around the world. My daughter attended 10 different schools in 16 years and my husband switched jobs seven times over the years. We clearly became very good at moving. We also became good at gauging communities and their support of military and veterans. When it was time to retire, we looked diligently for a community that was friendly and welcoming to the military and responsive and supportive the needs of Military, Veterans, and their families. We served in many communities that did not have great Military and Veteran services or resources and we frankly couldn't wait to depart those communities, and we never thought even once about settling in that community at a point in the future.

Every year approximately 200K military members either separate or retire from the military. These are people with experience in an occupational specialty, who have skills to share with our great State. With the declining demographics in our state and the increasing jobs due to substantive economic development, we are truly in a talent war. The winning state will be the one that thinks outside the box in terms of attracting talent. Veterans are a valuable talent pool, and the State of Ohio should do everything it can to attract Veterans from around the world to settle in Ohio. Many of the Veterans that we could attract are Veterans who call Ohio their home state and who have many family members currently living with us. We currently have over 6000 Veteran Friendly companies and a plethora of purple star schools. These are all steps in the right direction.

We have made it clear through legislation in our state that we are Military and Veteran friendly. This is what Veterans are looking for when determining a place to settle. It is time to take all of our initiatives to the next level, by supporting Open Enrollment Policies for Military Children. This legislation will allow families to determine the best school for their child to enroll. Every child has unique educational needs, and military parents should have the capability in Ohio to select a school for their child based upon the services offered at that school. This bill is critical for military and veteran families being heartily welcomed into our state.

When military members retire or choose to separate from the military and stay in a particular state, the military and veteran benefits offered in that state are a critical determinant in this decision. Welcoming veterans and their families with open arms with laws that allow for smooth military transitions is a significant benefit for the military in Ohio and can help military members trying to make this important decision regarding where they will settle with their families for the next chapter of their lives.

Chairwoman Manning, Vice Chair Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of SB 208.