



Michigan Supreme Court  
Lansing, Michigan 48909

BRIAN K. ZAHRA  
JUSTICE

MICHIGAN HALL OF JUSTICE  
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Senator Rick Jones, Chairman  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
915 Farnum Building  
Lansing, MI 48909-7536

Transmitted via E-mail  
and Hand Delivery

Re: Support for HB 5288 & HB 5289

Dear Chairman Jones:

Thank you and thanks to all the members of the Judiciary Committee for your consideration of these bills and for allowing me to testify in writing. But for the fact that the Michigan Supreme Court is hearing oral arguments this week, I would testify in person. I write to you as the Michigan Supreme Court's liaison to the Board of Law Examiners. The BLE administers the bar exam twice each year to law school graduates who seek to practice in Michigan. In addition, we review each applicant's character and fitness to practice law in our state. We serve a regulatory function to protect the public who rightfully expect that lawyers licensed in Michigan have a basic level of skill and knowledge.

Preliminarily, one may conclude as a matter of Constitutional separation of powers that the Michigan Supreme Court has the authority to enact rules that would accomplish the ends achieved by these bills. But, as a matter of comity and respect for equal branches of government, I believe it is wise for the Supreme Court and the Legislature to work together to achieve these ends by legislative means.

I want to thank the sponsors, Representative David Maturen and Representative Robert Wittenberg, for sponsoring these common sense steps to help the spouses of our military servicemen and women support their families. I also want to thank Representative Maturen and other leaders in the Michigan Legislature who have served and continue to serve our nation in the military. Those who have served know something that we don't fully comprehend, and that is how much military spouses sacrifice to support their families. It's not just repeated moves or extended separation from their loved ones. The sacrifice is deeper than that and reflects a commitment to serving America for which we should all be very grateful. Our military servicemen and women are heroes, but their spouses are heroes, too. This is why these bills should become law.

We all know about the importance of hiring veterans, and I am thankful to the many companies that have reached out to hire veterans. But what we don't hear enough about is the importance of hiring military spouses. Because after all, those spouses bring those same positive attributes to the workplace – dedication, loyalty, courage, flexibility, leadership, and problem-solving. You name the job and a military spouse can probably do it.

Just think of the challenges of earning a law degree and passing the bar under normal conditions. Just imagine accomplishing that feat when a spouse is deployed overseas. These bills help those spouses who have sacrificed so much by helping them do what they were trained to do: be lawyers. Specifically, HB 5289 permits the spouse of an active military member to be admitted to the Bar without examination provided that she or he meets some simple qualifications. Most importantly, the spouse must be licensed and in good standing in another state. The companion bill, HB 5288, provides that the military spouse as qualified under the terms of this legislation remains a valid member of the bar until their spouse is no longer in military service, they are no longer married, or they have been permanently transferred.

The benefits are substantial. Here are just a few that I want to highlight:

First, military families can avoid the time, expense and stress of multiple bar exams;

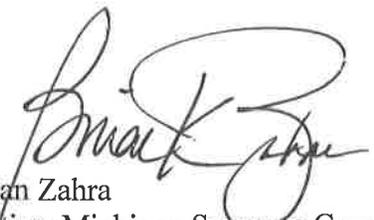
Second, barriers to employment are removed for military spouses;

Third, it brings stability to military families, increasing retention of top officers and enlisted members; and,

Fourth, it helps military families maintain a source of income.

It is time for Michigan to join the 18 other states that have similar licensing accommodations for military spouses. We can never do enough to thank the women and men who serve in America's military. But these bills are a step in the right direction to show how much we appreciate not just their service and sacrifice, but also the service and sacrifice of their families—especially their spouses.

Respectfully submitted,



Brian Zahra  
Justice, Michigan Supreme Court