

March 30, 2021

To Whom it May Concern:

I am a military spouse with over 20 years of service. We have three children and have moved multiple times with school age children. We have never been in a choice state, nor did we understand there may not be a slot for our children at the neighborhood school. We looked for houses in specific neighborhoods where we wanted our children to attend school. We were very fortunate when moving to Colorado Springs to have friends currently stationed there. They volunteered to help us enroll our children in school. We were confused and let them know we would have plenty of time to do so when we moved in June. Little did we know, if we had waited, our children would not have gotten into the neighborhood school. My daughter's brand-new elementary school was close to being maxed out in some grade levels the first year. We had to enroll our students online, then physically bring in the rest of the required paperwork. Our friend was willing to take our paperwork for us, but we had to first get a power of attorney for her and mail her the documents. The documents that were required to be brought in; I was not comfortable putting them in the mail. It worked out for our family, but I witness daily families who are not as fortunate.

Today, I work as a school secretary in Academy School District 20. The housing market is crazy here, and there are new neighborhoods that are going up all around the school. They are projecting over 200 houses to be completed in the next 5 months, and the school that these houses are zoned for is currently near max capacity. Military families are buying new builds, with builders and realtors, telling them yes, they are zoned for the school right across the street. Unfortunately, they may be zoned for that school, but due to the "choice window" closing in March, there are no available seats for their student at the "neighborhood school." Every year our school accepts multiple "choice students," and we are only required to hold seats for 10 neighborhood students. 10 seats is not nearly enough for the number of new builds there are and the number of military members and their families moving in. The district does have a second "choice window" open in early June, but military families are preparing to PCS or are in the middle of a PCS when this window opens and closes. It is during this second "choice window" that any extra seats over the 10 reserved for neighborhood students are given to students who apply.

At least once a week, military members or their spouses call to inquire about the process of enrolling their student(s) at our school. I want to cry with them on the phone, as I explain the process, and the fact that we do not have room for their student(s). I must explain that their student will be enrolled in an overflow school, as close as possible to their "home" school and as soon as there is an opening at their "home" school, they can transfer back. District does not provide transportation to the overflow school. It is the family's responsibility to get the student(s) to and from school. The district feels like this is a good solution, but military families make enough sacrifices and moving their children every 2-3 years. Why would they want to move their student to a second school during a three-year assignment? They become accustomed to a school, its rules and expectations, make new friends, and then 6 months or a year later are offered a seat at their "home" school. This is not a solution for military families. This causes more emotional stress on the military member and their family.

My name is Rachel Beard. I would like to provide my testimony with respect to House Bill 21-1217, Military Family Open Enrollment in Public Schools

I am a retired Air Force veteran and current Space Force spouse of 18 years and proud mom to two Space Force children.

Since April of 2006 we have been assigned to Schriever AFB in Colorado Springs three separate times, the last two assignments worders to live on base. Both times my children were school age and school choice factored into many of our decisions.

Our first assignment living on Schriever, my husband received his command selection in the fall of 2014, however we didn't have orders until April of 2015 and didn't receive a housing address until May of 2015, thereby missing the Colorado Springs school choice windows and having to enroll our children in District 22, Ellicott School District. As they were going into 5th and 2nd grade, we decided we would give Ellicott Elementary School a try. Our oldest had been in Gifted programs for the previous two years and Ellicott didn't have a gifted program available but they assured me they could provide her the support she needed. Unfortunately they were unable to support her and as she was going into the middle school with no support there either, we chose to move our children to District 20 for our second year. By this point, this was my children's fourth school, with my youngest going to a different school every year. As this was a two year assignment this guaranteed that they would only go to that school for one year but it was worth it from their and my perspective for their education.

Three years later, my husband was selected for command on Schriever a second time in the fall of 2019. Same timeline, selection in fall of 2019, no orders until mid May 2020, no address until 31 May 2020, and were unable to sign a lease on that home to prove residency until 11 June 2020. I contacted the district multiple times during the choice window to no avail. I was finally told in early January that I had to wait for the summer window and that I would need to be present, in person, on 1 June 2020 for the post-choice enrollment window where I could choose a single school to apply to in hopes that my child would get in. That date was prior to our arrival on military orders on 9 June 2020. In a bizarre turn of events, COVID actually helped us because we were able to do it virtually without being present for the window. The reality is that my children, once again were at the mercy of arbitrary dates that we can't meet due to our unique assignment challenges.

This bill is a vital first step to ensure Colorado supports military families in similar situations. I can not simply choose to live in the school district that best meets my children's educational needs. I don't have that option. The school district that supports my base doesn't have the necessary resources to best educate my children. My oldest is pursuing the International Baccalaureate program, of which there are only three or four schools accredited for the program in Colorado Springs. My youngest is STEM focused, D22 simply does not have the resources for my children and I can't live in the district that does.

For those that are not required to live on base, they are still unable to meet choice windows simply due to the residency requirements. By allowing military families more flexibility for open enrollment windows by providing alternate methods for proving residency through letters

in lieu of orders and using the Military Family Life Consultant installation address Colorado can better support our military families.

Thank you for your consideration,
//Signed//

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April 3, 2021

To the Colorado House Education Committee,

I am writing to ask you to support HB21-1217, Concerning Active Duty Military Family Enrollment In Public Schools. I have been a military spouse for thirty years, with children in schools in three states. I believe this legislation will make quality public education more accessible to military children. During the total of 15 years we have lived in Colorado, we have chosen a combination of homeschooling, charter schools, public schools, and private schools. My youngest child attended public school for 7th-9th grade while we were living out at Schriever AFB. Being able to choose him into a school near my job made it possible for me to take a job AND for my son to attend a high performing school. I am very grateful.

This legislation, by allowing the use of the School Liaison address for dependents who know they are coming to Colorado, will allow more families to compete during the choice windows and choose the schools that best fit with the needs of their military children and their military families. I urge you to support it.

Both of my children, now adults, call Colorado "home." The youngest is attending a Colorado University and we have plans to retire in the state. Thank you for considering this legislation and continuing to be a military friendly state. More military families will have the opportunity to attain quality education and our military services may be able to retain more servicemen and women who will not have to serve at the expense of their children's educations.

Very Respectfully,
Tonia Shaw

House Education

04/08/2021 1:30 PM

Testimony - HB21-1217 Military Family Open Enrollment In Public Schools

First Name Last Name Position Represer Text of Testimony

Madam Chair, committee members,

My name is Jessica Norsky. I am domiciled in Colorado, a registered voter of District 19, a military spouse and a mom of three children who have moved upwards of 12 times in nearly 19 years.

My oldest, Peter, now a senior in High School, has attended 9 different schools. Three of these schools were in Colorado Springs and another was in Denver.

One of the most important, but also most challenging factors we, military families, face when moving duty locations has everything to do with the education of our children. Which schools can they attend? Will it be a good fit for their gifts and their strengths? Will it help them grow in the areas that still need work?

This is not an old challenge. In fact, I applaud Colorado's efforts in mitigating this challenge and being an Open Enrollment State. As you know, Open Enrollment helps states level the playing field in education, especially for underserved children, both military and non-military alike. It also allows families to make intentional decisions regarding education and to select schools that are the best fit for educational values and priorities.

But as you also know, there is still work to be done. The School Choice window closes before most families even receive orders and certainly before they are able to secure a new address. For instance, the School Choice window for the next school year, 2021-22, was only open from January 4-March 17, 2021, making it virtually impossible for any incoming families to have a chance at attending a school of their choice and denying them all the positive outcomes of Open Enrollment.

This is why HB21-1217 is so important to me, to my children, and to all your military families, past, present and future. Colorado has the opportunity to not only alleviate this hardship, but to set the example for other states. Now that is a state I am proud to call "home."

Madam Chair, committee members, I thank you for your time and I eagerly await the outcome of your decision.

Jessica Norsky For Self

March 30, 2021

Colorado's Choice Schools may have worked for military families and Colorado residents in the past, but in today's post-COVID world it causes more stress and anxiety for military families. Colorado Springs, where there are 5 military installations is growing faster than the districts can budget and build schools. There are military members buying houses and paying taxes in a district where students from out of district are benefitting by receiving the services and dedication of the educators and staff that the military members are paying for. Military families sacrifice so much for this nation, and often, they are far from their extended family for support. Please consider making a move to this beautiful state easier for military families and their children.

Sincerely,

Lisa R. Rigby