



**Regulation Matters:
a CLEAR conversation**

Episode 65: Developing a Military Occupational Crosswalk May 23, 2023

Line Dempsey: Welcome back to our podcast, Regulation Matters: a CLEAR conversation. Once again, I'm your host, Line Dempsey. I'm currently the Chief Compliance Officer with Riccobene Associates Family Dentistry here in North Carolina and Virginia, and I'm also CLEAR's president for the 2022-2023 membership year.

As many of you are aware, the Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation (or CLEAR) is an association of individuals, agencies, and organizations that comprise the international and global community of professional and occupational regulation. This podcast is an opportunity for you to hear about important topics in our regulatory community.

One current issue that a lot of states are dealing with is the need to reduce licensure barriers for military members, veterans, and military spouses. These are people who often move from state to state due to deployments, who have had experience in the field during their military career, but then find themselves having to start over to meet license requirements for civilian careers. A lot of licensing boards are asking, how can we make that process less burdensome? Joining us today is Andrew LaFratte. He is a Deputy Policy Director with the Pennsylvania Department of State to talk about one of their initiatives. So, Andrew, we're certainly glad to have you with us today.

Andrew LaFratte: Thanks, Line. I'm glad to be here. Thanks for the opportunity to discuss the work that we're doing here in the Keystone State.

Line: Right on. Well, my parents are both from Pennsylvania, so I certainly have a connection there too. Well, as I understand it, the Pennsylvania Department of State developed a military occupational crosswalk to identify and relate civilian career opportunities and requirements to veterans' military experience. So, let's talk about that. Tell me a little bit more about that, and maybe some of the challenges that the veteran community faces when attempting to even try to get a professional license.

Andrew: Yeah, sure. So you know, here in Pennsylvania we have one of the largest veteran populations in the United States. In fact, we ranked fourth in the country on veteran population, with nearly

850,000 veterans. And that constitutes about 8% of Pennsylvania's adult population. You know, every day we enjoy the freedoms and safeties unique to the United States, and we do so because of the hard work of our veterans and the families and the sacrifices that they make. Yet there's often a struggle when obtaining a professional license so veterans and spouses can support themselves and their families.

You know, we've noticed, after doing extensive research that at least on the veteran side, applying for a professional license may be difficult as these individuals attempt to translate their military credentials and experiences that they gain during their time of service into civilian employment qualifications. Uncertainty with the skills translation and transferability is often the major challenge for civilian employers in being able to locate suitable positions for veteran employees in the workplace. So, due to this ambiguity, veterans are often put at a disadvantage when competing with a comparably skilled person who has their training from the private sector.

You know, we mentioned military families. So, even looking at military spouses specifically, you know military families move across state lines very often at an average of every 3 years usually. So, these military spouses often struggle to find and maintain their employment due to these frequent moves. Most of them are mobile workers in the labor market, and that leaves them vulnerable to varying state licensure requirements. The process often is expensive; it's repetitive; it's time consuming. And these regular moves create a financial burden on these families. So, doing anything to reduce the amount of time to help with the portability of a license, and to provide any temporary licensure options, or anything that can just help get a military spouse quickly into the workforce are things that should be evaluated.

Line: Let's talk about this, and I like the term the “crosswalk”. So, tell me a little bit more about this military occupational crosswalk. What the purpose behind it is, and how does it work?

Andrew: Yeah, sure. So, we developed this military occupational crosswalk essentially to identify and relate civilian career opportunities and requirements to a veteran’s military experience. And how we did that is, we're in a unique position, I think, at least in our Department of State, that we are the professional licensing arm of our State. I know in other states it's structured under perhaps a department of commerce, or there is a specific licensing division within their states, but here, in Pennsylvania it's organized under our State Department. So, you know, in addition to election administration, we also do professional licensing. We have 29 different boards and commissions under the Pennsylvania Department of State that license nearly 130 different individual occupations, and this can range from health care licenses like a nurse, or a doctor, or a dentist. But then we also have business related licenses, such as an accountant, or an engineer, or a real estate person, or a barber or cosmetologist.

So, what we did is we looked at all the initial licensure requirements that we had for the State and compared those qualification details to nearly 300 military occupations for Department of State licensure.

So, we had 300 related military occupations. Seventy of those occupations that are featured in the crosswalk are within the healthcare field, and I think that's very important to state, because you know, the health care profession sort of took a beating over the Covid emergency over the last few years, and I think a lot of States have experienced vulnerabilities and staffing those positions. So, this was another tool that we can say, hey, this can help bring in individuals into our health care related professions, qualified individuals that have attained their experience, education, and training from the US Military.

So, within this crosswalk we matched licensed professions that we administered to relevant professions across all the branches of the military. So, the overall purpose of the crosswalk is to relate the skills, the credentials, education, anything that was obtained in the military, and to help our service members or veterans align those with civilian opportunities.

At the end of the day, the crosswalk helps determine which of those military occupations are deemed essentially substantial, or deemed substantially equivalent to Pennsylvania's requirements for licensure. And if there is a gap- a skill gap or training gap, anything that exists - by reviewing the crosswalk between the civilian occupational licensure requirements and a veteran's current knowledge or skills, that's identified. And that's another tool to help the service member or veteran sort of create their own roadmap of 'Hey, I'm right there. Maybe I need a few more courses in this', you know, whatever your specific field is. Then they kind of have that game plan of what they need to do in order to gain civilian licensure. So, it's not just starting all over from scratch from square one after they complete their military service. We're acknowledging their time in the military, what they accomplished. And then we're just trying to get them over that finish line to becoming a fully credentialed license professional within our state.

Line: Andrew, I know you mentioned kinda the number of health care obviously being a large number, and in the pandemic having an effect on the ability for folks to either find people to work or be able to deal with people that were dealing with burnout. What inspired you for developing the crosswalk? Was it the pandemic, or did you start that before then?

Andrew: That's a great question. You know we recognized there was a need to develop this crosswalk by hearing directly from our veterans and service members who express difficulty when attempting to translate their skills and credentials into professional licensure requirements. We found this out actually during the pandemic, for sure, from the issues that were raised as a result of the pandemic taking place, but also related, but not related, I guess at the same time we had issued a **veterans licensure survey** out to nearly 500 veterans, military spouses, and service members across our state. And this was for individuals who are current license holders with us, or who may have applied for a license with us in the past and they were denied for whatever reason. So we were able to find a really great sample size of individuals who were willing to step up and provide very honest feedback to us. And that survey was really instrumental in us getting to the idea of creating this crosswalk.

We had a lot of findings that came in. And basically the two main ones that we took from it was again difficulty in transferring military credentials and experience into our occupational licensure requirements, as well as respondents coming through in this survey saying that acceptance of the military training experience would be most beneficial to veterans. And we also found for military spouses that licensure fee waivers were most beneficial when obtaining a licensure, and that harkens back to when I was speaking earlier about the military families moving every 3 years. So, doing this veterans study and actually hearing directly from the population really helped us out and really gave us a great perspective, because, you know as I've talked about this crosswalking and other avenues, we know the licensing side of things here at Department of State. You know we're the regulatory arm. We know what it takes to be a licensed professional. We know the Practice Act. We know all the guidance and what is needed in order to protect the public, while also being able to promote the industry. But we didn't really know much specific about these populations.

So, developing this research survey, getting this out to veterans and military spouses across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, was really helpful to get honest feedback and being able to know where we're at and what we're not doing to help these people out, but also what can we do to increase this, and to provide more assistance to this community that often gets overlooked when it comes to occupational licensure. So, doing the survey was a really great tool and inspiration for us to kinda have the reasoning of like, 'hey, this crosswalk is needed. This is something that's desperately needed and is asked for essentially by the public.'

So, we took that recommendation, and we ran with it. And you know now we're here at the finished product of it. So, it's just really great to see it go from the whole life cycle from just it being a concept that was born out of a survey comment essentially, and how we took that to heart and really ran with it in a span of just a few years. We're able to create, essentially, this database, if you will. But essentially just this information repository of what a veteran or a military spouse needs to do to get to that level of civilian licensure.

Line: Well, that I think you're starting to touch on something that I'm interested in. How did this develop? How is this cross work developed over the course of time? I understand the reason why you started it. But what's happened since then, and then, who actually is using the crosswalk? But let's start with first, how the development this kind of changed.

Andrew: Yeah, sure. So, developing the crosswalk, it was a pretty lengthy process. I mean, this was about a 2-year effort, and if you count the survey itself, this would be about a 3-year effort. Because it was about a year to develop a survey - get comfortable on the questions that we wanted to ask, actually administering the survey, collecting responses for about 6 months, and then analyzing those responses as they came in.

We developed a veterans licensure report that was disseminated out to our General Assembly, as well as our Executive Office and Secretary of State's office and Governor's policy office here within the State.

It was sent out to other stakeholders like our State Department of Military Veterans Affairs or Labor and Industry folks, even our Department of Education amongst other groups that interact with us basically on a licensure basis, but also interact with us in terms of representing veterans and that population. So, there were a lot of stakeholders involved, and getting that information out after we had the survey compiled and the findings and everything - that was about a year.

And then starting the crosswalk research itself. First that started with compiling a list of all the applicable licensed professions that we regulate here in Department of State, and I mentioned earlier that touches about 130 different individual license types. Then we compiled the initial licensure requirements for those professions, which include the education, examination, experience, requirements that an application must obtain in order to be issued that initial license.

Next, we researched various COOL databases - they stand for credentialing opportunities online databases. Each service branch has one of these databases where you can find information about certifications and licensing, as well as the military experience, training, education.

We used that information to determine which military occupations are related to the professions that we regulate. And we also went on the service branches' websites, because even if you go on their website, you can get the military occupational codes. You can get the typical job duties, the education or training that they'll attain during the military service. Some military professions require a degree, other others may not; others may have just a combination of experience and military training. We were able to find what qualifications are required to perform that role in the military, if they had to pass an examination, or if there's some sort of officer training that they must attain.

And then also we were able to find any related credentials that were offered by the specific service branch while training the military applicant. There's certain credentials that are offered by each branch. Just thinking about like, for accounting there might be a public finance sort of credential, or some sort of financial management credential that is offered by the service branch, and that would go into the license for consideration on the private side when our boards are looking at these things.

After we compiled that information from the COOL sites, as well as directly from the military branch sites of each occupation. And when I say we, I mean myself, my policy team, as well as the Board Councils for each of our 29 licensing boards and commissions - you know, it was an agency-wide effort to identify the military occupations that we felt are closely related to our civilian license types that we administer and locate the applicable military occupational codes for each profession. And those codes can be easily found on either the COOL sites or on the military service branch websites themselves, on those recruiting sites where they show the list of different professions that you can enter if you sign up for a specific service branch.

So, we compared the department's initial requirements that we gathered very early on in the process to these requirements of each military occupational code that we researched and found for those 300 military professions, and we determined which military occupations would be considered substantially

equivalent to our own State's requirements.

After we did that, we identified skill gaps in training, experience or education, and that's noted in the crosswalk for certain professions. So, the crosswalk basically has, I guess you could say, two classes of professions. There's certain military occupations that are basically good to go. You know, as long as you served in that role in the military, you have the education that the military asks of you, and you have all the related examinations passed that are needed for a license, then you're basically one for one. That applicant would be considered substantially equivalent, and they could be issued a license pretty quickly.

Then there's a second class of military applicants that may use this crosswalk, and they may, depending on their experience - it's all case by case right, and that's something that the Board reviews. But they may have a skill gap in their resume, in their training and education, and that's something that they can look towards the crosswalk. And if that gap is identified, it's noted where the veteran or service member should obtain these necessary qualifications prior to applying to one of our licensing boards for a professional license.

And then just to go back to your first question of who uses the crosswalk - the crosswalk is a resource that we hope people are using in an education capacity. We're hoping that it educates our State legislature, the General Assembly, as well as our licensing boards and commissions, all 29 of them, the veteran service member community, as well as public and private employers on how the military training experience aligns with civilian education and work experience. Obviously, this is primarily a tool for the veterans. But we're also hoping in an overarching way, it's a tool just for the veteran stakeholder and employer community to kind of just bridge that gap and reduce that ambiguity that comes along with military training and experience, and showing that this is pretty comparable to training that you would receive in the private sector or through the typical collegiate route. This is essentially the same training. And yes, there could be some small skill gaps, or whatever, but there's no reason why a military applicant should have to start from square one when applying for a professional license when they already essentially have done the job in oftentimes a more stressful situation by performing that role in the military.

Line: Yeah, 100%. And I can certainly see this being a tool that the recruiters could potentially use when they've got a young individual in their office looking to sign up for the military, and interested in different things - 'hey, look, this also gives you an education that will lead towards licensure in another state with the profession once you finish everything.' And maybe hopefully the military looks at the gaps that you're discussing there, and maybe tries to fill those in and down the road just to make that portability even more smooth.

How did you communicate this, the release of this crosswalk to the stakeholders?

Andrew: Yeah. So, we used various methods to communicate out the launch of the crosswalk tool. Number one, and I mentioned them earlier, was working with our partners within the Commonwealth

at other agencies. Primarily I'd like to give a shout out to our Pennsylvania Department of Military Veterans Affairs, DMVA, as well as our Pennsylvania Department of Education. They were very helpful in spreading awareness, not only of the veterans survey, which was really the kick-off to all of this work, but also spreading awareness to the military and service members community. And also especially DMVA was very helpful in giving us really concrete feedback on the crosswalk tool itself, but also getting it in front of a group of veterans to use it in a focus group capacity. We were able to get some really good feedback directly from individuals who would be using the crosswalk. So that was very helpful for us.

We also utilized our situation of being able to reach a large base of Pennsylvania through our press releases and social media posts. You know, obviously being a very high-ranking State agency, we have those communication tools available to us, and we have that presence within the online presence as well as social media presence. We promoted the crosswalk on our own website as well as our E-licensing website, having a link to it on there. So, if somebody was just going directly right to our E-licensing website, they can see that this tool's available. If they're a veteran or military spouse or service member, and it was something they were unaware of, they can easily access it from there.

Ourselves as a policy office, we've had several presentations to our licensing boards and commissions who have really taken an interest in this tool. We've presented to the US Department of Defense on this work. The platform here that CLEAR was able to give us to promote it has been very helpful, as well as just presenting it to our General Assembly and other agencies.

We released this crosswalk in late January/ early February of this year, and you know things have been really going well with it. But we're continuing the roll out with it, gaining awareness with it. And what we're hoping is to continuously have feedback and make this sort of a living document, right? So, every couple of years we're gonna have to go back and fine tune and update things as either our licensing boards change requirements up or if requirements are changed on the military side with the service branches. But you know, we're hoping to gain more professions into the crosswalk eventually, and maybe talk to Department of Education to try to add teachers, or to add some other professions across the other agencies that they oversee license and administer and include this into this crosswalk tool.

Line: This might be too soon to ask this question, since you just rolled this out within the last 4 or 5 months. Have you seen or noticed any type of impact? Have license numbers increased specifically related to military or spouses of military? Have you been able to track that yet?

Andrew: Yeah. So actually, after we after we did the licensure study, we presented those findings to the General Assembly that I discussed, and when we had our recommendations in there, and one of them was this military occupational crosswalk. So, the findings from the report were rolled into House Bill 1168 of 2021, which eventually became **Act 35 of 2022** here in Pennsylvania. Basically, that bill had a few provisions in there. It asks for the Department to collect data on military applicants by asking them a question on the licensure application if an individual is a military spouse or a veteran or a

service member. So, we're able to now to collect that data. And hopefully, by the end of the year, we'll have better numbers on that. But also military spouse licensure fees on the initial side have been waived as a result of this work and in this bill. So, we've seen an immediate impact in that military spouses are not facing the financial burdens that they once were by coming here to Pennsylvania.

Also all military applicants, spouses, service members, veterans - they all receive expedited licensure application reviews now. So as soon as they identify that they are in that target group of individuals, their licensure applications are pushed right to the top of the queue and are reviewed rather immediately.

We've also seen the impact that it's just a great way to market ourselves here in Pennsylvania. We're open for business, and we're open for military applicants to come here, because we know we need to fill these vacancies that we have across the State. These are quality applicants that already have a lot of training and experience and are really good public citizens, but also are very well-educated and very well-trained, and we're attracting them here into our state.

We don't really have hard numbers yet on how that's going, but we're hoping by the end of the year we'll have some better numbers. But just anecdotally, we're hearing back from our boards, and we've had veterans and military applicants call into the boards, and they're saying that they're experiencing less frustration when translating their military experience. Now, you know they have the opportunity to be issued a temporary license when they're trying to fill in those skill gaps that are identified from the crosswalk. And obviously the waiving of the licensure fees has gone a long way for military spouses. I think generally everybody overall is always happy when they have an expedited license application to be reviewed, right? Because that's always kind of something that all States are combating with is processing times for licensure applicants. So, anything that we can do in that sense to get these people quickly working, I think, has been a positive experience overall.

Line: That's great. So I guess, any advice you would give to another jurisdiction or licensing organization that's looking to develop a crosswalk like this? Any advice you have for them?

Andrew: Yeah, the biggest thing is, just use your partners. Use your stakeholders and other agencies that really know the population. I mean again, I'm speaking from it from a group that we're just focused on the licensure side of things, and other states may be in that situation. But yeah, always rely on your other partners and stakeholders. They can really help you out.

And just trying to cast a wide net of getting different opinions and what not. And it's really gone a long way, because we've had several renditions of this crosswalk over the last few years. We finally got to something that we were comfortable with, and this was because of having discussions with a lot of different agencies and just receiving that feedback. So that's where I would always point to is just trying to prepare by getting whatever work that you're trying to do out in front of a wider audience before releasing it.

Line: That's fantastic. Well, thanks so much. It's been grand to hear how your organization is implementing this approach to kind of match military experience to licensure requirements. So, thank you, Andrew, for speaking with us today.

Andrew: Yeah, thank you, Line. It's been really great; thanks for having me. It's been a lot of fun. You know, if any other states or groups or jurisdictions have questions, you know, just please feel free to email me. I'd love to connect offline, and we can talk about how we can do this work in in your state.

Line: Fantastic. Well, it's certainly been our pleasure. And we'd love to also continue this conversation once the podcast is done, and here are some questions for our listeners to think about. Here's one. Can you identify challenges that veterans and military spouses face when applying for professional licenses?

And then a second one is, do you think a veteran's education and experience attained during military service should be considered when they apply for professional license? We greatly appreciate and thank our members for your feedback. We've recently launched a new regulatory network platform, and questions like these will be posted there for member feedback and discussion. So if you haven't already joined the new CLEAR Regulatory Network, we invite and encourage you to join and take part in the online discussions.

I also want to thank our listeners for tuning in for this episode. We'll be back shortly with another episode of Regulation Matters: a CLEAR conversation. If you're new to the CLEAR podcast, please subscribe to us. You can find us on Podbean or any of your favorite podcast services. And if you've enjoyed this podcast episode, please leave a rating or comment in the app. Those reviews help us to improve our ranking and make it easier for new listeners to find us. Feel free to visit our website at www.clearhq.org for additional resources, as well as a calendar of upcoming programs and events.

Finally, I'd like to thank our CLEAR staff, specifically Stephanie Thompson, our Content Coordinator and editor for this program. Once again, I'm Line Dempsey, and I'm hoping to speak to you again very soon.

The audio version of this podcast episode is available at https://podcast.clearhq.org/e/military_crosswalk/.