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## Wisconsin to be designated as a Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zone

*State is the first in the nation selected by U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation to assist National Guard and reserve members' spouses in finding jobs*

**MADISON, WI, June 4** - Wisconsin has been designated by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce as the first Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zone in the nation, focusing on National Guard and reserve members' spouses, state officials announced today.

Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zones (MSEEZs) are an initiative of the Chamber Foundation's Hiring our Heroes program, with a goal of reducing the economic impact of military spouse unemployment and underemployment on military families. The zones promote collaboration among local and national employers, educational institutions and community resources; build robust employment networks for military spouses; and develop workforces in communities across the U.S.

"We're pleased that Wisconsin has been designated as a Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zone, and especially proud we're the first such zone to focus on the **unique** challenges facing spouses of members of the **National** Guard and reserves," said Mark Hogan, secretary and CEO of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC). "We look forward to collaborating with businesses, educational institutions and community groups to **better** serve **the families** of our local heroes."

"It's well known that in today's economy the competition for talent is significant and many Wisconsin employers are experiencing a shortage of workers," said DWD Secretary Caleb Frostman. "A program like MSEEZ is part of a workforce solution for our economy by welcoming a dedicated, innovative, and experienced contingent of professionals to our great state."

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The chamber's designation of Wisconsin as the first National Guard- and reserve-focused MSEEZ follows a community engagement event hosted by the Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce in February attended by military spouses, local elected officials, private sector employers and state agency partners.

The February event led to the formation of a Wisconsin MSEEZ Executive Committee, which identified four core focus areas. These four areas will serve as the foundation for building a comprehensive strategy to enhance and improve employment opportunities for Wisconsin's military spouses.

The four pillars are:

- hiring;
- training;
- advocacy and awareness; and
- education and entrepreneurship.

Hiring Our Heroes has been a key partner for Wisconsin's nation-leading veteran talent attraction initiative. Equally as important as attracting new talent to the state is retaining and engaging with the existing military spouse talent that already calls Wisconsin home.

The MSEEZ program complements the work underway to attract transitioning service members and their spouses to Wisconsin by supporting a more robust Military Spouse Professional Network and raising the visibility of opportunities for employers to tap into this underutilized talent pipeline.

Military spouses are often overlooked as candidates because their resumes frequently contain gaps in employment or have multiple short-term positions due to the military's inherent requirement for frequent relocations.

Through strategies developed under the four pillars, the Wisconsin MSEEZ will shine a light on reducing these barriers to employment while fostering connections between employers and military spouses seeking career opportunities, developing local solutions to a national problem.

The Wisconsin MSEEZ will be co-chaired by Rebecca Deschane, talent initiatives director with WEDC and the University of Wisconsin System, and Steven Janke, Marine Corps veteran. The subcommittee chairs of the four pillars are Carolyn Moe of Logistics Health Inc., Greg Peltier of the Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs, Leigh Searl, of America's Career Force and Deb Thompson of Stimmi LLC.

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### **About the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation**

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) leads economic development efforts for the state by advancing and maximizing opportunities in Wisconsin for businesses, communities and people to thrive in a globally competitive environment. Working with more than 600 regional and local partners, WEDC develops and delivers solutions representative of a highly responsive and coordinated economic development network. Visit [wedc.org](http://wedc.org) or follow WEDC on Twitter @WEDCNews to learn more.

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