

Worldwide Workforce: Clarifying SOFA for Military Spouses

Transcript: U.S. Army Directorate of Prevention, Resilience and Readiness Outreach Webinar

May 8, 2024

Presenter:

Beth Conlin

Lytaria Walker:

[00:09](#)

Welcome to the Directorate of Prevention, Resilience, and Readiness Outreach Webinar for May. At this time, all participants are in listen-only mode. However, you may ask questions at any time by placing them in the Q&A box. There will be several opportunities for questions throughout the webinar, and we should have some time at the very end as well. CEU credit is not available for today's webinar. Please note that the views of DPRR Outreach webinar presenters are their very own and are not endorsed by the Department of the Army or the Department of Defense. This month our guest is Ms. Beth Conlin. As a working professional married to a Soldier, Beth Conlin knows by experience the challenges of maintaining a career when a Military spouse is transferred to another country. In 2013, her husband's permanent change of station to Germany forced her to leave her job and put her professional development and family's financial security at risk due to the vague wording concerning spouse employment within the Status of Forces' Agreement (SOFA).

Lytaria Walker:

[01:24](#)

Frustrated by the ambiguity of the Agreement, she enrolled in the George W. Bush Institute's Stand-to Veteran Leadership Program to extensively study SOFA. Since then, she has worked tirelessly to try to get clarity for Military spouses about their employment rights and to ensure that SOFA provisions are not a barrier to a spouse's ability to pursue a career while overseas. As an expert on SOFA, Ms. Conlin has contributed to panel discussions, written op-eds and supported Congress members who champion Military spouse initiatives. Now a technical business manager at Amazon, Ms. Conlin continues to advocate for Military spouses as an advisor to militaryspousejobs.org and the Blue Star Families Research and Policy team as chairwoman of the board for the Military Spouse Chamber of Commerce, and as a member of several DoD and White House working groups aimed at reducing employment challenges. Ms. Conlin,

thank you so much ma'am for joining us this morning. Please take it away.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [02:43](#) Thank you so much. Good morning everybody. I see we've got folks from everywhere, which is very exciting. Some from Germany, Brooklyn, Arlington, and Fort Campbell. I'm coming to you hot and humid from Columbus, Georgia. Anyone else in the South with me can probably relate: it's already hot and humid and gross. Thank you all again for coming to this webinar about SOFA. I have a couple of quick questions I want to ask the group so we can understand who's who in the zoo and set up a few rules of engagement. If you have already gone overseas on a PCS, put that in the chat. I want to see how many folks have already been overseas.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [03:42](#) We have a lot of folks who have already been overseas, which is great because you'll understand some of the nuances. We have had some folks that were successful in maintaining their employment and other folks who weren't. It was already mentioned in the introduction about how I was personally victimized by the SOFA, and I wanted to share a little bit more about that story to lead us all to where we are now and how I've been designated as an expert on the SOFA.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [04:45](#) Before becoming a Military spouse, I knew nothing about the Military. I was one of those people that as a child, my only dream in life was to be the CEO of whatever. I didn't care, I just knew that I wanted a big fancy job. I wanted to be downtown New York City or San Francisco or somewhere very important, really. I think that was my way of daydreaming how to get out of Idaho. But regardless, I've always been super career-minded. When I did meet my now husband, it just never occurred to me what it would be like to have employment challenges. I had never moved, and I didn't know anyone who was in the Military. To be honest, I was just a little bit arrogant as a very successful young professional.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [05:32](#) I thought that if we were to move, obviously somebody would hire me because of how successful I was. I had a rude awakening when I went from a six-figure salary to being a personal trainer because I could not get a job. Fast forward to our PCS in 2013 to Germany. I had this great job with a global employer, and I said, "Hey, I'm PCSing to Germany. Is there any way you can transfer me to the Munich office?" They said it wouldn't be a problem, that I could work virtually (and this was before "work-from-home" was a thing). They said they were going to send me on an expat status, but nobody could answer

me when I asked how that was going to conflict with my SOFA status.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [06:17](#)

My employer didn't know what SOFA was, and nobody at DoD could tell me that if my employer sponsors my visa whether or not that would interfere with anything with the SOFA? No one could answer that question. My employer at the time said, "Listen, I don't want to be responsible for getting your Service Member in trouble or getting you kicked off of the Orders, so we rescind our offer to support you in Munich. Sorry, good luck." I was just devastated. I spent the next 10 years of my life trying to figure out SOFA and how the ambiguity was the thing that got in the way of me maintaining my professional development and career growth. As most of you can imagine, I ran into a lot of non-answers.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [07:09](#)

I also ran into a lot of fearmongering and "it's always been this way" mindset, or a culture of "if you're caught working, the German tax authorities are going to send you to jail." It was just absurd. But regardless of the rumors and the wife's tales, the SOFA was a problem. It was causing Military families to go from two incomes to one income due to no fault of their own. At that time, my husband and I didn't have any children, so financially we were okay, but I could not imagine having children and going from two incomes to one.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [08:01](#)

I continued to say that this wasn't good enough. We can't just say that "it's always been this way," or that "spouses have never worked," or (my favorite) to "just enjoy your time overseas." These were all well-intended comments, but they weren't the things that are going to solve any problems or remove any barriers for Military families. I spent three years in Germany talking to the local Judge Advocate General's Corps (JAG), talking to host nation attorneys, emailing and calling and writing my Congressional rep and my Senators for Washington State; just trying to get anyone to tell me where in the SOFA it said that I couldn't work. Those of you who've already been in this situation won't be surprised to hear that nobody could answer me.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [08:53](#)

After we were in Germany for three years, I went to South Korea. As you can imagine, I was devastated because I thought my career was over. I would have been overseas for five years with this huge gap in my resume. I would have taken a million steps backwards and nobody would ever hire me. I spent those two years in South Korea really digging into their SOFA and found out that it was a bit different than in Germany. I was demanding that someone at the DoD answer me, but it turns

out that if you are just an Army spouse, nobody really cares what you have to say.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [09:36](#) You don't hold a lot of weight. I remained just an angry Army spouse trying to get answers for the five years I was overseas to no avail. When I came back from overseas, the nonprofit organization Blue Star Families was looking for someone to run their Workforce Development program. I joined Blue Star families, took up their Military Spouse Employment Program, and then I was no longer Beth Conlin the Army spouse trying to figure out the SOFA. I was now the Director of Workforce Development at Blue Star Families trying to figure out the SOFA. That is where we were able to get a lot of traction and get face-to-face with the Congressional reps, Senators, and policy makers who really understood what the problems were.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [10:26](#) I want to tell all of you that the first thing I learned is that the SOFA is very nuanced and very emotional. If you have a question or a point of view or a scenario that resonates with something I'm saying in the moment, please drop it in the chat. I will stop and we'll talk about it, and then we'll get back to the content. We'll also have time at the end to do a deep dive into certain questions. Do not hesitate to just throw something in the chat because this conversation is best when it's fluid. After a decade of looking into the SOFA and five years of being personally victimized by the SOFA, I am here now to help clarify what it means, what it is, what it isn't, and then to help those who are wanting to maintain employment overseas understand how they can do that in this current environment.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [11:21](#) I realize that I am going to be preaching to the choir on this first slide, but the reason that clarifying the SOFA is so important is because it's directly tied to this high level of Military spouse unemployment. This number has remained relatively unchanged for over a decade. Some of the reasons are listed below. That also can be a whole separate podcast conversation about our Military spouse unemployment rate. The high unemployment rate is now one of the number one reasons that Service members are leaving the Service. You can't expect to support a family on one income, especially not on the income that the Military provides.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [12:16](#) And you also can't expect Military families to take a backseat to their civilian counterparts. Civilian counterparts are realizing dual incomes at almost twice the rate that we are. It is a challenge that needs to be solved, and part of that solution starts with clarifying the SOFA. Some of the other reasons that Service members are leaving besides employment is the lack of

childcare, which just makes everything difficult, the Service member daily job demands like the rapid deployments that we used to be on or the current deployments that we're on. This also means their day-to-day job. This is not your standard nine to five job, there are demands that just don't exist outside of the Service.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [13:08](#)

The frequent relocations also don't do us any favors. Even though remote work is now a lot more accessible than it used to be, it is not always a guarantee that you will be able to work virtually if you've ever been in a rural location. I'm currently in Columbus, Georgia, and I consider this rural, but there are very rural locations in California and Louisiana where there are issues with broadband connectivity. It's not just OCONUS locations that provide challenges for spouse employment: it's literally some places in the United States that are really rural and isolated. The last reason spouse employment tends to remain high is license transferability. If you are in a licensed profession, transferring your license over state boundaries can be complicated and time consuming. In the chat they're saying that we need to use our power and our influence to create a louder voice. A lot of this presentation is going to be about giving you the information and then empowering you to use your voice.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [14:53](#)

I want to talk a little bit about our most common OCONUS locations. Now there are more plenty, but these are where we tend to have the most service members overseas. Who has been to somewhere other than this? I'm seeing Bahrain, the UK, Germany, South Korea, Italy, Japan, Spain, Switzerland, and Egypt. We've got a few folks that have done multiple overseas assignments which is interesting. Quick tangent is that these overseas assignments, while they do have their own challenges, the cultural awareness or cultural competency that you gain by being in a different culture is really, really wildly beneficial for career development.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [16:04](#)

For example, I currently work for AWS, which is the tech side of Amazon, and I work with a ton of customers in Europe. I can't speak fluent German, but I can get by with a little bit of German, and I can do my pleasantries in French and Italian. I understand the workforce there after living in Germany for three years. I understand that their holidays are very important, and they have way more paid time off than we do, which again, is another conversation. All of that is because I was able to live overseas and immerse myself in those cultures, which has really paid off professionally after the fact. Don't discount those experiences that you can carry forward after living overseas.

- Ms. Beth Conlin: [16:58](#) There are some pretty exciting things about moving overseas, right? Let's talk about the adventure, the new culture, the new food. I didn't really know what Korean food was, and now I will push you down for some beef and leaf. I just love Korean food. We did a lot of travel. I don't know if this was just the time period that we were in Germany, but my husband did deploy twice when we were there. When he was home, I think we had a four-day weekend every month, so we took advantage of that and did as much traveling as we could.
- Ms. Beth Conlin: [17:46](#) Like I mentioned I learned enough of the languages to sound real ignorant, but at least I was trying. I gained this whole global perspective culturally and professionally on how other countries do things differently or better. That has been invaluable since. But then there are some things that are unknown. I have yet to hear anybody talk about an OCONUS PCS that went perfectly smoothly. The 3+ months without your furniture or not having a car. The fact that you're supposed to send your express shipment ahead of time and how, how many times that actually gets there last. Even just the timeline for an OCONUS PCS is never not quite a bit of a challenge.
- Ms. Beth Conlin: [18:38](#) I know the housing situation can be challenging too. For example, when we showed up in Germany we didn't have kids and we still don't. The housing office on post only had housing reserved for families. We had to go live out in the community, which was fine because I didn't want to go to Germany and then like live I was still in America. I was thrilled to live off-post, but that was just something we weren't prepared for and had its own unique challenges. And then again, part of the big point of this conversation is the challenges around employment.
- Ms. Beth Conlin: [19:31](#) We've talked a little bit about our personal interactions with the SOFA. I've shared my victimization, if you will, by the SOFA. I can get very nerdy about this, and I will do my best to not do that, but I really want to deep dive on what is this SOFA? The SOFA treaties are peacetime treaties, and they are established anytime there is a permanent presence of Service members. So think post World War II installations in Germany or the current installations in Japan and South Korea and all over the world. SOFAs are peacetime treaties that are negotiated or owned by the State Department and agreed on by the host nation, because the State Department does all things peacetime. They are intended for legal protection of Service members in a very broad and general sense. That was the initial intent.
- Ms. Beth Conlin: [20:27](#) Some of the SOFAs predate families going overseas. They also have some language in there about personal property taxes. For

example, if you bring a car overseas, that host country is not going to tax it like a personal property item. There are many nuances in the SOFA. They are technically owned by the State Department. If you go to statedepartment.gov and type in SOFA, they have a whole page of all of their peacetime treaties. Knock yourself out, they're very boring.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [21:21](#) Some of these links are just short summaries, and some of them are the whole like multi-page document. There are a lot of words that don't really say much, but that's the State Department. The DoD is the organization that, for lack of a better word, that actually engages with the SOFA or manages it or enforces it, however you want to see that because it mainly affects our Service members. Any changes that are made to the SOFA have to be ratified by the US Senate and both countries have to agree on it. So SOFA is a tri-agency and dual-nation agreement, which is why it's not so easy to modify the SOFA.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [22:16](#) Every country has a different timeline to review. For example, I'm going to make some dates up here. In 1954, the SOFA was established in Germany, and they said they would review it in 50 years. On the flip side, a SOFA that was implemented in 1980 somewhere could agree that every 10 years they would review it. Every country has its own timeline, which is why it might feel like nothing has changed in forever because it's like baked into the system. There are over one hundred individual SOFAs in every individual country.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [23:13](#) There are things like the NATO SOFA. All countries that fall under NATO have this blanket SOFA, and some NATO countries have their own addendums, like Belgium has its own set of additional criteria and Germany has its own set. But if you are a NATO country that just did not add anything else to it, then you just fall under the NATO SOFA. And then the most important SOFA for you folks in the audience is your visa. If you were just on a vacation with your family, for the most part tourist visas are 90 days. So let's say you're going to Europe for vacation, you go through customs, you get a stamp in your passport.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [24:06](#) You now have 90 days to legally be in the country before you have overstayed your tourist visa and you are no longer legally allowed to be in the country. If your employer was unrelated to the Military and was going to send you overseas for a work assignment, they would sponsor your work visa and that would be your legal reason for being in the country. Since you're going over there on Military orders, you don't need a tourist visa and you're going to be there longer than 90 days. If at the time you don't have an employer sponsoring you, you need a legal reason

for being in the country and that is what your SOFA is. It is your legal reason for being in the country for longer than 90 days.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [24:53](#)

Now, if your employer is going to sponsor you wherever it is that you're going, you might hear some language like well, we're going to revoke your SOFA status. That sounds terrifying, but all that means is you don't need two visas and by international tax law, your employer has to sponsor your work visa. That has nothing to do with DoD. That is how international taxation works. So if your employer says, we're going to have to revoke your SOFA visa and put you on an A-3 visa, all that means is now your reason for legally being in the country is sponsored by your employer and it's not sponsored by the SOFA.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [25:45](#)

Let's talk about what the SOFA is not. I'm curious if in the chat have you heard something ridiculous like "I'm going to take away your SOFA status and therefore take away your access to the installation." Have you heard that or any other ridiculous thing that is going to happen by revoking your SOFA status? I don't know where these myths came from. I heard them in Germany. I heard that if I was caught working I was going to have an Early Return of Dependent (EROD) which basically means that I was going to get kicked out of the country.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [26:45](#)

In South Korea I was told that there was a woman who did hair, and that if we got our hair done by her, then not only would we be kicked out so would she. There's also that fear of getting your spouse in trouble and I was told that when my employer at the time said, "Hey, we don't want to be the ones to get your Service member in trouble." I think that's established quite the mindset that the SOFA doesn't say I can work, so a part of doesn't want to ruffle any feathers and get anyone in trouble.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [27:45](#)

Question from the chat: "How would an employer-sponsored visa affect the Military spouse's SOFA status? Can a Military spouse be covered under both?" No, you don't need to be. If your employer sponsors your visa, you don't need SOFA status because the SOFA is just your reason for being in the country. The SOFA does not grant you access to the installation, so if you have been told that you can't get on the installation, your DoD ID card as a DoD beneficiary is the thing that gets you on the installation. Even if you are traveling in the UK while you're posted in Germany. You've got a raging headache, and you really want some American Tylenol, you can take your DoD ID card and go on post and get yourself some American Tylenol

Ms. Beth Conlin: [28:40](#) Your DoD ID card is the thing that grants you access to the installation, not your SOFA. If you are being told that, this is where I'm going to empower you all to use your voice. You have got to speak up because that is just purely false. You may have also been told that if your SOFA is revoked you won't be able to go to the hospital or get healthcare on post. Again, as a DoD beneficiary, your DoD ID card is the thing that allows you to have on-post healthcare. Same example. You're on vacation in Italy, you break your ankle, and you are near a Military installation. You absolutely can use your DoD ID card to go and get treatment there. That has nothing to do with your SOFA. I encourage you to speak up if you are being told these things. If you're not sure who to speak to, come talk to me and I'll help you out.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [30:18](#) Most importantly, the SOFA is not the thing that will prevent you from working. We'll get into employment now. Working overseas fully depends on your employer's ability to support you going overseas. For example, I work for a global employer and so my employer has a presence in basically any country that I could be transferred to. By international tax law, if your employer has an entity in that country like a headquarters or an office, then by law you must be converted to whatever that income of that country is and that taxation system. So for example if I PCS to Germany, I will get paid in Euros and have to pay to the German tax system and join the local German labor union.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [32:05](#) That is by law that has nothing to do with the SOFA. What's important to know is that every country has a tax treaty. If I'm in Germany, the tax treaty states that if you are there for less than five years, when you leave Germany, you can file to get your social security taxes back. And the reason that's important is because when you are tax equalized to a host nation, you'll receive a rather drastic pay cut because other countries' tax income is a lot higher than we do. In Germany, their social security taxes are meant for your long-term well-being, so if you're not there for the long term, you are able to then file with the country of Germany to get those taxes back. You cannot get your income taxes back, but you can get your social security taxes back.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [32:59](#) Every country will have a tax reciprocity but the timeline might be different. In Germany it's five years, and in some countries it might be three or ten. It's just important to understand that while yes, you most likely will take a pay cut when you go overseas and be rolled into their pay system, when you leave you'll be able to recoup some of those costs. Again,

the SOFA is not the thing that is preventing you from working. It's your employer's ability to support you. Like we mentioned earlier, if your employer is going to sponsor you, then you don't need the SOF at all. There's no reason for you to have two visas. So if your employer says, "Hey, we're going to revoke your SOFA," that's fine. In some countries your SOFA is also your work visa, but all that means is it's a little bit less paperwork. Regardless, if your employer wants to sponsor you, then you don't have to worry about what other visa you need.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [34:16](#)

Your employer is the one that would cover your work visa, whatever process that is for them. If you have an international employer, their HR payroll at their international office will understand what it takes to get you sponsored on a visa overseas. That process can take up to ten or twelve weeks. You want to start that conversation with your employer early because it also depends on the country. If you're employed and working with a company that has an office there, it defaults to that employment sponsorship.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [35:09](#)

For the most part, if you are going to Thailand and your employer has an office in Thailand, you will then be converted to Thai currency and everything. Again, that is based off of international tax law. When you have a corporate entity in the country, by law, you have to be paid by that entity. The other most common misconception while working overseas, I actually just dealt with this this morning at Amazon, when this Military spouse asked if he could just use our remote work policy. At Amazon we have a policy that allows Military spouses to work virtually if you are able to, like if you don't work in a warehouse setting or something similar.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [35:54](#)

He asked if he could just use the remote work policy to go to whichever country it was. And the answer is no, that's a very common misconception. A lot of people say, "Well, I'm going on orders overseas, so I can just take my job with me virtually." That is incorrect. There are exceptions for that where people work for a small business that doesn't do business outside of the US, so they just take their job with them, work virtually, and no one's the wiser. There are ways to double check the legality of that to make sure you're doing everything above board to make sure there are no issues.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [36:39](#)

So I am a Washington state resident. I currently live in Georgia, but I am taxed in Washington state, which is great because I have no income taxes. I can't apply that same logic to working overseas. I can't be a Washington State resident working in Spain because of the international tax law where it's not

necessarily a one-for-one transfer. Question from the chat: "I've heard rumors that companies don't want to pay the taxes, but never knew what that means." Great question. There are two schools of thought. If you are an employer that only does business in the US then you are not impacting an economy anywhere else.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [37:28](#)

We do have some Military spouses where that is their case. They're not impacting the local economy. They work from their laptop. They don't engage with customers in the local economy. So they continue to do their work. The other thing that your employer can do is to file to be a non-entity. For instance, if your employer is headquartered in Delaware and you, the employee, work in Texas, in order for you to work in Texas your employer has to file you as a foreign entity.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [38:20](#)

This is very common for how we operate in America. If your employer has people working in multiple states, that employer has filed with every one of those states to operate as a foreign entity. The process of being a non-entity is very similar, so your employer should understand what that means if you can file to be a non-entity. Basically what that tells the host country is that you're going to operate in the country, but you don't affect that economy or work with anybody there. You only work in the US, and so that will remove any Social Security tax liability from your employer. That's one way that they can do that. The income tax subject is another issue that doesn't have a super clear answer because it is very country dependent.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [39:11](#)

There are ways that if you are with a small company that doesn't affect an economy anywhere else that you can continue to work overseas. There is a little bit of risk associated with this and the attorneys that I have talked to about this have said they would support it any day, but there are employers that don't want to accept the risk. There's not enough clarity in it, aren't enough rule books. You may come across a small employer that's just doesn't even understand how to navigate this and doesn't want to get in trouble. I can't really blame them, right? This can be a monumental ask to say, "can you register as a non-entity in a foreign country for me so I can maintain work?"

Ms. Beth Conlin: [39:52](#)

There will be some language coming out very soon that helps clarify a little bit of this so hopefully we'll make it easier for everybody. Question from the chat: "So the spouse would not be on the Military orders? Could that be an issue with TRICARE, or sponsor benefits, or living OCONUS?" Your SOFA is not the same as your orders. If you are on the orders you're good. My question to the DoD back in 2013 was, "Hey, if my employer

sponsors my work visa, does that affect my SOFA? Would it take me off orders? Would my service member maybe look single and have to live in the barracks?"

- Ms. Beth Conlin: [40:43](#) No one could answer me, but now we know that no, that is not an issue. If you are on the orders, which means you have Command sponsorship, then you are good to go. What you won't have is SOFA, which again, you don't need if you have an employer-sponsored visa. SOFA and orders are two completely separate processes and two separate things. If you are on the orders, you are on the orders.
- Ms. Beth Conlin: [41:36](#) This is the barrier that that doesn't need to be a barrier, and we need to do better. It's been a barrier for so long because spouse employment didn't really start becoming a factor until the 80s, and it has only been in the last ten years that virtual work has made something like this more accessible. Change is consistently, slowly happening and it's because of our voices calling out these issues as unacceptable. As a collective group we are demanding solutions, and our voice has made some change. It is our voice saying, "Hold on a second, you need to provide clarity on that. You need to answer this question."
- Ms. Beth Conlin: [42:24](#) This has given us the 4 + 1 Commitment that Blue Star Families has launched with DoD and the Chamber of Commerce. The 4 + 1 Commitment affirms that we know Military spouse employment has been a challenge for all these years, but that we also know what works. There are four things that work for spouse employment: Portability, Transferability, Remote Work, and Flexible Schedules. Your employer can sign the 4 + 1 to say that they will commit to do one of just one of those four things to support Military spouses. Again, that is because we have demanded some transparency in our workforce. With our younger Service members coming in, their families don't just want to work, they need to work. If we don't address these things in the private sector, we are going to have continued recruiting challenges.
- Ms. Beth Conlin: [43:16](#) This is all because we stood up and said something. There is more SOFA clarity coming as a result of this community saying, "Show me in the SOFA where it says I can't work" over and over and over again. In my other side job, I've been working with the DoD Policy Office to get exact language because again, we can talk to our employers all day long about what the SOFA is and isn't, but it's not written anywhere that the SOFA is not the thing that will prevent you from working. That language will be coming to a memo soon from the DoD that will provide that level of clarity. We've been working on this memo since January

and as you can imagine, it's been sitting in the legal and PR office since February.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [44:06](#) I have a couple two calls to action for you, one piece of information on Italy, and then we'll have some Q&A. In June of 2023, the Biden administration issued an Executive Order that did a lot of things. It brought up support from Military caregivers. It concerned childcare and Military spouse employment. It directed the DoD to provide clarity on the SOFA. Part of my project at the Bush Institute was to find a SOFA coalition and burn it down to rebuild it.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [45:01](#) In doing so, I worked with the American Bar Association and their pro bono committee called the Legal Assistance for Military Personnel Committee (LAMP). We drafted a resolution that the entirety of the American Bar Association adopted unanimously stating that "The lack of clarity on the SOFA has detrimental impacts to Military families, and for these reasons, we demand clarity." The Military Spouse Licensing Relief Act was put into place in January of 2023, and essentially what that says is that if you are a licensed professional going from one state to another, that you get to transfer your license into that state.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [45:56](#) The only caveat being that when your license needs to be renewed, you have to renew it in your new state. This Act is only as good as its implementation. This QR code takes you to the information on that Act, and then in that information you can find the state that you're currently in. And I encourage you to call your Secretary of State and ask them what they're doing to get that implemented. Policies and laws are great, but if they're not implemented, they don't help us. Lastly, I talked a lot about Italy in this presentation and the clarity that happened there. This is information on what happened in Italy. Italy and the State Department came to what they call "an Exchanging of Letters." And in this exchanging of letters, it clarified 56 beautiful FAQs what it means to work while on a SOFA in Italy.

Ms. Beth Conlin: [46:54](#) It is brilliant. There is not a question that goes unanswered. It talks about every profession from selling Pampered Chef to practicing law. I'm sharing this with all of you to invite you to scan this QR code and take this to your installation leadership and ask them to have the same conversation with their State Department liaison. I'm not saying that the Italy model is the right model, what I am saying is the level of clarity in this exchanging of letters was literally life changing overnight for the Military population in Italy. We demand that level of clarity

from all other countries and it's only going to happen if we continue to ask for it.

- Ms. Beth Conlin: [47:46](#) We have about 10 minutes left for some Q&A. I think I've addressed all of the questions in the chat. Question: "If the Military spouse has an employer-sponsored visa, but their employment situation changes, is it difficult for them to obtain SOFA?" The answer is no. If you had a work visa and then you were laid off or you quit, all you need to do is to go to your installation's JAG Office. Every country does a little bit different, but usually it's the JAG office or the immigration office, but you go there and get your SOFA stamp. That is the easiest thing to do.
- Ms. Beth Conlin: [48:33](#) What can be challenging is that if you are already in country and you had a work visa, and then you stopped working for whatever reason, and then you try to obtain another work visa through another company, that can be a little tricky. It's really just an issue of time though.
- Ms. Beth Conlin: [49:10](#) If anyone else has something that they would want to share or a question feel free to connect with me on LinkedIn, I'm pretty accessible. I do have an auto response, so you will just get like a generic auto response for like, if you want to work at Amazon, go to this website because I get a million emails a day on LinkedIn and I just don't have the time, but I do scan them occasionally to see if there's specifically SOFA related questions.
- Ms. Beth Conlin: [49:57](#) Angie's asking for information to provide her employer, and this is the memo that I'm waiting on from DoD. The coming memo will be official language from the DoD clarifying the SOFA as it relates to employment, which will hopefully allow all of us to celebrate that we've officially burned the SOFA down. We're not literally burning anything down you guys, but I've needed to adopt that mindset in order to change through these last ten years. We're going to burn it down, then we're going to build it up.
- Lytaria Walker: [51:59](#) Thank you Ms. Conlin for joining us today. We will conclude this morning's webinar. At this time, I do want to extend a gracious thank you to you again, Ms. Beth Conlin, for taking the time today to provide this great presentation for us. Thank you listeners for joining today's webinar as well. Once the webinar concludes, you will be prompted to complete a survey. We appreciate your feedback as this helps us to improve upon future webinars. If you'd like to receive invitations for DPRR webinars and receive the latest news and information from the Directorate of Prevention, Resilience, and Readiness, please go

to the DPRR website at armyresilience.army.mil and sign up for notifications there. Again, thank you for joining us today and have a wonderful rest of your day.