

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION FOR  
APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018 AND  
THE FUTURE YEARS DEFENSE PROGRAM**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

**UNITED STATES SENATE**

**ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS**

FIRST SESSION

ON

**S. 1519**

TO AUTHORIZE APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018 FOR MILITARY  
ACTIVITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, FOR MILITARY CON-  
STRUCTION, AND FOR DEFENSE ACTIVITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF  
ENERGY, TO PRESCRIBE MILITARY PERSONNEL STRENGTHS FOR  
SUCH FISCAL YEAR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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**PART 6  
PERSONNEL**

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FEBRUARY 14, 2017





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# CONTENTS

FEBRUARY 14, 2017

	Page
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE SINGLE SERVICEMEMBER AND MILITARY FAMILY READINESS PROGRAMS .....	1
Dailey, Daniel A., USA, Sergeant Major of the Army .....	2
Giordano, Steven S., USN, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy .....	7
Green, Ronald L., USMC, Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps .....	13
Cody, James A., USAF, Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force .....	16
Roth-Douquet, Kathy, Chief Executive Officer, Blue Star Families .....	36
Barna, Stephanie, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs .....	51
Raezer, Joyce W., Executive Director, National Military Family Association ....	60
Questions for the Record .....	95



**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE SINGLE  
SERVICEMEMBER AND MILITARY FAMILY  
READINESS PROGRAMS**

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2017

U.S. SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL,  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:30 p.m. in Room SR-222, Russell Senate Office Building, Senator Thom Tillis (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Committee Members present: Senators Tillis, McCain, Ernst, Sasse, Gillibrand, Reed, McCaskill, and Warren.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR THOM TILLIS**

Senator TILLIS. Thanks, everybody. We are going to start these meetings on time and move them pretty efficiently. I appreciate the Members being here, and I particularly appreciate the two panels that are before us today.

Actually this is the first time I have ever struck a gavel in my political career. I have been doing this for 12 years. When I was Speaker of the House, I got to strike the gavel there but never over a committee.

I am thrilled to be actually chairing this committee, along with Ranking Member Gillibrand. The Ranking Member brings Ranking Member experience from the last 2 years and chair experience prior to that. I think we are going to work very well together and look forward to working with the other committee members.

Just from the standpoint of how I intend to conduct the hearings, we do the early bird rule. For those of you who all know, the people who get here before the strike of the gavel go in the order of seniority, and then as people come in, we will track their position and recognize them in turn.

There is only one modification that I have not heard of in the Senate that I would hope that my members would indulge me on. We are going to have rodeo rules, and what rodeo rules means is that after you have gone over 8 seconds, we move to the next Senator for speaking.

[Laughter.]

Senator TILLIS. So we buck to the next one. If the next Senator would like to have you continue down the line of questioning, it is their prerogative to yield their time.

But the key thing here is in a committee like this, it is so important to get Members here, having them know when they can sched-

ule their time to be here when they have so many competing priorities and meetings, that letting them know when they can come here and ask important questions that are under the jurisdiction of this committee. I think we owe it to them to be able to plan properly.

So we are excited about the input that we are going to get on defense single servicemember and family readiness programs.

I want to welcome the first panel of this seasoned group of gentlemen before us. I especially want to recognize the two spouses who are here with two of our panelists for being here. I have indicated this does not count as a Valentine's date.

[Laughter.]

Senator TILLIS. But it is good to see you with your spouses today because I know in your line of work, that is sometimes challenging.

On panel one, we will hear from Sergeant Major of the Army Daniel Dailey. We will hear from Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Steven Giordano, Master Chief Sergeant of the Air Force James Cody, and Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Ronald Green. We will just begin from my left to right for opening comments not to exceed 5 minutes. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE ARMY DANIEL A. DAILEY, USA, SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE ARMY**

Sergeant DAILEY. Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand, distinguished Members of this subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today, and thank you for your continued support of the greatest army in the world. I am honored to provide to this committee an update on the current state of single servicemembers and the status of soldier family programs within our Army.

First and foremost, I would like to thank this committee for what you did for our Army in last year's Congress. By increasing our end strength, you showed that military readiness is at the forefront of our policies. This decision supports the idea of an agile and ready force that our country needs today more than ever before. We ask that Congress continue to make military readiness a top priority as they have this past year.

After visiting and talking with thousands of soldiers and families over the past year, I believe their quality of life is okay. But it is not great now. If we want to continue to retain and attract quality people under the current end strength of an All-Volunteer Force, we must continue sustainment efforts, as was the case in last year's Congress. We must ensure our military community is properly cared for and resourced. This includes appropriations for equipment, training, and manpower, but also includes a consistent, predictable budget that supports benefits and services throughout the entire lifecycle of a soldier: recruiting, retention, transitioning, and veteran status.

The long-term impact is what is concerning. If we continue to be placed in positions where we must choose benefits or training, we will certainly lose out on the quality and talent down the road. Fiscal uncertainty will result in loss of confidence in our institution and ultimately degrade our ability to retain and recruit. We know very well what our Nation expects of us. We will continue to place emphasis on the mission by building readiness, preserving the fu-

ture of the Army, and caring for our soldiers and their family members.

Today our challenge remains the same as it has for the past several years: balancing requirements we have been assigned within the limits of the budget we have been allocated. Having a military is a requirement for the Nation, but it is a choice by individuals today. Therefore, we must ensure our actions and decisions reinforce the message that we are behind our professional All-Volunteer Force, and I am confident that together when we are called upon as a Nation our Army will ask and always be ready to assure, deter, and defend the American people and our way of life.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today, and I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Sergeant Dailey follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE ARMY DANIEL A. DAILEY

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand, distinguished Members of this subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today on behalf of the more than 2 million Active Duty soldiers, Army National guardsmen, Army reservists, and Army civilians to discuss soldier and family programs. Thank you for your continued support of the greatest Army in the world. I am honored to provide an update on the current state of single servicemembers and the status of soldier family programs within our Army.

With more than 180,000 soldiers participating in named operations, working to build partner capacity and deterring aggressors in more than 140 nations around the globe, our Army is in high demand. Despite recent years of force structure cuts and fiscal uncertainty, our operational tempo has not decreased. We have remained the best trained, most lethal, and ready Army in the world, because we have continued to invest in our greatest asset—people.

Our greatest challenge as public servants is keeping faith with the people we serve while remaining fiscally responsible. We appreciate the increase to Army end strength and the pay raise allocated to us in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2017. After visiting and talking with thousands of soldiers and their families over the past year, their quality of life is good, but I believe it could be improved. If we want to continue to retain and attract quality people for our future All-Volunteer Force, we must provide adequate levels of funding and support our key family and soldier programs. I am grateful for the support Congress has provided to our soldiers, their families, and Army civilians over the years and I am confident that this Congress will keep our Army the best trained and equipped force in the world.

BACKGROUND

Soldier and family programs are an investment in the Army's most valuable asset—our people. The Army remains committed to providing soldiers and families a quality of life commensurate with their service, while being good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

Soldier and family programs remain a top priority for Army leadership, because they have a direct impact on readiness and resiliency among our soldiers and their families. They are an investment in the Army's most valuable asset—our people. Where there are service gaps, we will continue to partner with our sister services and local communities by providing alternatives to government-provided programs and ensuring support for our geographically dispersed families.

We will protect soldier and family programs to meet DOD [Department of Defense] standards. However, given the recent years of fiscal uncertainty, the Army has, in past, paused to analyze spending in support of Morale, Welfare, and Recreation programs, specifically. We continue to review these and other family programs to ensure the most efficient delivery of service, where and when they are needed most. Local commanders have the flexibility to adjust programs within statute, and policy to support the unique needs of their populations.

The realities of a changing force and a budget level designed to support a smaller Army require that we evaluate where efficiencies can be realized. As good stewards

of America's tax dollars, it is our responsibility to consider where we can best utilize limited resources to maintain the Army's readiness.

#### INTEGRATION

The Army has fully implemented gender-neutral occupational standards for all military occupations. Over 233,000 positions have been integrated since 2012. The Occupational Physical Assessment Test became policy in January 2017 for use in gender neutral recruiting and accessions. This test fulfills the Army's obligation from Congress to adopt gender neutral occupational standards. The testing is also intended to reduce training injuries and attrition. Since integrating women into combat arms occupations, 14 female officers have graduated the Infantry Basic Officer Leader's Course since October 2016, and 15 female officers have graduated the Armor Basic Officer Leader's Course since January 2017.

The Army has successfully contracted with, accessed, or transferred over 300 women—49 Active component leaders in the ranks of sergeant through captain, 30 Reserve component leaders in the ranks of sergeant through lieutenant, and 262 junior enlisted soldiers—for Infantry, Armor, and Fire Support Specialist occupations since April 1, 2016.

To address cultural concerns identified through Army studies, the Army will train and assign leaders into previously closed career fields and units before assigning junior enlisted female soldiers using the "Leaders First" strategy. The Leaders First strategy assigns two leaders in the same career management field into Infantry or Armor company level units prior to the assignment of female junior enlisted soldiers. Enlisted recruits for Infantry and Armor occupations were placed into the Delayed Entry Program in support of the "Leaders First" strategy and the Army Unit Fill Plan. The Unit Fill Plan designates specific units for assignments during phase III of the Army's implementation plan based on propensity of women to serve. Junior enlisted soldiers will be assigned to companies in cohorts to prevent isolation and avoid potential incidents of unprofessional behavior.

In another example of the Army's desire to attract and retain the best qualified soldiers, the Army allows transgender soldiers to serve openly. Anyone who can meet the standards for military service and readiness is eligible to join the Army. We are committed to treating all soldiers with dignity and respect while ensuring good order and discipline. No otherwise qualified soldier will be involuntarily separated, discharged, or denied reenlistment or continuation of service solely on the basis of the soldier's gender identity.

Accession policies are pending change to address a history of gender dysphoria as a disqualifying factor. Transgender soldiers currently in service may transition to their preferred gender. The Army provides medically necessary care, either through the direct or purchased care system, to soldiers to treat gender dysphoria. Medical treatment associated with gender transition is individualized and in most cases does not include sex reassignment surgery. Once the soldier is stable in his or her preferred gender, as determined by a military medical provider, the soldier may request a gender marker change. When the gender marker is changed, the soldier will adhere to all standards of their preferred gender. Approximately 25 of the Army's over 1 million soldiers have an approved gender marker change.

#### BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

With more soldiers receiving care in outpatient settings, behavioral health conditions are being managed sooner, before crises occur. In 2016, there was a 41 percent decrease in behavioral health inpatient bed days as compared to 2012. We have transformed the behavioral health system of care into a model for the nation. Programs such as embedded behavioral health, behavioral health in primary care clinics and school behavioral health reach soldiers and families where they live and work to improve access and reduce stigma.

#### SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION

Sexual assault, sexual harassment, and retaliation for reporting incidents have no place in our Army. Army data shows that over the past few years, more soldiers are making the difficult decision to report sexual assault than ever before, while the occurrence of the crime within the Army has decreased. We credit the changing culture in our units for making soldiers more comfortable in filing reports. Training and assistance to command teams from sexual assault response coordinators and victim advocates are paying dividends in reducing the stigma and providing support to soldiers who report sexual assault.

Sexual assault response coordinators are the single point of contact at an installation or within a geographic area and oversee sexual assault awareness, prevention,

and response training. They coordinate medical treatment, including emergency care for victims of sexual assault, and they track the services provided to soldiers from their initial report through final disposition and resolution of their case. The sexual assault response coordinators also explain that soldiers who experience sexual assault have the right to their own attorney, the special victims' counsel. These specially trained military attorneys help protect victimized soldiers' rights and provides them with legal advice both before and during the military justice process. Survey data indicates servicemembers highly rate the services of the special victim's counsel program. All indications are that these attorneys have made a big impact on empowering our soldiers as they navigate the military justice process.

Victim advocates provide non-clinical crisis intervention, referral, and ongoing non-clinical support to adult sexual assault victims. Support includes providing information on available options and resources available to soldiers. The victim advocate, on behalf of soldiers reporting sexual assault, provides liaison assistance with other organizations and agencies on care matters and reports directly to the sexual assault response coordinator when performing advocacy duties.

The Army's ongoing Sexual Harassment/Assault Response Prevention (SHARP) efforts include helping installations identify community and installation risk factors for sexual assault and the development of evidence-based prevention strategies. We are also fielding the Emergent Leader Immersive Training Environment Command Team Trainer, and the Prevention and Outreach Simulation Trainer; two computer based applications to better train both victim advocates and the chain of command. We continuously learn from our experiences. We also challenge our commanders and leaders at all levels to set the right conditions within their units so that all may serve in an Army free of sexual assault and harassment.

#### BASE OPERATIONS

Army installations sustain more than 1 million soldiers and 2.2 million family members to support soldier, family, and unit readiness. Installations are platforms of readiness that provide secure and sustainable facilities and infrastructure from which we organize, train, equip, and deploy. Base operations support funding provides services much like those associated with a municipality, such as public works, security, logistics, compliance with the environment statutes and regulations, and family programs across our installations. These services and programs enable soldiers, civilians, and families to work and live on Army installations worldwide.

Balancing readiness with installation services, however, will continue to be a challenge in the current fiscal environment and without consistent, predictable funding. The Army has taken risk in base support operations, but we do so to provide sufficient funds to support training and unit readiness. The risk we assume with reduced funding goes well beyond facilities. Further decreased funding would result in a higher demand for soldiers to be taken away from their units to support installation services. We do this to an extent already at larger installations where more soldiers are available and the risk to readiness is lower.

Installations have very little trade space across Services and little flexibility to support emerging operational (Europe & Pacific) and strategic (Cyber) missions. We pursue initiatives to right-size our installation footprint and to establish partnerships. Traditional efficiency initiatives are not keeping pace with the decline of the spending power in the budget.

#### MORALE, WELFARE, AND RECREATION

Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) enhance the quality of life for our soldiers and their families. Like everything in our Army, MWR is a readiness consideration. High morale means better execution of our mission. MWR today impacts the readiness and resiliency of soldiers, families, and civilians by impacting their physical, social, and mental well-being.

The range of morale, welfare, and recreation programs offered at each installation is based on the needs of the soldiers and families. We know Morale, Welfare, and Recreation programs and services are great factors in readiness. This is never taken out of consideration during our reviews of such programs. Army leaders will always advocate to provide soldiers and families the quality of life they deserve within fiscal constraints, while still remaining sustainable.

#### CHILD AND YOUTH SCHOOL SERVICES

Child, youth, and school services programs operated by the Army includes child development centers, family childcare homes, school-age care, youth centers, youth sports, and fitness activities. In fiscal year 2016, there were more than 227,000 youths enrolled in child, youth, and school services programs.

Army child development programs must meet statutory requirements for national accreditation. All Child, Youth, and School Services (CYS) programs also are required to have unannounced inspections four times annually. Additionally, programs sponsored off the installations must be state licensed, annually inspected, and nationally accredited. All Army CYS programs are Defense Department certified, and 98 percent of child development programs are nationally accredited, compared to only 10 percent of the civilian sector childcare services.

While we are proud of our facilities and their high standards, some hiring delays occur due to the time it takes to complete background checks. We are concerned that there are currently more than 5,500 children on waitlists for childcare. Most are infants who cannot be placed within 90 days, per DOD policy. The transition to the Office of the Secretary of Defense's online system to request childcare will help the Army meet our goal to reduce this backlog.

#### EDUCATION ASSISTANCE

Few programs have had more impact on the decline of veteran unemployment than the educational programs offered by the Army. I am confident that the Army programs such as tuition assistance, credentialing, Soldier for Life, or transition assistance, in combination with Defense Department and interagency initiatives with the Labor Department, Veterans Affairs Department, and the Small Business Administration have helped lower the unemployment rate for veterans and post 9/11 veterans.

During my visits throughout the various Army installations, soldiers often have concerns about education benefits. Topics such as variations in tuition assistance, how much assistance is offered, and what programs are available are echoed across our Army. First and foremost, we understand that tuition assistance is a privilege and not an entitlement. The Army's tuition assistance program helps retain quality soldiers by enhancing their career progression potential, increasing Army combat readiness, and preparing soldiers for their eventual return to civilian careers.

Education supports the Army's goal to develop adaptive, agile soldiers capable of responding to full spectrum operations across the world. The Army's tuition assistance program supports three of the seven leader development imperatives of the Army Leader Development Strategy: commitment to the Army profession, lifelong learning and development; a balance of the Army's commitment to training, education, and experience components of leader development; and management of military/civilian talent to benefit the institution and individual.

In addition to tuition assistance, our Army is reviewing an initiative to expand our ability for soldiers to earn certificates and licensing. Currently, there are 1,556 credentials, as identified by each of the Army career fields that are recommended through Army COOL (Credentialing Opportunities On-Line). Last year, about 23,000 certifications were earned by soldiers through mandatory and voluntary credentialing opportunities, leaving them more prepared to enter the civilian workforce.

Veteran unemployment is below the national average. At the close of calendar year 2016, veteran unemployment was 4.3 percent, and the non-veteran rate was 4.7 percent. As a result, Army Unemployment Compensation (UCX) costs during fiscal year 2016 were the lowest amount recorded in 13 years. The Army pays UCX for up to 26 weeks for recently transitioned veterans who are unemployed.

#### SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT

Multiple relocations, extended periods of separation, single-parenting, and, simply, the overall tempo and requirements of a soldier takes a toll on the entire family. The spouse is often the glue that holds it all together. Spouses of soldiers are extremely resilient and their sacrifices cannot be underestimated. Even during peacetime or when the military spouse is not serving in an operational unit, they often forego careers of their own.

We remain committed to doing all that we can to enhance employment opportunities for military spouses. I agree with what Secretary Mattis recently stated that, "we cannot lose sight of the imperative to keep faith with our servicemembers and their families." Eighty-five percent of military spouses have some college. Twenty-five percent have undergraduate degrees, and 10 percent have earned graduate degrees or higher.

Spouse employment affects financial stability and military readiness. Our Army Employment Readiness program provides assistance to military spouses, Active Duty, retirees, Army civilians, and survivors to acquire skills, networks, and resources to find employment. The DOD Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP) program has over 340 partner employers with over 5.5 million positions.

MSEP focuses on connecting spouses and military-friendly employers, which range from small businesses to Fortune 500 companies to non-profits. These programs have facilitated over 100,000 spouse hires. Still, there is more work to be done to ensure spouses who want to work can do so with proper compensation.

#### SINGLE SOLDIERS

Single soldiers make up a large portion of our force. We talk about family readiness and family programs, but it is often the single soldiers for which we have the most difficult time providing support. They are young and away from home, their friends, and family for the first time in their lives. This is why programs such as Better Opportunities for Single soldiers (BOSS), part of MWR, are so important.

BOSS focuses its efforts on single soldiers 18–25 years old to enhance their quality of life and is not simply focused on recreation events. BOSS gives single soldiers an avenue to communicate issues important to them to their command. BOSS improves esprit de corps through community outreach events, too. Currently, there are 74 BOSS programs Army wide. Each one fosters fellowship and supports initiatives for fitness, leadership, and pride in service.

Supporting single soldiers through BOSS reinforces Army strategies and component processes that build and enhance resiliency. It is another avenue for young soldiers to refine leadership skills, develop public speaking skills, improve communication skills, etc. When fully utilized, BOSS contributes to a higher percentage of comprehensively fit soldiers. Like morale, comprehensive soldier fitness is often not measured in tangibles, but directly impacts readiness of the overall force.

#### CLOSING

The topics I've highlighted here carry one thread—people. Everything we do is about the people who wear this uniform now and in the future. As decisions are being made about programs to keep, facilities to maintain, services to provide, and people to stay—we are ever mindful of the impact of these decisions on our Army family.

The amazing thing about the American soldier and the Army family is that despite these challenges, fears, and frustrations—they stand tall in defense of our Nation. Throughout the recent years downsizing our force and working within fiscal constraints, our soldiers have demonstrated their professionalism. The soldiers who make up today's All-Volunteer Force, their families, and the civilian workforce that supports us, stand ever-ready and willing to answer the Nation's call. We must ensure that our decisions never weaken such a solemn bond.

In closing, I want to recognize the tireless work that our Army team does every single day. As the Sergeant Major of the Army, the best part of my job is being around the greatest team the world has ever known. I respectfully request that Congress partner with us to continue supporting and sustaining quality in the All-Volunteer Force. Soldiers and families need consistency and predictability from our Government to meet the inconsistent and unpredictable threats to our Nation. We must continue our commitment to the families of those who serve. Any degradation of benefits and services to our soldiers and families may hinder our ability to maintain readiness and could add significant risk to sustaining a professional All-Volunteer Force.

#### **STATEMENT OF MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE NAVY STEVEN S. GIORDANO, USN, MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE NAVY**

Chief GIORDANO. Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and distinguished Members, I am honored to appear before you today on behalf of the men and women of the United States Navy. Also with me today, as mentioned, is my wife Elka, our Navy's Ombudsman-at-Large.

Five months ago, I assumed the duties as the 14th Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy as the senior enlisted advisor to the Chief of Naval Operations on all matters dealing with our sailors and their families. Throughout my time in service, I have been honored and humbled to serve alongside these courageous patriots, these men and women who are determined, motivated, and unshakable

in their devotion to our Nation and our Navy and highly competent in their technical expertise and abilities. With quiet, unassuming courage, these great Americans defend our Nation and its freedoms around the globe in every theater of operation. With this in mind, I believe we share a collective and inherent solemn obligation to ensure their quality of service while supporting and preparing them for the future.

Our Navy is at optimal potential when sailors are fully focused on the mission. Taking care of our sailors is key to ensuring the Navy's military readiness. Providing them the ability to devote their full attention and capabilities to the mission at hand is an important factor in successfully executing our design for maintaining maritime superiority, specifically our line of effort to strengthen our Navy team for the future.

We are a one Navy team comprised of a diverse mix of Active Duty, Reserve sailors, thousands of Navy civilians, and our collective families with a history of service, sacrifice, and success. I have listened and spoken with many of our sailors and their family members, and I am awed by their high morale and devotion to duty and to one another. The Navy remains resolute in ensuring we deliver the highest quality of service to recruit, train, and retain our best sailors. We strive to meet that demand delivering the proper skills mix to the fleet and improving balance between sea duty and shore duty while at the same time ensuring the families of our servicemembers are taken care of.

Our sailors are the most important component of our Navy. We can never take for granted the sacrifices sailors and their families make every day. On behalf of all of them, I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you on their behalf and to thank you for your unwavering support and commitment to providing the resources necessary to ensure we remain the world's preeminent maritime fighting force.

Please accept my written testimony for the record, and I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Chief Giordano follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER STEVEN S. GIORDANO

Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and distinguished Members of this subcommittee, I am honored to submit to you today on behalf of the enlisted men and women of the United States Navy an informative statement covering various topics of interest to our enlisted force. Six months ago, I assumed duties as the 14th Master Chief Petty of the Navy (MCPON), the senior enlisted advisor (SEA) to the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), on all matters dealing with enlisted sailors, and their families. In nearly 28 years of service, I have been honored and humbled to serve alongside our Nation's most admirable and courageous patriots, the sailors of the United States Navy. These men and women are determined, motivated, and unshakable in their devotion to our Nation and our Navy, and highly-competent in their technical expertise and ability to meet the National Command Authority's objectives with enthusiasm and professional acumen. With quiet and unassuming courage and tenacity, these great Americans defend our Nation, its freedoms and its national security interests around the globe in every theater of operations. With this in mind, I believe we share a collective and inherent solemn obligation to ensure their quality of service, while supporting and preparing them for the future.

I read with great interest Chairman McCain's thoughtful report on *Restoring American Power*. It acknowledges the realities of what has come to pass as we stretched our forces to the maximum point. While significant challenges lie ahead to address the true national security requirements, we must carefully consider the requirements to enhance and sustain our Navy in the years ahead. We are at opti-

mal potential when sailors are fully focused on the mission, making them the most critical asset in our ability to fight and win. Regardless of the force structure we adopt, taking care of our sailors is key to ensuring the Navy's military readiness. Providing them the ability to devote their full attention and capabilities to the mission at hand is the single most important factor in successfully executing the Chief of Naval Operations' *Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority* Line of Effort to "Strengthen Our Navy Team for the Future."

Quality of service—composed of quality of work and quality of life—is vital to sailor and Navy family readiness. In maintaining readiness, quality of service initiatives involving infrastructure—such as barracks, enhanced training and schools—require consistent investment. We are one Navy team—comprised of a diverse mix of 600,000 Active Duty and Reserve sailors, coupled with thousands of Navy civilians, and our collective families—with a history of service, sacrifice and success. The CNO has charged us with building upon this history to create a climate of operational excellence allowing us to prevail in all future challenges. We currently have 71 installations around the globe, with more than 25,000 sailors deployed, away from their families, and in the current environment, the demand for Navy operating forces and Active component manpower, capability and capacity is increasing. I have listened and spoken with thousands of our sailors and family members, and am awed by their high morale, even as they operate within an increasingly constrained fiscal environment that directly affects their quality of life.

The Navy remains resolute in ensuring we deliver the highest quality of service to facilitate recruiting, training and retaining the finest sailors who make the selfless decision of service with sacrifice. We strive to meet that demand, deliver the proper skills-mix to the Fleet, and improve the balance between sea duty and shore duty. Active component manpower is augmented by Ready Reserve Sailors, the Navy's primary source of mobilization manpower and surge operational support. Maintaining the appropriate level and types of sailors in the Reserve Force provides needed operational capabilities and strategic depth to meet Total Force requirements. Our flexibility, responsiveness, and ability to serve across a wide spectrum of operations, enhances the Navy Total Force.

*Fleet Manning.* Increased accessions in fiscal year 2012 and fiscal year 2013 have contributed to high levels of Fleet manning and warfighting readiness. Manning among Optimized Fleet Response Plan (OFRP) assets and Forward Deployed Naval Forces (FDNF), our highest-priority deployers, averaged 98 percent in calendar year 2016 ("Fill"), with 90 percent of those billets, occupied by sailors with the proper mix of skill, experience, and specific billet requirements ("Fit"). Our efforts to reduce manning gaps at sea continue unabated. By the end of fiscal year 2016, there were nearly 2,800 gaps at sea, an increase of almost 1,000 gaps from 1 year earlier. As projected, we have seen a slight decline in Fit and Fill throughout this year, as sailors from the large fiscal year 2012–fiscal year 2013 cohort have started to transfer from sea duty sooner than replacements arrive. We are using a wide range of available options to mitigate the projected drop in sea duty Fill, including increasing fiscal year 2017 enlisted accessions, extending sea tours, and assigning Reserve sailors to fill sea duty billets. At the end of fiscal year 2016, nearly 3,300 Full-Time Support (FTS) sailors were filling sea duty billets, exemplifying the importance of Reserve sailors as integral partners in our operational Navy Team.

Despite a decrease of deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, high operational and personnel tempo continues to present challenges for sailors and Navy families. As we continue to work under OFRP, we remain mindful of the need to fulfill their quality of life expectations. The plan is designed to provide a sustainable, predictable, cycle for ship deployment, training and maintenance allowing families to better plan around their sailor's platform cycle minimizing the potential for imposition of high, unhealthy, stress levels. Among sailors' top concerns are short-fused Permanent Change of Stations (PCS) moves, career flexibility, childcare availability, and spouse employment licensing and credentialing.

*Recruiting & Retention.* Aggregate recruiting and retention objectives are being met. However, with an improving economy, it is paramount we maintain Navy career flexibility in rating modernization. Providing proper training, career incentives and special pays, will contribute to retaining critically-skilled sailors. With the extraordinary demands we place on sailors and Navy families, coupled with the improving economy and increased job opportunities in the civilian sector, recruiting and retaining highly-talented sailors may become increasingly challenging in the years ahead.

Fiscal year 2016 enlisted retention exceeded 100 percent in each of the three reenlistment zones through 14 years of service. While we anticipate meeting aggregate enlisted retention goals in fiscal year 2017, we continue to experience retention challenges and inventory shortfalls within some critical communities, such as Informa-

tion Warfare, Nuclear Field, Special Warfare, and Advanced Electronics. After experiencing strong retention from fiscal year 2014 to fiscal year 2016, current economic indicators suggest a greater pull from the civilian workforce for our top talent over the next couple of years. This impending challenge requires judicious targeting of incentives, particularly selective reenlistment bonuses among high-demand critical skill sets, as well as among less-technical skill sets that an improving economy may adversely affect. Retaining sailors in the right mix of skills and pay grades is critical in positioning Navy to meet future mission requirements.

*Pay and Compensation.* Navy life imposes the stress and rigors of deployments, overseas duty assignments in harms-way, and prolonged separations from family and friends. Members of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) serve out of an abiding sense of patriotism, honor, uncommon valor, and sense of duty. On behalf of our enlisted sailors and their families, I want to express our gratitude for the basic pay adjustment enacted in the fiscal year 2017 NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act], which sent a strong signal of the Nation's appreciation for the service, sacrifice and commitment of our sailors and their families.

*Basic Allowance for Housing.* A fiscal year 2017 NDAA provision requires the Department of Defense to report to Congress on a plan revising the longstanding salary system, placing particular emphasis on a change in Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) as compensation, rather than as an allowance. This has caused significant uncertainty and anxiety among sailors. BAH is a recurring topic of concern at my all hands calls during command visits. Sailors are concerned about the BAH monetary amount decreasing or being realigned by reintroducing the Variable Housing Allowance. If sailors perceive the value of their service is declining by increasing their out-of-pocket expenses for housing, it may adversely impact retention and recruiting.

*Navy Housing and Homeport Ashore.* Construction and recapitalization of single sailor housing continues to be of concern out in the Fleet. Although we monitor the safety of our barracks and prioritize funds for buildings in the worst condition, we are not renovating unaccompanied housing faster than the rate at which it degrades. Currently, 62 percent of Navy unaccompanied housing facilities are rated as "adequate," and we are unable to improve the overall condition of our inventory at current funding levels. As defined from DOD 4165.63-M, "adequate" means for unaccompanied housing, the construction costs for all needed repairs and improvements cannot exceed 20 percent of the replacement costs.

As an example, if a building has a \$100 value and the cost of needed repairs exceeds \$20, it is considered "inadequate." The longer we wait to make investments in this area the greater and more costly this problem will become. In 2016, the Navy completed the implementation of our Homeport Ashore initiative which provides a bed ashore for each single shipboard sailor while their ship is in homeport. Our two privatized unaccompanied housing projects—Pacific Beacon in San Diego and Homeport Hampton Roads in Norfolk—offer modern apartment-style living to junior sailors stationed in these two Fleet concentration areas.

*Sailor 2025.* In September, Navy announced initial plans for modernizing the enlisted career development program, providing greater choice and flexibility for sailors with respect to detailing and training, greater flexibility in assigning highly-trained personnel, and increased professional alignment with civilian employers.

Through Ready Relevant Learning (RRL), a component of Sailor 2025, we are enhancing our training processes to ensure sailors receive the right training, at the right time, through an enhanced learning continuum, modernized training and integrated training development. This will preclude commands from being without trained sailors with the specific required skills during periods of personnel transfers. As sailors arrive at their commands earlier in the training cycle, the overall quality of training for individuals and units will improve as will deployed readiness and capability.

The Career Intermission Program (CIP) originated as a unique Navy initiative, authorized by Congress in the fiscal year 2009 NDAA, which permits eligible sailors to take a break from Active Duty to pursue personal goals such as starting a family, acquiring higher education, or tending to various other personal family matters; and then resuming their Navy service upon completion of the intermission. Allowing sailors an intermission of up to 3 years, while serving in the Individual Ready Reserve, and continuing to enjoy full medical and dental benefits, access to commissaries and exchanges, and a small monthly stipend, contributes to our ability to retain sailors who might otherwise leave the Navy to meet those personal needs. CIP has grown over the years, with enhancements based upon lessons-learned, and has now been adopted in various forms across the other Services. We have only recently begun to expand CIP, implementing enhancements enacted in the fiscal year 2016 NDAA, such as lifting the cap on the number of participants, and permitting

participation by those in receipt of a critical skills retention bonus, or serving in their initial period of obligated service. We have yet to tap the full potential of this innovative retention and quality of life program. We appreciate recent modifications to the program, and will closely monitor the impact on CIP participation rates and its effects on retention and sailor satisfaction.

Last month, OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] released implementing guidance for the Blended Retirement System (BRS), authorized in the fiscal year 2016 NDAA. BRS blends a 20-year cliff-vested defined benefit annuity, similar to the existing uniformed services' legacy retirement systems, with a defined contribution plan, allowing servicemembers to contribute to a Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) account with government automatic and matching contributions. BRS is expected to provide retirement savings benefits for the majority of servicemembers, including those who serve fewer than 20 years. Integral to successful implementation of BRS is the effective training of all impacted uniformed personnel. Any member of a uniformed service determined to be eligible for enrollment in BRS has either completed, or must complete, mandatory training prior to enrolling in accordance with prescribed guidance. The BRS training is only one of many resources available to sailors making a possible opt-in decision.

*Family Support Programs and Force Resiliency.* Sailor and family support provides much-needed assistance to sailors and their families through robust programs including: relocation assistance, non-medical and family counseling, personal and family life education, personal financial management services, information and referral services, deployment assistance, domestic violence prevention and response services, exceptional family member liaison, emergency family assistance, and transition assistance.

In this increasingly technological world, we are upgrading our capability to communicate directly with deck-plate sailors using available technologies. With the launch of Navy's Resources web page, now including applications for download on personal electronic devices, we can conduct unprecedented outreach with sailors. The Financial Literacy Application is one example of leveraging technology to increase interactivity and enhance information sharing with sailors. Financial literacy education, along with Military Life Cycle Transition Points education, enables sailors to consider relevant information as they approach specific life events. This will assist sailors and their families in updating financial plans based on professional and personal needs. Each of these programs is available through online access.

Navy families are the heart and soul of our Navy team and family support programs are vital to sustaining them. We have new programs that focus on assisting military spouses find employment, which is critical to the financial needs and long-term financial security of Navy families. All military spouses, as well as other family members, can receive employment services through Navy's Family Employment Readiness Program. In addition to offering assistance in resume writing, interview coaching, job searches, and other employment services, we work closely with the Department of Defense Spouse Education and Career Opportunities (SECO) Program to provide expert education and career guidance to military spouses worldwide. The MySECO website provides a comprehensive set of virtual tools and resources that assist military spouses in pursuit of their educational and employment goals. Navy has also partnered with the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP), which connects military spouses with more than 335+ partners, which have committed to recruit, hire, promote, and retain military spouses in portable careers.

Navy Child Care and Youth Programs continue to be accessible, affordable, and provide high-quality child and youth development programs through child development centers, youth centers, child development homes and contract childcare spaces. The increase in child development center hours to provide childcare has been well-received throughout the Fleet; however, challenges remain. Some DOD childcare facilities have wait lists greater than 3 months, and this is an issue of concern to many sailors who are dependent upon child development centers in order to perform their assigned duties.

The Navy Ombudsmen Program, for which my wife, Elka, serves as Navy Ombudsman-at-Large, and Family Readiness Groups, continue to be great success stories. These two programs offer tremendous support in preparing sailors and Navy families prior to, during, and after deployments and other demanding missions worldwide. An ombudsman provides resources to spouses, assisting them in better coping with making it through a deployment, and providing support whenever they may need it. The ombudsman program offers a critical lifeline for Navy families providing the support they need when our sailors are deployed.

The Navy has extended the operating hours for many of our fitness centers to ensure they are accessible to all sailors and marines regardless of their work schedules. Currently, all Navy fitness centers are open between 90 and 118 hours each

week. Specific hours of operation are tailored to meet the specific needs of sailors and the installation to accommodate the mission. In addition to extended hours, there are currently 163 unmanned fitness areas and spaces across the enterprise that provide additional workout options for military members working irregular shifts.

*Morale Welfare and Recreation Programs for Single Sailors.* Navy's Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) program provides 76 liberty programs for single sailors 18–24 years old at installations worldwide. Liberty Centers offer an alcohol free environment and are open afternoons, evenings, and on weekends. The centers offer free Wi-Fi, computers, table games, video game stations, movies, recreation skills classes, trips, and social events. Liberty Centers offer recreation opportunities for all interests, from cooking classes and local sightseeing trips to holiday parties and game tournaments.

*Sexual Assault Prevention and Response.* Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) continues to be a top priority for our Navy. Although we have made significant progress, we continue efforts to ensure our sailors know what sexual assault is, how it hurts our Navy, how to be proactive in prevention, and how to report it. In compliance with DOD initiatives and the DOD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office's (SAPRO) five lines of effort, our Navy is continuing the push to eliminate sexual assault and destructive behaviors from our service. In fiscal year 2016, the Fleet successfully completed Chart the Course training, which builds upon the foundational elements articulated in our sexual assault prevention training products. Our Navy is working to encourage reporting from all affected personnel, with a particular focus on eliminating the stigma associated with male-reported assaults.

We have established a number of critical initiatives and are refreshing the Navy SAPR strategy enhancing counseling services, victim/alleged offender non-colocation, leveraging technology advances, such as cell phone applications, and DOD-wide Installation Prevention Projects. We recently launched *Full Speed Ahead* training, designed to combat destructive behaviors across the Fleet, while reinforcing the core attributes of the Navy and signature behaviors as the foundation of a resilient and professional force. *Full Speed Ahead* is the third in a Fleet-wide training series focused on creating culturally aware and educated sailors while also creating an environment intolerant of sexual assault and other destructive behaviors. Navy continues to focus on ensuring victims are treated with compassion and receive quality care, that investigations are conducted with a high level of competence and timeliness, and that we continue to provide a fair and equitable system of appropriate accountability that promotes justice and assists in maintaining good order and discipline.

*Suicide Prevention & Resilience.* Suicide remains a paramount concern in our Navy. The loss of even one sailor to this tragedy is one too many, and it is imperative we provide them with the resources required to assist them in coping with life's challenges. Sailors are placed under significant demands and pressure situations throughout their career, increasing the risk for suicide, but we are committed to winning this difficult battle to save the lives of our sailors. Through Operational Stress Control Mobile Training Teams, we are equipping sailors with information, training, tools, practices, and policies to be psychologically healthy, resilient, tough, and mission ready. Suicide is complex and almost always well hidden from the families, friends, and commands of sailors. As we look deeper into the causes, we continue to find problems in relationships, legal issues, financial matters, periods of transition, and mental health issues among the most common stressors sailors face, and serving as a catalyst for contemplating suicide.

Our 21st Century Sailor Program continues to develop new programs to reduce incidents of suicide. The office recently launched the Sailor Assistance and Intercept for Life (SAIL) program, a research-based non-clinical intervention strategy, providing rapid assistance, on-going risk assessment and support for sailors who exhibit suicide-related behaviors. SAIL case managers from our Fleet and Family Support Centers initiate and provide continuous caring contacts with these sailors, and maintain collaborative relationships with healthcare providers and command leadership throughout the critical 90 days following a suicide-related behavior. SAIL does not replace psychological health services, and is not a form of treatment, but will enhance our suicide prevention efforts and assist in reintegrating our sailors back into the command.

Other programs consistently promote a core message that it is always ok to ask for help. During fiscal year 2017, we will continue to emphasize "1 Small Act" as the communication campaign's primary message. The campaign focuses on individual self-care practices and coping skills, as well as societal prevention and inter-

vention support. Community and relationship support will continue to be emphasized, integrating the newest DOD theme of *#BeThere*.

Our sailors are the most important component of our Navy. We can never take for granted the sacrifices sailors and their families make every day. On behalf of all of them, I appreciate your affording me the opportunity to talk with you about them, and to thank you for your unwavering support and commitment to providing the resources necessary to ensure we remain the world's preeminent maritime fighting force.

**STATEMENT OF SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE MARINE CORPS  
RONALD L. GREEN, USMC, SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE MARINE CORPS**

Sergeant GREEN. Good afternoon, Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand, distinguished Members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide you an update of the commitment of the Marine Corps to our marines and families. With me, I have my wife Andrea who represents all the families around the Corps.

The Marine Corps continues to maintain its commitment to the Nation, remaining forward-deployed and ready to respond to crises around the world. With the dynamic pace of current and future demands, our Nation's leaders require and the American people expect your marines to answer the call, to win, and fight. Thanks to your lasting support and leadership, the Marine Corps has always been the Nation's expeditionary force in readiness. The Marine Corps is dedicated to our essential role as an expeditionary force that Congress and the American people can call on as the most ready when the Nation is least ready.

The marines are the core, are the most sacred resource and always will be. Taking care of marines and their families is a key element of overall readiness and combat effectiveness. The adage "we recruit marines and retain families" remains as true today as ever. Our comprehensive package of programs and services seek the holistic readiness of our marines and families.

The Marine Corps is by far your youngest service. The average age is 25. 65 percent are under 25 years of age, and 56 percent are single. As a result of these dynamics, programs to support single marines and their dependents are most important.

Our single marine program, as the consolidated voice of all single marines and sailors to the commanders, develops initiatives, and programs to enhance morale, recreation, community relations, and personal development in order to improve total force readiness, unit cohesion, job performance, and retention within the Marine Corps.

The Marine Corps continues to strive to provide robust family readiness services for our marines and families. Our family readiness programs continue to methodically adjust to post-Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, while also taking into account the unpredictable and demanding operational tempo of the future.

Our portfolio of family readiness training programs provide marines, the sailors that serve under the Marine Corps, and families with tools and resources needed to successfully meet the challenges of military life and enhance mission readiness by providing preventative services and assistance offered to all.

Overall, single marines and families and programs have one overarching goal, to take care of our own and their families. The marines of our Corps represent the American people who have stepped forward and sworn to defend and protect our Nation. By ensuring that we take care of all our marines and families, we fulfill our responsibility to keep the faith with the honor, courage, and commitment they have so freely given.

With your support, the Marine Corps will continue to meet the demands of our Nation when it calls.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Sergeant Green follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY SERGEANT MAJOR RONALD L. GREEN

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide you with an update on the commitment of the Marine Corps to our marines and their families.

The Marine Corps continues to maintain its commitment to the Nation, remaining forward-deployed and ready to respond to crises around the world. With the dynamic pace of current and future demands, our Nation's leaders require, and the American people expect, your marines to answer the call, to fight, and to win. Thanks to your lasting support and leadership, the Marine Corps has always been the Nation's expeditionary force in readiness. The Marine Corps is dedicated to our essential role as an expeditionary force that Congress and the American people can call on as the most ready force, when the Nation is least ready.

Your marines are the foundation of the Marine Corps. They are the Corps' most sacred resource, and always will be. Taking care of marines and their families is a key element of overall readiness and combat effectiveness. The adage "we recruit marines, we retain families" remains as true today as ever. Our comprehensive package of programs and services seek the holistic readiness of our marines and families.

OUR SINGLE MARINES

The Marine Corps is by far your most junior service. The average age of your Active component marines is 25 years; 65 percent are under 25 years of age or younger and 56 percent of your marines are single. As a result of these dynamics, programs to support single marines and their dependents are important.

Our Single Marine Program (SMP), as the consolidated voice for all single marines and sailors to the commanders, develops initiatives and programs to enhance morale, recreation, community relations, and personal development in order to improve total force readiness, unit cohesion, job performance, and retention within the Marine Corp. The SMP identifies quality of life (QOL) concerns and developing QOL solutions that focus on readiness, leadership development, personal growth, community outreach, and recreation. The SMP incorporates commanders and leaders in the SMP QOL process allowing them to directly influence the issues with living on base, such as parking, chow hall, the Exchange (MCX), and anything else which directly influences the QOL for single marines.

The SMP allows for participation in a wide variety of social, competitive, and educational activities that may include the great outdoors such as paintball, deep sea fishing, river rafting, mountain biking, and hiking. In addition, excursions to Washington, DC, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and New York City are just a few of the opportunities SMP offers. The SMP social, recreation, and fitness programs within Marine Corps Community Services (MCCS) deployment support provide for participation in leisure activities when forward deployed away from the home installation in austere environments.

Each installation establishes an SMP Council that is comprised of an executive council, unit representatives, an SMP Coordinator, and Senior Enlisted Advisor. Councils conduct monthly meetings where members discuss leisure activities of interest, community involvement projects, and QOL issues that are relevant to single marines. Unit representatives are responsible for providing information to members of their units to ensure engagement at the unit level. This provides a direct link

between the Unit's Command Team and what installation SMP is providing for single marines.

The SMP helps mold the public perception of our military through continuous volunteerism in the community by participating in Habitat for Humanity, Toys for Tots, Adopt a School, beach cleanups, or Veterans' Homes visits. In 2016, over 7,000 single marines provided nearly 30,000 volunteer hours.

Lastly, in January 2016, 112 marines traveled from installations around the world to attend the 2016 SMP Leadership Symposium. The symposium consisted of 3 days of leadership training that included educational sessions, networking opportunities, professional development, and mentorship. The symposium also offered many opportunities for operational commanders and senior enlisted leadership to engage directly with the single marines that serve in leadership roles at their installations.

#### FAMILY READINESS PROGRAMS

The Marine Corps continues to strive to provide robust family readiness services for our marines, attached sailors, and families. Our Family Readiness Programs continue to methodically adjust programs to post-Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) footing, while also taking into account the unpredictable and demanding operational tempo before, during, and after deployments.

Our portfolio of Family Readiness training programs provide marines, sailors, and families with the tools and resources needed to successfully meet the challenges of military life and enhance mission readiness by providing preventative services and assistance (e.g., stress management, anger management) that is offered to all marines, sailors, and their families. The focus is to increase awareness and provide skill-building tools and readiness for individual and family development.

Marine Corps Family Team Building (MCFTB) reinforces and sustains a state of personal and family readiness through a continuum of resources that are offered at finite and predictable touch points across the life-cycle and development of marines, sailors, and their families. Training is provided at the unit level, through partnerships with Family Readiness Officers, and other supporting resources of the unit. Training opportunities at the installation level are also provided and promoted throughout the installation. MCFTB Computer Based Training (CBT) courses have been fully incorporated into MarineNet to expand and enhance accessibility. All authorized patrons are able to register for an account and utilize the CBT on MarineNet.

Family Readiness Program Training (FRPT) builds on a strong unit command team influence that has become the focal point of the marine and family programs across unit and installation levels. The FRP trainer's responsibility is to provide training for the unit command team training, Family Readiness Officer (FRO) training, commanding officer/senior enlisted spouse training, command team advisor/family readiness assistant training, operational security training, and volunteer management training.

Lifestyle Insights, Networking, Knowledge and Skills, commonly referred to as L.I.N.K.S., is the signature training for MCFTB. This year marks the 20th anniversary in which L.I.N.K.S. was formalized as an official training component that serves as an organizational socialization tool to aid marines, sailors and families in similar phases of their life. L.I.N.K.S. provides an introduction to the Marine Corps culture and lifestyle, thereby increasing participants' knowledge, and empowering them with tools to enhance self-sufficiency. L.I.N.K.S. also teaches and informs participants about the many military and community resources and benefits available to them at the local installation and the surrounding areas.

LifeSkills Training and Education promotes positive adjustment and improved individual and family functioning, providing workshops on life competencies in areas that are not currently offered by other MCCS entities. These workshops focus on communication, relationships, and wellness. Conquering Stress with Strength (CSWS)—is a newly developed training in collaboration with Behavioral Health and MCFTB. CSWS is an evidence-informed workshop, presented in a format that is non-clinical, relevant, and useful to marines, sailors, and families. CSWS workshops focus on cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, and problem solving skills development.

Readiness & Deployment Support Training (RDST) provides deployment workshops to marines, sailors, and family members, to include children, which encompass all phases of their servicemember's deployment from redeployment to return and reunion classes. MCFTB trainers work in conjunction with unit FROs to focus on educating and preparing marines, sailors, and families for all types of deployments and family separation topics. During deployment, a series of practical appli-

cation workshops are provided which allow marines, sailors, and families to engage in fun activities, understand the support of the military community, and learn new skills that empower their ability to thrive in the military lifestyle. Lastly, return and reunion training provides a series of interactive workshops which are specific to spouses, parents/extended family members of the marine, and children about the expectations and positive reintegration.

In fiscal year 2016, the Marine Corps extended childcare development center hours to a 14-hour minimum, ensuring military families are able to have access to care for their children when they are on duty. The Marine Corps, like other services, has been looking at our long-range options of our current childcare programs and how to improve access and usability. This includes the participation in MilitaryChildCare.com that provides a single gateway for military families to find comprehensive information on military-operated or military-approved childcare programs worldwide. This system makes it easier on families to navigate the process and to facilitate more expedited access to childcare.

The readiness of our deployable forces is our priority. The primary mission of our Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) is to improve the quality of life for families that support a member with special needs. EFMP ensures that sponsors with a family member with special needs will have those special needs considered during the assignment coordination process. We maximize family support funds based on the greatest need. Critical EFMP care services include (1) Effective assignment of marines and exceptional family member (EFM) continuum of care; (2) Individualized family case management support; (3) Care navigation training for EFM Advocates (parents/sponsor); and (4) Access to legal services.

#### CONCLUSION

Overall, our single marine and family readiness programs have one overarching goal: to take care of our own and their families. The marines of our Corps represent the American people who have stepped forward and sworn to defend and protect our Nation. By ensuring that we take care of all marines and their families, we fulfill our responsibility to keep faith with the honor, courage, and commitment they have so freely given.

With your support, a vibrant Marine Corps will continue to meet our Nation's call.

#### **STATEMENT OF CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT OF THE AIR FORCE JAMES A. CODY, USAF, CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT OF THE AIR FORCE**

Sergeant CODY, Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and Members of the subcommittee. Thank you for your continued support of the men and women who serve our Nation. I appreciate the opportunity to represent America's airmen and their families, and I am honored to convey their needs and offer appreciation for your support on their behalf.

Our job is to support and defend America's way of life, defend our country's borders and national interests, and when absolutely necessary, fight and win our Nation's wars. It is not an easy task, which is why a focus on our airmen and their families is so important. The ultimate source of air, space, and cyberspace combat capabilities reside in the men and women of the United States Air Force. It is imperative we put them first, inspire them, and support them as they face the challenges inherent to serving in the profession of arms.

The security environment has dramatically evolved over the last 25 years, and the unpredictable landscape we now operate in requires the Air Force to continue to revisit, improve, and evolve our personnel management processes to ensure we better recruit and retain our talented airmen. The Air Force must meet the needs of the warfighter faster, more efficiently, and more effectively.

We continue to explore opportunities to strengthen the force. While some initiatives are Air Force-wide, others are more tar-

geted. But all have the same objective. Taken together, they strengthen our competitive position to battle for top talent.

To meet the global demands, resource emerging requirements, and repair and sustain the force, the Air Force must increase our Active Duty end strength up to 321,000 by the end of 2017 and up to 350,000 over the next 7 years. To do this, we must address mission and readiness demands, increase our accessions and strengthen our retention while never sacrificing quality for quantity.

Families are often the catalyst to an airman's decision to stay or leave the Air Force. These selfless families make many sacrifices, and the Air Force remains clear in its commitment to them. Our Airman and Family Readiness Centers serve as a crucial bridge with our families and military missions, encompassing 14 core programs to ensure the resiliency and readiness of airmen and their families.

We also rely on our Key Spouses, volunteer family members who are trained on critical family-based programs and other aspects of military life. We continue to expand and build our Key Spouse program, as we recognize its importance to the resilience and health of the family, especially in a time of global uncertainty and continued operational demands on our airmen.

Financial stresses significantly impact the resilience of airmen and their families. This is certainly a key factor today as our Nation continues to face fiscal uncertainty, which has already eaten at airman's compensation. There are significant concerns as it pertains to the calculus of regular military compensation. We continue to look for ways to improve the personal financial readiness of our force through education with the rollout of the Blended Retirement System and to ensure airmen and their families are prepared to make educated financial decisions. We are developing comprehensive financial training across the military lifecycle.

We are also grateful for the Spouse Education and Career Opportunity program which supports our spouses as they work to overcome the significant challenges of relocation. This support is a significant boon to the employment prospects of our spouses who relocate every few years, but more work must be done. Most notably, spouses with careers that require certification must continually seek and pay for recertification after every move. We must do more to ease the burdens of relocation in this regard on our family members.

To ensure we meet the expectations of our families, the Secretary of the Air Force and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force recently conducted a Spouse and Family Forum. We are committed to addressing many of the issues that came up during this forum, including exceptional family member support, spouse employment, school, and deployment support.

We focus on our single airmen with the same vigor and intensity as we do to our families. To that end, the Air Force created capabilities that focus on the resilience, which has a direct impact on readiness. As just one example, our Air Force Single Airman Program Initiative delivers resilient and readiness capabilities that help revitalize squadrons and optimize airmen performance.

Part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 considers potential changes to our airmen's compensation,

specifically as I just mentioned in the form of basic allowance for housing. The aggressive nature of the proposed legislation effectively removes basic allowance for housing as part of regular military compensation which could severely limit our ability to recruit and retain our airmen. This would reverse nearly 20 years of deliberate legislation action to ensure servicemembers are appropriately compensated for their service and that their salaries remain competitive with the demand for their talent and acknowledge their service and sacrifice.

The talented men and women of the Air Force are called upon each day to perform crucial missions around the world. In every one of those mission areas, airmen are the key to our success. Taking care of those airmen must always be our first priority. Every one of them earn their current pay and compensation. While we remain mindful of the current budget pressures across the Department of Defense, cost-saving needs to be tempered by the need to retain our talent, which is truly a national asset.

Undoubtedly, the past few years have been extremely trying for all members of our Air Force, Active, Guard, Reserve, and civilian airmen and their families. My wife Athena and I have visited with thousands of airmen and family members over the past year. We have listened to their concerns and witnessed firsthand their passion for service. We both can affirm the impact the current environment and uncertainty has had on our force.

I believe you have had the chance to read my written testimony, which includes greater details on the current status of our family programs and our single servicemember readiness, as well as concerns of our airmen and families.

I thank you for your tremendous support and interest in the issues which affect our force, and I look forward to the opportunity to answer your questions.

[The prepared statement of Sergeant Cody follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT JAMES A. CODY

#### INTRODUCTION

Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand and Members of the subcommittee, thank you for your continued support of the men and women who serve our Nation. I appreciate the opportunity to represent America's airmen and their families and I am honored to convey their needs and offer appreciation for your support on their behalf.

The ultimate source of air, space, and cyberspace combat capability resides in the men and women of the U.S. Air Force. We owe it to our Nation, our airmen and our partners around the world to provide a ready and resilient force. The security environment has dramatically evolved over the last 25 years, and the unpredictable landscape we now operate in requires the Air Force continue to revisit, improve, and evolve our personnel management processes to ensure we better recruit and retain our talented airmen. The Air Force must meet the needs of the warfighter faster, more efficiently, and more effectively.

Our airmen and their families are the key to our success. Our job is to support and defend America's way of life, defend our country's borders and national interests and, when absolutely necessary, to fight and win our Nation's wars. It's not an easy task, which is why focusing on our airmen and their families is so important. It is imperative we put them first, inspire them, and support them as they face the challenges inherent in serving in the profession of arms. Where we can, we must ease burdens and remove barriers. Eliminating barriers ensures we fully leverage our skilled and innovative airmen and supports retaining ready, resilient airmen and families.

The initiatives this subcommittee supports allow us to strengthen the quality of life for our airmen, even in difficult financial times. We rely on your efforts, actions, and legislation to protect and support our servicemembers.

We continue to explore opportunities to strengthen the force. While some initiatives are force-wide, others are more targeted, but all have the same objective. Taken together, these will strengthen our competitive position in the battle for top talent.

#### GROWING THE FORCE

To meet global demands, resource emerging requirements, and repair and sustain the force, the Air Force must increase Active Duty end strength—up to 321,000 by the end of 2017, and up to 350,000 over the next 7 years. The Air Force will consider end strength increases as it works with the Secretary of Defense to develop the fiscal year 2018 President’s Budget.

The Air Force continues to execute assigned missions, but nearly 25 years of combat—along with declining personnel numbers and aging equipment—have strained our readiness. Since 2001, the Active Duty Air Force has remained consistently engaged in military operations while reducing the force by more than 11 percent. The majority of reductions came from the Logistics and Agile Combat Support (ACS) communities without corresponding reductions in force structure or infrastructure. Although the Air Force took an 11 percent cut, ACS Active Duty manpower was cut 34 percent. Restoring the force ensures airmen have time to take care of themselves and their families while also taking care of the mission.

The Air Force started fiscal year 2017 with 317,000 Active Duty airmen. To successfully grow our force to meet future end strength requirements, we must address mission and readiness demands while shaping the workforce to meet current and future mission and skill requirements. The Active Duty force needs to grow by approximately 4,000 airmen a year through a combination of increased accessions and robust retention, while continually working with the Secretary of Defense to reassess our end strength needs based on overall mission requirements. To increase accessions, our recruiters and military training infrastructure must flex to handle this significant increase in annual throughput. But, we must remain measured and cautious in how fast we grow the force to ensure readiness and not further hollow the force.

#### COMPENSATION

Part of the fiscal year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act considers potential changes to our airmen’s compensation, specifically in the form of basic allowance for housing (BAH). The regressive nature of the proposed legislation effectively removes BAH as part of regular military compensation. This would reverse nearly 20 years of deliberate legislative action to ensure servicemembers are appropriately compensated for their service, and that their salaries remain competitive with private-sector professionals. The fiscal year 2017 NDAA directs the DOD to move to a single pay system no later than January 1, 2018, which represents an attempt to treat BAH as compensation rather than an allowance. The talented men and women of the Air Force are called upon each day to perform crucial missions around the world. In every one of those mission areas, airmen are the key to our success. Taking care of those airmen must always be our first priority; every one of them earn their current pay and compensation. While we remain mindful of current budget pressures across the Defense Department, cost savings needs to be tempered by the need to retain our talent, which is truly a national asset.

#### MILITARY FAMILY READINESS

Families are often the catalyst to an airman’s decision to stay or leave the Air Force. These selfless families make many sacrifices, and the Air Force remains clear on its commitment to taking care of them.

Our Airman and Family Readiness Centers (A&FRC) serve as a crucial bridge with our families and military missions, encompassing 14 core programs to ensure the resiliency and readiness of airmen and their families. Beyond our A&FRCs, the core of establishing a connection between squadrons and family members resides with our Key Spouse program. The program is comprised of volunteer spouses trained on critical family-based programs and other aspects of family life, connecting an informal network of the nerve center in our units’ families. Recognizing the pivotal nature of this relationship, we continue to focus on specific roles and responsibilities for commanders, Key Spouse mentors, and Key Spouses. This invaluable team dynamic exists at every Air Force installation per Chief of Staff of the Air Force’s direction. We continue to expand and build our Key Spouse program as we

recognize its importance to the resilience and health of the family, especially in a time of global uncertainty and continued operational demands on our airmen.

Financial stresses significantly impact the resilience of airmen and their families. This is certainly a key factor today as the Nation faces fiscal uncertainty which has potential to eat at an airman's compensation. To reduce this impact, our personal financial readiness program aims to improve the financial literacy and readiness of our total force. With the rollout of the Blended Retirement System and to ensure airmen and families are prepared to make educated financial decisions that meet their needs and circumstances, we are developing comprehensive financial literacy training across the military lifecycle. Through individual counseling, education, and mandatory training, our personal financial managers (PFM) at installations are a ready and capable asset for our airmen and families, especially the 440,000 airmen eligible to make a decision on which retirement system is right for them. Last year, our PFMs assisted 100,000 airmen and family members; the expectation over the next year is a significant increase in demand for personal financial services as we implement the Blended Retirement System.

The Spouse Education and Career Opportunity (SECO) Program tremendously assists our Air Force spouses. The DOD-led Military Spouse Employment Partnership, in collaboration with our A&FRCs, is supporting our spouses as they work to overcome the significant challenges of relocation. There are currently 338 civilian companies who have partnered to recruit and hire military spouses and have posted nearly 6 million jobs since 2011. This partnership with SECO resulted in 105,000 military spouses hired through the program since June 2011. Additionally, the Small Business Administration includes spouses in programs offered to the total force by providing the same counseling, training, and access to capital, provided to servicemembers and veterans. This support is a significant boon to the employment prospects of our spouses who relocate every few years, but more work must be done. Most notably, spouses with careers that require certification (real estate, hairstylists, nursing, teaching, etc.) must continually seek, and pay for, recertification after every move. All states have enacted broad legislation that improves license endorsement for military spouses, provides temporary licenses, and expedites their applications. Of the 50 states, 38 have improved endorsement, 47 have temporary licensure and 37 have expedited applications, but the goal is to have professional licenses and certificates which travel with spouses whenever they relocate.

The quality of locally available public education, whether on base or off base, remains a critical concern of our airmen and families. These concerns are significantly exacerbated for special needs family members or those who are home-schooled and seeking extra-curriculum activities with local schools. While the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission has done much to standardize the administrative rules between states for the transition of military children between schools, there is more to be done. The Air Force continues to explore options to meet childcare needs. Options include extending hours at child development centers, using family childcare (FCC) providers and partnering with qualified community based providers. The Air Force Child and Youth Programs operations and installation support team is working with installations who are having challenges recruiting FCC providers; however, we still need affordable, safe, immediate childcare for our families when they move. We continue to need support in funding the programs we have, building additional childcare centers on bases or building better partnerships with community providers.

To ensure we meet the expectations of our families, the Secretary of the Air Force and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force live streamed a Spouse and Family Forum centered on exceptional family members, spouse employment, schools, and deployment support. The Air Force followed up a month later with a Facebook Town Hall to announce what we accomplished since. Here are a few brief examples:

In response to requests for better communication for families enrolled in our exceptional family member program (EFMP), we established quarterly events and webcasts to the country including EFMP, family support, assignments, and medical representatives.

Also in support to EFMP family members, we funded 44 additional Exceptional Family Member Program-Family Support (EFMP-FS) coordinators. Currently, there are 43,000 exceptional family members but not every installation has an EFMP-FS coordinator, ensuring every community with more than 200 exceptional family members has a dedicated coordinator.

#### AIR FORCE SINGLE AIRMAN PROGRAM

The Air Force's Single Airman Program Initiative (SAPI) delivers resilience and readiness capabilities that help revitalize squadrons and optimize airmen perform-

ance. SAPI began in 2011 to expand activities for our single airmen population. The Air Force created capabilities that focus on resilience, camaraderie, and reintegration; thereby, increasing readiness.

Air Force made SAPI a component of its overarching Recharge-for-Resiliency (R4R) program, which encompasses high adventure/adrenaline activities and A&FRC programs focusing on reintegration after deployment. R4R is executed in two separate formats.

There are Design-It-Yourself activities, where the Air Force allocates funding directly to installations to develop programs unique to the location and interests of the airmen. These programs include ropes courses, zip-lining, water and winter sports, and cultural tours. The Air Force also created Ready-to-Launch activities with pre-designed programs to ease initial startup. As an example, the Team Cohesion Challenge is a successful program introducing the team-based training found in special operation units. The 4 to 5 hour event is demanding physically and customized to the terrain of each installation. Our airmen make great use of SAPI opportunities in recharging themselves and elevating their fitness level.

The Air Force recognizes programs such as SAPI contribute to the four pillars (spiritual, physical, mental and social) of Comprehensive Airman Fitness, while at the same time, provide fun events which help revitalize squadrons and optimize airmen performance. Since the SAPI launch in 2011, the Air Force continues to advocate for resources to ensure the program flourishes as a valuable tool in building airmen who are resilient, ready and available for the joint fight.

#### CONCLUSION

Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and Members of the subcommittee, thank you again for this opportunity to represent our incredible airmen and their families. Despite the many challenges we face, your airmen, supported by some of the strongest families our Nation will ever know, remain committed to building a strong community whose members are capable and have a sense of belonging.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide insight into the issues impacting single servicemembers and our families. We appreciate your continued support, and for your commitment to retaining ready, resilient airmen and families. We're counting on you to lead our Nation and ensure we have the resources to remain the world's greatest Air Force.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you all, gentlemen. To your spouses, thank them for their service too because I know, if it is like my job, it is teamwork that makes it possible.

The topics we are going to discuss today are vital to the health of our All-Volunteer Force. We have got a number of stressors, some of which we address. Some of them we may not address in the most efficient manner possible, and there are a lot of opportunities for, I think, improvement here. I think that the Ranking Member and I agree.

The main thing that we need to focus on, though, is instead of just purely asking you all questions about what we think you need is to make sure that we are listening to you about things that we have not even thought about yet. Some of that will come down to an ongoing dialogue with myself, the Ranking Member, and Members of this committee to offer up suggestions for things that we can do better, to be more expedient, more responsive to the needs you think our soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen all have in common.

I want to thank you again for being here today.

I also want to defer to Senator Gillibrand for her opening comments before we go to questions.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will submit my opening comments for the record.

[The prepared statement of Senator Gillibrand follows:]

## PREPARED STATEMENT BY SENATOR KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND

TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE SINGLE SERVICEMEMBER AND  
MILITARY FAMILY READINESS PROGRAMS

Thank you, Senator Tillis. I join with you today in welcoming our witnesses as we discuss these very important issues.

Before I begin my statement, I want to congratulate you, Senator Tillis, on your new chairmanship of this very important subcommittee. As military and civilian leadership of the Department and the Services have testified over the years, our men and women in uniform are our greatest asset and resource; thus, it follows that this subcommittee is in many respects the most important, and certainly the issues we grapple with carry great import for our servicemembers and their families. This subcommittee has a long history of bipartisan cooperation, which continued throughout Senator Graham's tenure as Ranking Member and Chairman, and I fully expect that to continue under your leadership. I very much look forward to working with you as we strive to improve the lives of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, retirees and their families.

This is an appropriate topic for our first subcommittee hearing this year, and I thank you for holding it. My primary concern continues to be how we support servicemembers and their families, especially those with children and other dependents with special needs, and how we set them up for success. This hearing is styled as a review of single servicemember and family readiness programs. The readiness of our military—in short, its ability to fight and win the Nation's wars, depends on the readiness of its units, which in turn depends on the readiness of the individual servicemember, which ultimately depends on the readiness of that servicemember's family. If the family isn't ready, the servicemember isn't ready, and the military as a whole is not as ready as it needs to be, and lives will be at risk.

Our military has gone through many changes in these 16 years of war, and it is the servicemembers and their families who have borne the brunt of the impact. I would like to hear from our witnesses what support services are available for these families, how they are assigned, what happens to the family when the member deploys, and whether these programs will be fully funded in the upcoming budget request.

To that end, one initiative I have pursued the last 2 years, and which I will continue to pursue in this Congress along with Senator Blunt, my cosponsor, is the Military Family Stability Act. We've heard from our military families about the challenges they face when a servicemember is reassigned, and we need policies that better accommodate spouses with careers and children in school. The Military Family Stability Act would better serve the modern military family to give our servicemembers, their spouses, and their children new resources and much-needed flexibility when they have to move. I would like to hear more from our witnesses about the challenges that confront our military families, due to the nature of military service, and how we can address these challenges to better support military families.

I also appreciate the inclusion in this hearing of consideration of single servicemember programs. While it is difficult for military families to adjust to military life, we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that most servicemembers are first termers, first time away from home, away from their families, and have to adjust to military life away from their support networks. These individuals have families and friends that they depend on, but the military in many ways becomes their family, and that brings its own challenges. I look forward to hearing how we take care of these servicemembers, and what role the military plays in their lives.

We have also made many changes in the past few years—from retirement to healthcare—and I would like to hear from our witnesses how these changes are being rolled out, what kind of programs you are putting in place to ensure that servicemembers understand the changes, and how you are incorporating military families into that educational process.

One of the major changes the Department made in the last year was to open up all combat positions to women. I would like to hear about how the Services are implementing this policy to ensure the effective integration of women into these units and address any challenges.

Again, I thank the witnesses and I look forward to your testimony.

Senator TILLIS. Then I am going to move very quickly.

We have a little bit of a military presence down in North Carolina. Down at Fort Bragg, my wife has taken on a cause called Baby Bundles. Ironically about 9 months after a major deployment,

we have a lot of babies born down at Womack. What we have done is created, you know, this Baby Bundle support for new families. It is amazing to me. When you get personally involved in that—this is going into our third year—you see how under-met the needs are of these young families and single military personnel. So I want to talk just briefly on childcare.

What are the Services doing to expedite the process for employee background checks?

Sergeant DAILEY. Sir, I can address this. I appreciate the concern you have for our soldier family members and I appreciate the outreach that you do with you and your wife. That is well received by our family members down at Fort Bragg, sir. So thank you.

This is a huge concern for us. One of the key things that enable our family members and a lot of our spouses to seek employment is childcare. It is the number one resourced function within MWR [Morale Welfare Recreation] in the United States Army by size and scope. It is critical to our success and it is something we have continue to invest in for the future.

We experience a backlog for several reasons. First and foremost, we need additional space. So it is a MILCON [Military Construction] issue and we need to seek resources to meet the adequate needs of our soldiers at our major installations.

Second is the one you described, sir. It is a backlog of employment, sir. We have been working this very hard. I think we have done an okay job at reducing that amount of backlog, but it is compounded by the simple problem that people often do not want to wait for those background checks and they need to seek employment. We are working very hard through our individuals that conduct backlog to continue to reduce that, and we are allowing more soldiers—if we cannot meet their needs on post, we are allowing them use funds in order to seek equal opportunities for them to seek childcare off post by offsetting the costs.

Senator TILLIS. Unless the other gentlemen have an adjustment to that, I would like to expand the question just a little bit. You can go back and add onto what the Sergeant Major said. That would be, have you looked at fully supervised provisional approvals so that you can start addressing the backlog and making sure that we have adequate childcare services for our soldiers?

Sergeant GREEN. In the Marine Corps, sir, we have committed more adjudicators to the process. Today we do not have a backlog or wait for employment in our childcare process. What we are experiencing is the outside community have adjusted the age that they are taking on kids under 4 years of age, and that is causing employment to go elsewhere. So when that backlog was there, we had employers leaving and now it is more competitive to get them to come on base with the salary that the government pays childcare providers. That is the problem we are having now.

Senator TILLIS. Anything to add on the subject?

I am also kind of interested in something. We are going to have to submit a number of questions for the record on these topics. One that I would like to talk about in my remaining time is what initiatives the service lines have taken to expand employment opportunities for military spouses. We will start with Mr. Giordano.

Chief GIORDANO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

If I may in regard to the spouse employment through the childcare facilities, you know our Navy has approximately 237 CDCs, child development centers, and youth centers across the globe. We deal from a spouse employment perspective. We allow our spouses the opportunity to basically operate in any of those CDCs. So if a servicemember PCSes [Permanent Change of Stations] and gets to another location that has a CDC, that spouse's credential automatically translates to that other CDC, and they are guaranteed employment into that other location, which has yielded great benefit and removes a little bit of stress for those providers inside the facilities, which also allows for increased capacity because of the number of providers that can easily come on board inside those facilities.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you.

We will submit these so we get consistent answers from each of the lines of service here. Thank you.

Chief GIORDANO. In regard to the spouse employment piece—and as you mentioned, my wife is with me. I will share a story, which is my wife is a registered nurse, and her license across the State lines has changed a number of times throughout the years. It presents a challenge for her every time she has got to get a new license and pay for that licensing. I know that we have taken great steps to try to mitigate that in the Services, working with our Department of Labor and our State processes, and we appreciate all those efforts.

But the bigger challenge is probably the overseas locations. When our spouses are looking for that employment overseas and they are restricted by the status of forces agreements and things of that nature that might limit those employment opportunities. So I think that the biggest struggle in this is those employment opportunities in overseas environments and what we can do to try to help mitigate those.

Senator TILLIS. Senator Gillibrand?

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am also concerned about spouses. Over the past few years, I have requested all files for sexual assault cases from the four major bases, one for each of the Services. One of the issues that came to light was the high number of spouses who are abused. Oftentimes those were cases that, although reported in an unrestricted way, get withdrawn within the first year of the investigation.

For these cases of spousal abuse, some of them end up in the Family Advocacy Program and then are included in the yearly SAPRO [Sexual Assault Prevention Office] reports. Do you know why spouses are not surveyed as part of the biennial prevalence survey, and do you recommend they should be? Each one.

Sergeant DAILEY. Ma'am, I can't answer at this time why they are not surveyed. Of course, I would have to take that for the record. With regard to the Family Advocacy Program, there are rules associated with release of that information. I am not referring that to being released to Congress. So I cannot comment right now on whether or not they should be surveyed. I have to take a look at those rules before I make that recommendation.

Senator GILLIBRAND. That would be great. Thank you.

Chief GIORDANO. The same response.

Sergeant GREEN. The same response, ma'am.

Sergeant CODY. Ma'am, I think we do include them if they do report. But to your point on the survey, I just do not know that we have expanded that aperture—

Senator GILLIBRAND. They are only included if they filed an unrestricted report, but they are not surveyed. The survey is an estimate because all servicemembers take it. When we say last year there were 20,000 cases of sexual assault, unwanted sexual contact, and other sexual abuse, they survey the members and they extrapolate from that. So if they are not being surveyed—in 1 year that we looked at it, more than half of the cases were spouses. So that would mean if they are not being surveyed and there is no estimate, that 20,000 number is not accurate because they are not actually being surveyed to be part of the prevalence survey.

I would urge you to look at what is happening in your own services and make recommendations because I would like to include them in the survey. We are thinking on what would make sense, how it would make sense because we are just not capturing the data. Then when they withdraw from the prosecution of the case, then you do not even know why they withdrew because once they are out of the system, they are out of the system. It may go to the 62 percent retaliation rate. I mean, spouses might be uniquely positioned that they easily get retaliated against because it is against their spouse.

[Responses included in the questions for the record.]

Related, I am also worried about child abuse. There are a number of cases that are really heartbreaking. When there is a child abuse case, it gets reported to the Family Advocacy Program, but again, if that then is not prosecuted, is not treated as such. I will give you just a couple examples.

The DOD instruction 6400 states that commanders are responsible for ensuring alleged military abusers are held accountable for their conduct through appropriate disposition under the UCMJ and/or administrative regulations, as appropriate. This does not appear to be happening.

Two examples, in 2015, a 14-week-old baby, Kiley Houston, died from suffocation in her soiled crib on board the Naval Air Station New Orleans. A 20-month-old, Ryan Ott, drowned in a pond while his mother and her boyfriend, a military police officer at Fort Bragg, snorted prescription tranquilizers. In each case, the abuser's commander either knew or should have known of the abuse that led to each child's death and no military justice action was taken.

What are your recommendations about how to fix the system?

Sergeant CODY. Ma'am, I will start. Obviously horrific situations and crimes. From an Air Force perspective, when we are aware of those crimes, we do prosecute, and we can certainly provide an example of that. When child abuse is brought or neglect is brought to our attention, if it does fall within the purview of the UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice], we have done so and held people accountable, as well as work with child protective services to ensure that the child—in the event that it is not a catastrophic loss because of their death type of thing. But we do do that. So it is unfortunate when things slip through, but I know we do vigorously prosecute these crimes when they are brought to our attention.

Chief GIORDANO. If I may. You know, from a Navy perspective, again I am not familiar with those two cases, but I think our Navy, our leadership, does a phenomenal job in holding—

Senator GILLIBRAND. Well, let me just give you a proof point why I am so concerned. In 2015, FAP [Family Advocacy Program] counted 5,378 child abuse and neglected victims in military families, but claimed they only received reports on approximately 25 percent of the cases. So there are a lot more cases than wind up getting to criminal justice.

My time has expired. If you want to submit fuller answers to the record. We just have to deal with the fact that only 25 percent of the cases are typically reported, and it may be a process problem that we could fix.

Senator TILLIS. Senator Ernst?

Senator ERNST. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, it is good to see you here today.

I echo Senator Tillis' comments and thoughts that this does not count as a date, and neither does going through the drive-thru on the way home. So make sure you treat your spouses appropriately on Valentine's Day.

Sergeant Major Dailey, I would like to start with you. I do appreciate the testimony that has been given by each of you today on a number of the programs that are available to help our families. It is very important because that allows us to strengthen our military.

But I am not only concerned about those that are currently serving and will continue to serve in the future, but those that are transitioning out of our services as well.

Just a few years ago, I was an Active Duty spouse of one of the Army's finest NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officer]. During that time, I worked for a transition assistance program at Fort Benning, and in that program, we were able to assist soldiers as they left the military. We helped them find jobs, whether it was in the local community or in their home States if they chose to return to those home States.

Sergeant Major, if you could talk a little bit about the transition assistance programs that continue to need support, but why those are so important and what we can do better to assist our services in those transition assistance programs.

Sergeant DAILEY. Senator, I would be happy to. This is an area, Senator Ernst, distinguished Members of the panel, that I would like to talk about that I think we have gotten right for the last several years. As you describe, we need to continue because it is a constant effort that we need to continue to provide for our young soldiers as they leave the service.

But we have invested in this heavily. With the new Soldier for Life program—we turned this on about 3 or 4 years ago—we recognized the absence of providing adequate transition services to our young servicemembers and their families as they left the service. It really is an investment in our future. It is an investment that tells America that we believe in these young men and women and they are valued enough to invest in them for the future. We have worked things like our career skills programs throughout our institution partnering with our great organizations outside of our gates

to help us provide them with the necessary skills. We have instituted credentialing programs to give credentials to those soldiers where their job skills in the military translate to civilian sectors to provide them jobs, and those efforts since 2008, ma'am, have reduced our unemployment compensation from over \$500 million a year to approximately \$172 million this year.

So I agree that we need to continue to do this and we need to continue to find ways to credential our young men and women so they fill those valuable spots that they can seize in today's job market.

Senator ERNST. That is fantastic.

The credentialing—is that done through our Army university or are there other methods of credentialing?

Sergeant DAILEY. Currently, ma'am, because of the work that Congress did for us last year, we have the authorization to credential soldiers that are within the MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] that they hold currently in the Army, and those credentials match civilian occupations in the civilian sector.

I think where there is future potential to expand that capability, as you describe—and I do not think we are done with our efforts—we can allow soldiers to elect credentials. The preponderance of the soldiers in our Army serve in combat MOSs, and their job skills do not directly translate to civilian sector jobs. I think this is an opportunity, a vacancy that we can find an opportunity to help our soldiers and continue to provide them with the necessary skills they need to be successful as they transition from Soldiers for Life.

Senator ERNST. Fantastic.

Any other comments?

Sergeant GREEN. Yes, ma'am. I will give you some examples of how this process is working. We partnered with Microsoft. Actually they host a 16-week program aboard three major installations, and upon completion, they actually invite the marines in to actually do interviews for jobs. If they are not picked up by Microsoft, they make an interview for other IT [Information Technology] industries who have picked up on this, and eventually they will have a place of employment.

We partner with the Department of Energy for solar. We have a 16-week solar program, along with the enrollers in the American Aluminum program and we have a 16-week program. It has been going for about 8 years at Camp Pendleton. It just came on board about 2 years ago at Camp Lejeune. So there are numerous programs out there and organizations that are getting the process, and like Sergeant Major Dailey said, this is a good news story.

Senator ERNST. It is very good.

Any other comments?

Sergeant CODY. Ma'am, I would just add on to what they said as an airman who is 3 days away from that transition himself. So I fully appreciate the impact of this.

We are doing a lot, but I think the challenge and the disconnect quickly comes in this idea, and it goes to this financial education that I am talking about and the realization of the compensation and what they have been doing for their country and the lifestyle that they and their family have become accustomed to and have earned and then transitioning those skills into somewhere where

they can actually do the same thing. Because we do things a little different—you know, there is some magic math that takes place on how we compensate the military and account for all of that.

I think the challenge is people separate because there are a lot of jobs out there. If we can get them credentialed where they can get those jobs that are comparable, you are in. But if you are not, they are not going to take those jobs because they cannot afford to. That is where I think we still have work to do is to really bridge that gap working with the Department of Labor, crossing State lines on those things. There is lots of opportunity to get this better, not that we have not put a lot of good effort into it.

Senator ERNST. That is fantastic. Thank you and congratulations.

This is just an important point for those of us that are here is making sure that not only do we value those servicemembers who are currently on inactive status, but that we value what they have given to our Nation as they move into their next career. So thank you, gentlemen, very much.

Senator TILLIS. Senator Warren?

Senator WARREN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I just want to say how delighted I am. I am the newest member of this committee and looking forward to serving with you as chair and with our Ranking Member and doing the hard work that this committee should be doing.

So I wanted to follow up on Senator Ernst's question and see if I can just dig in a little bit more and make sure I understand this.

Each of you is responsible for communicating the concerns of enlisted personnel up the chain of command. So you know, as well as anyone, that the vast majority of our enlisted servicemembers transition out of service before they reach their 20 years. When they leave, they need to be able to find these civilian jobs.

You know, this transition, I recognize, can be really difficult even for highly trained and experienced personnel. I just want to ask a couple of questions about why that is so.

Sergeant Major Dailey, the Army trains thousands of soldiers every year to drive trucks in the most difficult conditions, in combat, with hazardous cargo, at night in sandstorms. You name it. If it is tough, you train people to do it. So would you say those folks are pretty good truck drivers?

Sergeant DAILEY. I am saying in my opinion they are the best in the world, ma'am.

Senator WARREN. Best truck drivers in the world. That sounds like an expert opinion on that.

So with those kinds of skills, when they transition from the Army, it is reasonable to assume that they could pretty much sign on with any long-haul trucking company and hit the interstate the next day. Right?

Sergeant DAILEY. That is correct, ma'am.

Senator WARREN. And they can?

Sergeant DAILEY. Not fully, ma'am, no.

Senator WARREN. No, they cannot. How come?

Sergeant DAILEY. Ma'am, it is a complicated matter. First and foremost, one, we have to credential them, those young men and women. Two is we have to work the requirements for each and

every one of the 54 States and territories that license those trucks, ma'am.

Senator WARREN. So we have got a State, a national licensing problem here, and we cannot take the world's best truck drivers and just automatically move them into truck driving jobs. Right? Civilian truck driving jobs. Okay.

Let me ask another one. Chief Cody, I know that you got your start as an air traffic controller. I did my homework, and the Air Force trains thousands of air traffic controllers every single year. These airmen are responsible for the safety of aircraft worth millions of dollars, not to mention the lives of their crews, that they often direct traffic in the most hazardous possible situations. Is that correct?

Sergeant CODY. Yes, ma'am.

Senator WARREN. All right. It sounds very challenging. Surely these individuals can walk out of the Air Force and fill an opening at a low-key domestic airport when they separate from the Services.

Sergeant CODY. So they can.

Senator WARREN. You would like them to be able to. Can they? Can they get fully credentialed? So they right now are fully credentialed and able to do that? Any airman can leave?

Sergeant CODY. So for us in the Air Force—and this goes back to 32 years-plus for me—we have been given that authority from the get-go. So when we graduate our training, we have an FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] certificate, which is what is required to be a CTO, control tower operator. So any air traffic controller that has received that can go and apply. Now, they have to compete with everybody else. Post 9/11, the FAA changed their hiring rules for controllers that were over the age limit. Age limit is the biggest factor for us.

Senator WARREN. But we have set up at the federal level a licensing program. So once you have gotten that training, you just take it and you come out and you slip right into at least the competition for the civilian jobs.

Sergeant CODY. Exactly.

Senator WARREN. Very helpful. Thank you very much.

Master Chief Giordano, let me ask. Enlisted sailors operate and maintain some of the most sophisticated equipment in the world. They are trusted and trained to respond in any number of crisis situations. So surely these personnel are able to obtain civilian certifications and licenses at their service jobs. Is that right or not?

Chief GIORDANO. To an extent, ma'am. We have about 80 enlisted ratings in the Navy, and we offer every sailor at least one opportunity to earn a credential in each one of those ratings. But the unfortunate thing is those ratings encompass a number of different skill sets. So our Navy is driving to reinvent our training pipeline to where we can train to a specific skill set in each one of those ratings and then get to a credentialing opportunity so that they will have that expertise as they do make that transition.

Senator WARREN. Then, like the Air Force expertise, will it be a credential that will be recognized in all 50 States, or are you going to have to negotiate or, as you say, 54 different jurisdictions that you have to negotiate?

Chief GIORDANO. A path that we will have to cross, Senator.

Senator WARREN. I think that sounds like 54.

But thank you. Look, I know that we have made progress in this area in part thanks to the former First Lady's Joining Forces Initiative. I know you all have worked on that. I definitely do not want to change or lower civilian certification standards. That is not the problem here. But it seems to me that America spends hundreds of millions of dollars each year to train our servicemembers to do these highly skilled jobs. We train them to do these jobs with precision, to do them without mistakes, to do them in Active combat situations, and I believe they should be ready to move into civilian life with those certifications.

What concerns me right now is that too many servicemembers are being roped into expensive credentialing programs by predatory, for-profit colleges that are looking to get a hold of those military benefits and make a profit off them. I just want to work on making it easier for our servicemembers, when they leave the service, to have that credential in hand and know that that credential is going to be recognized in all relevant 54 jurisdictions. I think we can fix this problem, and I look forward to working with you on it. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you, Senator Warren. Senator Warren, I suspect there are going to be one or two policy matters on a broader base that we may not see eye to eye on, but on the line of questioning you just had, there is a lot of—after we defer—you know, Chairman McCain announced that we are going to have a rodeo roll here in the committee where after 8 seconds, we buck people to the next committee. Of course, that was before I knew the chairman was going to stop in.

[Laughter.]

Senator TILLIS. So Chairman McCain.

Chairman MCCAIN. I thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank you and Senator Gillibrand for your focus on the personnel issues that are obviously vital to our Nation's defense.

I do not want to interrupt the proceedings. I would just like to ask one question of our distinguished leaders. Anything I ever learned about leadership I learned from a master chief petty officer, and I thank you especially Chief Petty Officer Giordano.

As we know, 25 percent of military spouses in the labor force are unemployed. Many are under-employed. Obviously, the movement of our military personnel makes it extremely difficult for spouses to hold employment and jobs. My only question I would have, Mr. Chairman, is maybe our witnesses could describe how we are trying to address that challenge. Maybe we could begin with you, Command Master Chief Cody.

Sergeant CODY. Yes, Senator. Thanks for the opportunity to address this.

So I think we are making some inroads here, but the previous discussion you will see in the record is we do need to work on this ability of licensing and the transferability of that. We have done some work here. So I want to be respectful of the fact that there has been an effort to create the ability to have some time frame—

right—so you can seek employment, given some time to get the credentialing done or licensing done for that State.

Chairman MCCAIN. Would that require approval or legislation on the part of States?

Sergeant CODY. It is going to require collaboration between the States. Yes, sir. Absolutely. I mean, that is essential to this.

I do think there is a way ahead. We did this with education. We came up with the Military Coalition Act where we kind of worked with every State to say, hey, with children that are going to transfer from school to school, a baseline of what they will accept so our children would not be taking a step back with every State that they went into and getting behind.

But something similar to that nature where there is at least some type of baseline foundation where everybody fundamentally agrees that in this transition time, we are going to accept things as long as they meet some minimum level, to Chairman Tillis' point, you know, some level of supervised ability to get employment, understanding it will take time.

I do think we have a responsibility to take on the cost of that, help with the cost of that through some type of offset because it is very expensive for some of these licensing and credentialing across State lines. It makes it prohibitive when you are talking about a 2- to 3-year move ratio. It is almost cost prohibitive.

Sergeant GREEN. Yes, sir. Good afternoon, sir.

Chairman MCCAIN. We are calling on the communities to help.

Sergeant GREEN. Yes, sir. I agree, sir.

Two things from the Marine Corps. Number one, we are looking at our programs and seeing how we can further align with the States. We felt maybe we could teach them some things in our curriculum, one or two things that actually will parse out what the differences are in that licensing process. We tried it with a few MOSs. The industry out there—they actually accepted that. So some of it is just going through our curriculums.

The other part of it is the language is different. Of course, truck drivers can drive, but some of it is just how we write the language in our system, going back and taking a look at that and rewriting it. That has been successful for us in some cases.

Another thing is for the Marine Corps—we are so young. We move pretty often. We are looking at the model that we move on and the number of years we move families, looking to keep them more stabilized in this environment we are in. So that is helping us as well.

Chief GIORDANO. Thank you for the question, Senator, and the compliment as well. I appreciate it.

You know, I would say that one of the issues we have from a spouse employment base is also access to the things that are readily available today. That is where we are at, I think in a little state of play with the Navy, is aligning all those things to make sure that spouses understand how they can access these things, whether it is access to scholarship opportunities or whether it is access to figure out how to link to a partner that we have through our SECO [Spouse Educational Career Opportunities] initiatives in those hiring practices or how to speak—when they go into a fleet and family service center to speak to a counselor that talks about our Hiring

Our Heroes programs. So getting that access and that information to the family members is critical in this.

The other piece that I mentioned earlier I think that is even more important or as important, as we cross State lines within the continental U.S., is the employment outside of the U.S. in the other areas that we find our spouses trying to gain employment and have limited opportunity for employment.

Sergeant DAILEY. Senator McCain, thanks for the opportunity and thank you for the question.

I think this is important not just advocating for soldiers, but all of us here have lived this with our spouses as we moved probably seven dozen times or more combined. This is important because we know that stability in the family makes for better soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines, and we proved that over time.

I think that we have done a lot of great work in the area of the MSEP, the Military Spouse Employment Program. We have asked people outside our gates to help us with this, partnering with hundreds of non-government agencies that produce thousands of employment opportunities for our spouses for the last several years. I think we need to continue to strengthen that in every way, shape, and form we can.

One of the things I think we can improve on is what MCPON [Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy] just talked about is internal and external communication in both forms, talking to our spouses about the availability of these type of programs and having them exercise these resources and to continue to talk to our partners outside of our gates of our installations, talk to them about the value that they bring because, as you mentioned, sir, many times they are more educated but they are getting less salary for the work that they are doing.

Lastly, I believe that we can resource our internal resources. Over the last several years, we have done great work with regard to finding education and training opportunities that enhance job opportunities for our young soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines as they exit the service. With the appropriate resourcing for these things, we can easily extend these services to our families as well.

Chairman MCCAIN. I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think this is an issue and maybe we ought to look at—if an individual is credentialed or licensed to work in one State, maybe we could look at making the licensing applicable in other States. I hope we would look at that.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank you, Senator Gillibrand.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you.

Ranking Member Reed?

Senator REED. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing.

Thank you, gentlemen, for your service. My sense is that the greatest force multiplier we have in our military forces is the non-commissioned officer. So go back and tell your other NCOs the great job they are doing for all of us.

Chairman MCCAIN. The absence of leadership from West Point.

[Laughter.]

Senator REED. That is right.

I do not know if the chairman found this out at Annapolis, but they taught us very early before we did anything, check with the first sergeant. If he said it was cool, then do it. It at least got me through without major incident.

Anyway, one of the issues that I discovered, as probably the chairman did and others, on Active service is financial problems complicate life so dramatically for servicemen and women. I saw something that really was staggering. According to the DOD, every time we separate a servicemember, it costs the Department \$57,000. The Department estimates that each year somewhere between 4,700 and 8,000 servicemembers are involuntary separated due to financial hardship. That is a staggering amount of money, and it is totally avoidable I think.

One thing we have tried to do—and I want to thank the chairman and all my colleagues—is the Military Lending Act ensured real protections for servicemen and women and families. In addition to that, what we have done when we created the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, we specifically put in an Office of Service Members Affairs, which has been led until recently by Holly Petraeus. I am just wondering if you can give us any sort of on-the-ground feedback about if it is helping. Do we need to do more? What else can we do? I will start just because it is the Army, just because he is there. Okay? Sergeant Dailey?

Sergeant DAILEY. Senator Reed, thanks for the question. I would be happy to share with you my experience with the organization, which you described and which previously was led by Ms. Holly Petraeus.

We have scheduled meetings with her on frequency in the past. She has easily described the benefit that she provided to our soldiers in the ways of protecting and making sure they were not being aggressively pursued by predatory lenders. So I cannot speak for the specific numbers, but I know it is a substantial amount of help that was provided by that organization for our soldiers.

This also increased our internal agencies that provide assistance. So now soldiers are no longer going with those predatory lenders. They are now using things like the Army Emergency Relief Fund, which is a nonprofit organization governed by the military service or oversight by the military service that provides low and no-cost interest loans to our soldiers. So I see value in that organization and I know that they have done great things for our servicemembers.

Senator REED. Chief?

Chief GIORDANO. Thank you, Senator.

I know that our sailors think about when they get the calls from debt collectors, they think about mortgages, and they think about interest rates, high interest rates. What we can do to try to help mitigate that or provide them education up front to work through all that—and like my battle buddy here, the sergeant major, I have also met with Holly Petraeus prior to her retirement. I had the opportunity to speak with them about services that are provided and the education that is provided to our servicemembers.

Something that we spoke about just recently is, we have this thing called the Misadventures of Money Management that we provide to those personnel that are in our delayed entry programs to

kind of start them upfront on education in those regards, so things that later may affect them in life that they may not understand. The idea is educate them early before they even get into an institution that may affect them later on, involuntary separation, or clearance matters that may affect money matters. So we have worked hand in hand with them. We continue a weekly battle rhythm with the office to continue to figure out any support they can provide in the realm of financial literacy.

Senator REED. Thank you.

Sergeant Major?

Sergeant GREEN. I echo my battle buddies here. We are the last one to come on board. I was reading this morning on the treadmill, sir, the Misadventures of Money Management. We actually tied it into our program for our policy for the blended retirement system which we will roll out on March 1 and we will start to capture those members as well. This is a great program, a great tutorial, and starting with the delayed entry program is the right place to start. We know that.

Senator REED. Thank you very much.

Sergeant Cody?

Sergeant CODY. Senator Reed, thanks.

I think all of us who have spent time with Holly Petraeus would have the same opinion of any agency out there specifically focused on supporting servicemembers and their families, and helping them make decisions is good for the military. It is good for them.

The only thing I think I would share with you on this, especially as we talk about this blended retirement stuff—we are talking a lot about military compensation and looking at all this, and to your point, money is a huge factor in just the sustainability of a family and a lifestyle—is this idea that we are never going to be experts within the Department of Defense on this type of money management. It is not what the American people expect us to do. This becomes a personal thing. But the dynamics and the lifestyles that we expect our people to live in are dramatically different than anybody else in the Nation.

So having these relationships and available services outside where they are resources to us is extremely important because they are experts. Having access to the experts that can help us through understanding what this fully means to a young person, upon their retirement, how that changes I think is better because their sole focus is on that, and our sole focus cannot be on that. It has to be doing what we do for the Nation.

Again, I think they have done great stuff from that office particularly. I think that is the only thing we can speak to because that is our interaction with the agency. But no question, we need something like that to leverage as a support structure for those that serve because realizing the predominance—you know, the sergeant major talked earlier—of the age of the people that come into the military and the lack of education they have on finances. So having them embed into school systems and better educate people like we are doing, if you start off a little bit better, you have a better chance of finishing.

Senator REED. Thank you very much. If there is anything else you think we can do along these lines, please let us know. Thank

you for your service and thank the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines that you so ably represent. Thank you.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you, Senator Reed.

Just some closing comments before we move to the next panel. Senator Reed?

Senator REED. Can I, with unanimous consent, submit my statement?

Senator TILLIS. Without objection.

[The prepared statement of Senator Reed follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY SENATOR JACK REED

TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE SINGLE SERVICEMEMBER AND MILITARY FAMILY READINESS PROGRAMS

Thank you, Senator Tillis and Senator Gillibrand, for holding this very important hearing. The readiness of the Armed Forces is fundamental to ensuring our men and women in uniform can perform all that we ask of them, fighting and winning the Nation's wars, while maximizing the chance they return safely home to their families.

I want to highlight one particular aspect of readiness that is often overlooked, but is probably the single biggest element in ensuring the stability of military families and the readiness of servicemembers: financial readiness. Eleven years ago, the Department of Defense sent a report to Congress that alarmed many of us, detailing the predatory lending practices of payday lenders, car title lenders, and other unscrupulous actors who targeted servicemembers in order to trap them deeper and deeper in debt. Specifically, these predators took advantage of our servicemembers' unusual combination of youth and financial inexperience, a steady income, and the very fact of military service itself. This is because these young servicemembers could be threatened in a variety of ways for their unpaid debts, whether by raising the specter of punitive action by commanders, including the loss of a security clearance, or even administrative disciplinary action. In short, young enlisted military members present a target-rich clientele for predatory lenders, and they have taken full advantage.

Congress responded by passing the Military Lending Act (MLA), which provides numerous consumer protections for servicemembers and their families. These protections have served us well, and have allowed servicemembers to keep their focus where it should be—on their mission. It is important that these protections continue.

The Office of Servicemember Affairs of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) has been instrumental in ensuring consistent enforcement and awareness of the protections afforded by the MLA. The CFPB has worked tirelessly on behalf of servicemembers since its inception, returning over \$120 million to military families. According to DOD, "each separation of a servicemember is estimated to cost the Department \$57,333, and the Department estimates that each year approximately 4,703 to 7,957 servicemembers are involuntarily separated due to financial distress." In addition to the cost savings DOD has identified, I give great weight and deference to DOD's belief that a strong MLA reduces "non-quantifiable costs associated with financial strains on servicemembers. High-cost debt can detract from mission focus, reduce productivity, and require the attention of supervisors and commanders." These protections clearly enhance the readiness of our Armed Forces.

Senator REED. Thank you.

Senator TILLIS. The point—before I was Senator, I was Speaker of the House in North Carolina. We moved some legislation I think is very important. I would like to get feedback from all of you all in follow-up form for States that are doing a particularly good job of making this crosswalk available. [Response not received in time for printing. When received, answer will be retained in committee files.] Sergeant Major Green, you had a very good point. We need to look at the MOSs and the definition of jobs that we have to make sure they best crosswalk to, say, industry standards for positions like CDLs [Commercial Driving Licenses] in North Carolina.

We did express permitting for CDLs. We did what we called Brass to Class so that we could have officers come in and move into a public school classroom on a lateral entry basis. It would be helpful to get an inventory of the States that are getting some of those policies right so that that can be instructive in things that we can do encourage other States to get up to that same level and maybe provide some incentive for doing that.

Mr. Cody—or I should say Master Chief—I would like to thank you for your service. I think this may be the last time you come before this committee. I want to thank you and your family, and on behalf of all the military families and people serving, thank you so much for your leadership and commitment to taking care of our men and women in uniform. I would just ask—you still look pretty young. Make sure you do not have the ear buds in the transition meeting, not listening to all the things you can take advantage of in transition and come out of that transition process transition-literate. That is the last thing I will leave you with.

We are also very curious about the majority of men and women who go into the armed services who are going to leave at some point far earlier than retirement age. As a member of the Veterans Affairs Committee, I would also like to get your input on things that we can do better to glue together the DOD and Veterans so that we make sure that these soldiers know what they have available to them and we also have very clear vision into challenges that they may face so that we can do the best job of serving them after they have served us.

Thank you all for your time on the committee, and we appreciate your feedback on the follow-up questions.

The next committee, while we are doing a transition and changing the nameplates—I want to welcome the second panel before the committee here and introduce the speakers. We have Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Ms. Stephanie Barna. We have Kathy Roth-Douquet, CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of the Blue Star Families, and we have Joyce Raezer, Executive Director of the National Military Family Association (NMFA). Thank you all for being here. Consistent with the first panel, we will have you, if you could, have opening comments of about 5 minutes. Please feel free to submit your comments for the record, and then we will go to questions. We will start with Ms. Roth-Douquet.

**STATEMENT OF KATHY ROTH-DOUQUET, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, BLUE STAR FAMILIES**

Ms. ROTH-DOUQUET. Thank you so much. Senator Tillis, Senator Gillibrand, I really appreciate you having us here today and I appreciated that earlier session too. We know that you all care about us, and that makes a big difference to all the servicemembers and their families.

Blue Star Families builds communities that support military families and connects them to their civilian neighbors. We believe all military families members ought to be able to both serve their Nation and see their families thrive.

One of the ways we do our work is through research that finds the current problems facing military families and works with part-

ners on those solutions. Our annual military family lifestyle survey is nationally recognized as a yearly snapshot. It is the largest and most comprehensive survey of Active Duty, veterans, and their families in the country. It is released annually with the House and Senate military family caucuses, and it is used broadly by the White House, Congress, Department of Defense, State and local officials, foundations, and other nonprofits.

So what I would like to talk to you about is what we learned in this year's survey, which was released in December, which is that we see a military community at a point of inflection. The All-Volunteer Force and our military personnel system was not designed for our current security situation of low-intensity conflict over time for a force that is educated, married, and living in a society that is increasingly diverse and inclusive, and increasingly middle class families require two incomes to maintain lifestyle and create opportunities for their children.

Rather than ad hoc measures meant to provide support during periods of acute warfare, military families need to be understood as a structure, a part of the structure of the force. Military family readiness programs alone cannot be the answer. Families are part of recruitment, retention, readiness, and reintegration and need to be structured as such in a way they currently are not.

I am honored to help lead an effort with the Bipartisan Policy Center examining the impact of military family policy on readiness and national security. Our upcoming report, which we will be presenting here to the full Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) will demonstrate how military family readiness is part of our national security.

When DOD maintains policies that categorize military families purely as quality of life issues, it does not get us to where we need to be.

You have most of my remarks for the record. I just want to highlight that when we ask the open-ended response to servicemembers' families, what is it that DOD could do to make the biggest difference for you in your lives today, the number one written-in response was childcare. It is important to note that two-thirds of families do not have childcare to meet their needs.

Number two was health care.

Number three was operational tempo. Nearly three-quarters of the families in our survey said that the current operational tempo is unhealthy and unsustainable for them, and more than 4 in 10 had had more than 6 months of family separation in the last year and a half. I think our civilian neighbors are unaware of how hard we are working.

Finally, spouse employment is a bit of a silver bullet issue we feel. So many stresses are economic, as you mentioned, and financial. Military families' median income—servicemembers' income is \$45,000 a year. You cannot reach the American dream of a middle class lifestyle without two incomes. There is more that we can do to solve that problem.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Roth-Douquet follows:]

## PREPARED STATEMENT BY KATHY ROTH-DOUQUET

Dear Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and other distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, Blue Star Families deeply appreciates the opportunity to testify in front of the Personnel Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee on February 14, 2017. Thank you for including our perspective.

The following attachments are also submitted for the record:

1. Written Testimony
2. 2016 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, Comprehensive Report
3. 2016 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, Executive Summary
4. 2016 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, Comprehensive Infographic
5. 2016 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, Recruitment Infographic
6. 2016 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, Readiness Infographic
7. 2016 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, Retention & Reintegration Infographic
8. 2016 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, Spouse Employment Infographic

Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand and other distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I am Kathy Roth-Douquet and I am the CEO of Blue Star Families. Blue Star Families (BSF) builds communities that support military families by connecting research and data to programs and solutions, including career development tools, local community events for families, and caregiver support. Since its inception in 2009, BSF has engaged tens of thousands of volunteers and serves more than 1.5 million military family members. BSF believes that all military families should be able to serve and simultaneously build thriving and healthy families. With BSF, military families can find answers to their challenges anywhere they are. With strong ties to all branches of service, Active Duty, veterans, and their families, BSF is nationally recognized for its annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey. The largest of its kind, the survey provides both quantitative and qualitative data that reveals a snapshot of the current state of the servicemembers and their families. Conducted annually, the Military Family Lifestyle Survey is used at all levels of government to help inform and educate those tasked with making policy decisions that impact servicemembers and their families—who also serve.

## SUPPORTING MILITARY FAMILIES STRENGTHENS NATIONAL SECURITY AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Military families are assets to national defense and local communities. They are central to the health and capability of the All-Volunteer Force and are good neighbors actively engaged in making their civilian communities great places to live.

This past year has seen new and emerging security threats in numerous regions while Department of Defense (DOD) budget cuts and personnel downsizing continues. The resulting operational tempo is very concerning to servicemembers and their families. New proposals to make further cuts to housing allowances were accompanied by new cuts to military family support programs. Quality of life issues like military family stability and the impact of deployments on children are increasing relative to lasting concerns regarding pay, benefits, and spouse employment.

Research suggests that servicemembers' top concern is for their family's well-being and family well-being is a top consideration in whether a servicemember stays or leaves the force. In fact, our research shows that while 66 percent of servicemembers and their spouses would recommend service to young people, only 43 percent would recommend it to their own child. While the military has adopted a number of reforms to support military families in the past few years, there is still much more to be done.

## KEY PRIORITIES FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Blue Star Families conducted its seventh annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey in April-May, 2016 with over 8,300 respondents including military spouses, Active Duty servicemembers, veterans, and their immediate family members participating in the survey. The Military Family Lifestyle Survey's response rate makes it the largest and most comprehensive survey of Active Duty, veterans, and their families.

This year's survey results show a military community at a point of inflection. It shows the country needs to get smarter about what a healthy All-Volunteer Force really looks like—and what it needs it to look like to ensure future success. The All-Volunteer Force was not designed for our current security environment of protracted low-level conflict, nor was it designed for the modern servicemember—who is better

educated, married with children, and living in an increasingly diverse and inclusive society.

Analysis of the qualitative portions of this year's survey reinforced the quantitative findings. For example, extended family separations, frequent moves, and outdated expectations that military spouses sublimate their personal, professional, and familial priorities to support their servicemember's military service are the most relevant topics identified as substantially reducing the quality of life and attractiveness of martial service. Military families understand that serving may mean making sacrifices in support of service; however DOD must also examine the military necessity of the burdens it asks military families to bear.

Despite varied topics covered in this year's survey report such as financial readiness, veteran transition, and healthcare, one clear and consistent theme emerged: the DOD must do a better job of incorporating military families into its current thinking and future planning. Rather than ad hoc measures meant to provide support during periods of acute warfare, military families must be understood as a structural component of the force. Thinking about families in this way makes the country smarter about what it takes to ensure our nation's security and it improves the ability of the DOD to meet recruitment, retention, readiness, and reintegration goals.

Our key priorities for the coming year are based on areas of need identified in our 2016 survey. We feel improvement in these areas also has the greatest potential to reduce the trend of increasing quality of life concerns that were a top trend in our 2016 survey.

The areas we will be focusing on are:

- Increasing understanding among the general U.S. population that operational tempo and family separations remain very high—72 percent of Active Duty and military spouse respondents indicated the current op-tempo exerts an unacceptable level of stress for a healthy work-life balance, and 42 percent of military family respondents report experiencing more than 6 months of family separation in the last 18 months. Military families continue to experience significant challenges and make heavy sacrifices as a result of their service.
- Improving access to timely and competent healthcare services is imperative for wellness and force readiness—Improvement to healthcare was a top response when asked “What could DOD do to make it easier for you to ensure your family is healthy and happy during your or your loved one's military service?”
- Improving employment and career viability for military spouses—unemployed or underemployed military spouses—military spouse unemployment sits around 25 percent (compared to 3 percent for all married women with children under 18) and is a top obstacle to the financial security and successful retirement or transition planning for military families
- Developing better solutions to the lasting challenge of access and affordability of quality childcare—66 percent of military families are unable to reliably find childcare that meets their needs and it was the top response when asked “What could DOD do to make it easier for you to ensure your family is healthy and happy during your or your loved one's military service?”

#### OPERATIONAL TEMPO AND FAMILY SEPARATIONS

The military lifestyle demands long hours, unpredictable work schedules and that families endure frequent and prolonged separations not just for wartime deployments, but also for training, temporary duty assignments, and additional responsibilities that frequently require travel. Servicemembers and their families feel the current optempo is unsustainable and threatens the health of their families. Active Duty servicemember respondents rank “general military op-tempo/deployments/training time” as their number five issue and 33 percent rank it in the top five issues overall. Seventy-two percent of Active Duty and military spouse respondents indicated the current op-tempo exerts an unacceptable level of stress for a healthy work-life balance.

Despite the troop drawdowns in Iraq and Afghanistan, military families continue to experience high rates of separation from their servicemember. Forty-two percent of military family respondents report experiencing more than 6 months of family separation in the last 18 months and 37 percent of military couples reported experiencing relationship challenges in the past year related to worry over future deployments. Sixteen percent of Active Duty family respondents had a family member currently deployed.

For the first time since the survey began ranking issues by respondent subgroups in 2014, Active Duty respondents ranked the impact of deployments on children as a top five issue. Thirty-one percent of Active Duty respondents indicated the impact

of deployments on children was a top five issue, a 57 percent increase as compared to the 2015 survey, with Active Duty and military spouse respondents both ranking it the number four issue for 2016. Fifty-one percent of military family respondents feel the DOD support services are inadequate to support military children in coping with deployments. Military leaders can continue to prioritize military family programming as an essential component of readiness while operational tempos remain high and the global security environment remains uncertain.

#### HEALTHCARE

Healthcare coverage is part of a complete compensation package for a service-member and his or her family, just as it is in the civilian labor markets. As military families consider whether or not staying in the military is a good decision for their families, many quality of life and cost considerations go into that decision calculus. In this year's survey, satisfaction was considerably higher regarding access to and timeliness of care among military spouse respondents who use Tricare Standard (81 percent) as compared to military spouse respondents who use Tricare Prime with a Military Treatment Facility (MTF) provider (54 percent).

Medical and mental health care are intimate exchanges between a patient and a provider, requiring trust and empathy. However, 35 percent of military family respondents who have a child with special needs report they do not feel their child's needs are being adequately addressed. Forty percent of servicemember respondents were uncomfortable seeking mental health care from a military provider. For military family respondents who identify as LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender], 59 percent feel the military system lacks LGBT competent mental health providers, and 39 percent of feel Tricare's LGBT healthcare policies are inadequate.

To reduce uncertainty around healthcare benefits, stakeholders including Congress, the Department of Defense, and the Administration, need to communicate the details of proposed changes early and often. Yearly cuts or changes to benefits erode trust—and as a result, the readiness—of military families. Only 19 percent would recommend service to others if the current trend of cutting/changing benefits continues. Additional steps include reducing healthcare red tape experienced by users—especially transferability of established services/specialists after a permanent change of station (PCS), and eliminating the need for referrals to obtain/maintain continuity of care (i.e. referrals for long-term specialty care/educational services should be valid in new duty station without seeking new referrals). We need to learn from trends in the civilian medical and healthcare sectors to increase patient satisfaction such as expanding MTF hours to later into the evening, opening weekend hours, and increasing same day/next day appointments. Finally, increasing provider continuity and ensuring appropriate staffing levels (i.e. providers assigned to MTF's deploy during their MTF tour, resulting in frequent shortages in providers and lack of continuity of providers at MTF's. Consequently, patients are forced to see multiple providers and lack continuity of care).<sup>1</sup>

#### MILITARY SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT

The ability of military spouses to meet their own employment expectations is a significant factor with overall satisfaction with the military lifestyle<sup>2</sup> and with individual servicemember retention decisions<sup>2</sup>. Fifty-one percent of respondents to our survey identified military spouse employment as a top obstacle to their family's financial security and military spouse employment remains a top concern for Active Duty spouse respondents. Twenty-one percent of military spouses responded they were unemployed (versus 3 percent for comparable civilian group—married women with children under 18), a new finding in this year's survey. Findings also indicate that married Active Duty and military spouse respondents were 27 percent less likely to have dual incomes than married non-military couples with children under 18. Less than half (48 percent) of military families with a civilian spouse earn two incomes, as compared with two-thirds (66 percent) of the general U.S. population with kids under 18 who field two incomes.

\*ERR13\*A newly released white paper from the Bipartisan Policy Center appropriately explains how an outdated view of military spouses and families is not ade-

<sup>1</sup> Casetenada, L.W. and Harrell, M. (2008). Military Spouse Employment: A grounded theory approach to experiences and perceptions. *Armed Forces and Society*, 34(3), 389–412

<sup>2</sup> Scarville, J. (1999). Spouse Employment in the Army: Research Findings. Retrieved from <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a222135.pdf>

<sup>1</sup> Casetenada, L.W. and Harrell, M. (2008). Military Spouse Employment: A grounded theory approach to experiences and perceptions. *Armed Forces and Society*, 34(3), 389–412

quate for a modern All-Volunteer Military. In this year's survey 79 percent of Active Duty military spouses reported being a military spouse had a negative impact on their ability to pursue a career, an increase from last year's survey results. It is important to note that findings indicate that military spouses able to maintain a career are 36 percent more likely to recommend military service which contributes towards retention and future recruitment.

Finally, Active Duty spouse respondents in this year's survey indicate seeking federal employment is not a successful strategy for military spouses despite special military spouse hiring authority. The existing special federal hiring authority does not appear to be a particularly effective initiative for hiring military spouses with 79 percent of military spouse respondents who applied for employment using the hiring authority indicating they had not obtained federal employment.

To address these military spouse employment needs we need to prioritize military spouse employment and education initiatives at the national and community leadership levels. Increase coordinated efforts among the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to promote high-quality portable or work-from-home positions for military spouses that enable employment continuity and career advancement. The DOD and the Federal Government can clarify the various public hiring preferences available to military spouses and better educate human resource managers and spouses on how to implement/utilize to ensure hiring managers are implementing existing policies.

#### CHILDCARE CONCERNS

Frequent moves and geographic separation from extended family members makes the need for childcare especially acute within military families. Childcare continues to be a top need among military families, especially military spouses who are pursuing an education or employment. In this year's survey 83 percent of Active Duty spouse respondents report lack of childcare impacts their ability to pursue employment or education. Interestingly, among Active Duty spouses' respondents who desire work, those who do not want to work, and those who are unsure, the top three reasons for not working are the same: family commitments, servicemember's job demands (including PCS, deployments, servicemember's unpredictable schedule), and childcare. While family commitments and servicemember's job demands is consistent with last year's findings, childcare replaced relocation in this year's top reason for not working.

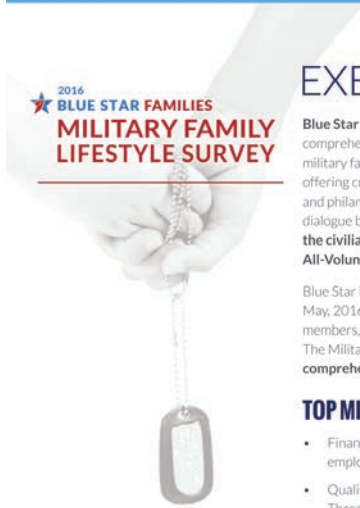
Increasing access to affordable, flexible, and high quality childcare will remain a top challenge and presents a substantial opportunity to increase military family readiness. Additional support for flexible and affordable childcare remains a top request with 66 percent of military families indicating they are not always able to find the childcare they need and 38 percent report spending \$500 or more per month on childcare. When asked "What could DOD do to make it easier for you to ensure your family is healthy and happy during your loved one's military service," the top theme among qualitative responses was "offer accessible and affordable childcare."

To address these childcare challenges the DOD needs to simplify on-base childcare enrollment, increase capacity across military-certified providers including occasional care capacity, and increase career to child ratio in order to align with state laws where federal ratios are lower than those mandated by the state. The DOD can streamline the process for re-registering children for Child Development Center (CDC) placements following a Permanent Change of Station (PCS). Finally, the DOD can work to enhance command sensitivity to the growing trend of equitable division of household and childcare responsibilities as well as command support for improving work schedule predictability and military spouse considerations as a factor in PCS assignments.

#### CONCLUSION

Blue Star Families believes that military families are assets to both our national defense and local communities. They are central to the health and capability of the All-Volunteer Force and are good neighbors actively engaged in making their civilian communities great places to live. Servicemembers may be employed by their respective services—but they work for all Americans. Thus, the responsibility for supporting military families is certainly a duty of the Department of Defense; however, a healthy nation also shares in this responsibility. Our country can help support military families by learning more about the unique nature of military life and increasing civilian and military collaboration on a number of levels. We can do this by supporting a number of positive military lifestyle factors such as: the employment of military spouses; military child education and wellness; financial and retire-

ment savings education; military childcare; local civilian community engagement; strong mental health; and veteran employment.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Blue Star Families' annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey (aMFLS) provides a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and challenges encountered by military families. The survey is a **yearly "snapshot" of the state of military families**, offering crucial insight and data to help inform national leaders, local communities, and philanthropic actors. Most critically, the survey is an opportunity to increase dialogue between the military community and broader American society, **minimizing the civilian-military divide and supporting the health and sustainability of the All-Volunteer Force**.

Blue Star Families conducted its 7th annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey in April-May, 2016 with **over 8,300 respondents** including military spouses, active duty service members, veterans, and their immediate family members participating in the survey. The Military Family Lifestyle Survey's response rate makes it the **largest and most comprehensive survey of active duty, veterans, and their families**.


### TOP MILITARY FAMILY ISSUES

- Financial issues of military pay, changes to retirement benefits, and military spouse employment are the top concerns among military families.
- Quality of life and wellness concerns are increasing relative to financial concerns. Three of the top five issues for military families are related to quality of life: impact of deployments on children; family stability; and operational tempo.


  

TOP ISSUES	Active Duty Spouses	Active Duty Members	Veterans
Military Pay/Benefits	59%	61%	56%
Change in Retirement Benefits	37.5%	41%	42%
Military Spouse Employment	37.9%	23%	11%
Impact of Deployment on Dependent Children	37%	32%	21%
Military Family Stability/Quality of Life	32%	33%	15%
General OPTEMPO/Deployments/Training Time	20.7%	30%	19%
Rising Numbers of Service Member and Veteran Suicides	22%	20%	38%
PTSD/Combat Stress/TBI	21.1%	14%	38%
Veteran Employment	13%	17%	33%



**BLUE STAR FAMILIES**  
2016 MILITARY FAMILY LIFESTYLE SURVEY

IN COLLABORATION WITH  
 **INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES**  
EMERSON UNIVERSITY | Veterans' Center & the Learning Center



### SUPPORTING MILITARY FAMILIES STRENGTHENS NATIONAL SECURITY AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Military families are assets to national defense and local communities. They are **central to the health and capability of the All-Volunteer Force** and are good neighbors actively engaged in making their civilian communities great places to live. Service members may be employed by their respective services, but they work for all Americans—and so do their families.

The past year has seen new and emerging security threats in numerous regions while Department of Defense (DoD) budget cuts and personnel downsizing continues. The resulting **operational tempo is very concerning to service members** and their families. New proposals to make further cuts to housing allowances were accompanied by **new cuts to military family support programs**. Quality of life issues like **military family stability and the impact of deployments on children** are increasing relative to **lasting concerns regarding pay, benefits, and spouse employment**.

This year's survey results show a **military community at a point of inflection**. It shows the country needs to get smarter about what a healthy All-Volunteer Force really looks like—and what it needs it to look like to ensure future success. **The All-Volunteer Force was not designed for our current security environment** of protracted low-level conflict, **nor was it designed for the modern service member**—who is better educated, married with children, and living in an increasingly diverse and inclusive society.

Analysis of the qualitative portions of this year's survey reinforced the quantitative findings. For example, **extended family separations, frequent moves, and outdated**

**expectations** that military spouses sublimate their personal, professional, and familial priorities to support their service member's military service are the most prevalent topics identified as substantially **reducing the quality of life and attractiveness of martial service**. Military families understand that serving may mean making sacrifices in support of service; however, DoD must also examine the military necessity of the burdens it asks military families to bear.

Despite varied topics covered in this year's survey report such as Financial Readiness, Veteran Transition, and Healthcare, **one clear and consistent theme emerged: the DoD must do a better job of incorporating military families into its current thinking and future planning**. Rather than ad hoc measures meant to provide support during periods of acute warfare, **military families must be understood as a structural component of the force**. Thinking about families in this way makes the country smarter about what it takes to ensure our nation's security and it improves the ability of the DoD to meet recruitment, retention, readiness, and reintegration goals.

For this reason, **2016's Comprehensive Report looks different** than in previous years. It is designed around the central defense priorities of **recruitment, readiness, retention, and reintegration** in order to illustrate the centrality of military families in achieving these goals and to highlight **opportunities to better integrate thinking about military families into defense policy and analysis**.

In short, the Comprehensive Report is a **framework** through which our national leaders and local communities can better understand why **supporting military families isn't just the right thing to do—it's also the smart thing**.



## TOP TRENDS AND FINDINGS FOR 2016

**Current optempo is very concerning to families.** Service members and their families feel the current optempo is unsustainable and threatens the health of their families. Active duty service members rank "general military optempo/deployments/training time" as their #5 issue and 33% rank it in the Top 5 issues overall. 72% of active duty and military spouse respondents indicated the current optempo exerts an unacceptable level of stress for a healthy work-life balance.

**Family separations continue at high levels.** Despite the troop drawdowns in Iraq and Afghanistan, military families continue to experience high rates of separation from their service member. 42% of military family respondents report experiencing more than 6 months of family separation in the last 18 months and 37% of military couples reported experiencing relationship challenges in the past year related to worry over future deployments. 16% of active duty family respondents had a family member currently deployed.

**Increasing service member worry over the impact of deployments on their children.** For the first time since the survey began ranking issues by respondent subgroups in 2014, active duty respondents ranked the impact of deployments on children as a Top 5 issue. Active duty respondents who indicated the impact of deployments on children was a Top 5 issue increased 57% as compared to the 2015 survey, with active duty and military spouse respondents both ranking it the #4 issue for 2016.

**Veterans recommend service at higher rates than active duty.** The majority of active duty military families (57%) are unlikely to recommend service to their own children. Active duty military families are more likely to recommend a young person join the military (66%) than they are to recommend service to their own children (43%). 57% of veteran family respondents would recommend service to their own children.

**Benefit cuts/changes negatively impact views of service to a greater extent than retention.** 19% of military families indicated they would recommend service if the current trend of cutting benefits continues. In qualitative responses, 27% felt changes in benefits, budget cuts, and sequestration illustrated that commitments are not being kept for those who serve; however, an additional 27% indicated that those same changes have not impacted their decision to stay in the military.

**Quality of life and wellness concerns are increasing relative to worry over changes to retirement benefits.** While "change in retirement benefits" remains in the Top 3 issues overall, the concern has decreased relative to family and quality of life concerns. The percentage of respondents who ranked it as a Top 5 issue decreased by at least 30% across all subgroups, with the greatest drop of 36% among active duty service members. It also dropped to second place among veterans, who for the first time ranked "military pay and benefits" as their #1 issue.

**Nineteen percent of active duty service members plan to exit service within the next two years.** The Top 5 reasons that veteran respondents left the military were: military retirement (40%); completion of military service obligation (25%); family reasons (25%); lost faith or trust in military or political leadership (24%); and to pursue education and training opportunities (17%). The successful re-entry of veterans and veteran families to civilian life is beneficial for both the military and civilian populations. As more service members prepare to separate from service, it is particularly critical that the transition experience be improved.

**Services recruit families, not just individuals.** History of family service was strongly associated with current service and among military spouses. Nearly half (47%) of military spouse respondents and 45% of active duty respondents had a parent who served in the military. 9% of all respondents had a child who served in the military.

**Twenty-one percent unemployment rate among military spouses.** 21% of military spouse respondents were unemployed—not employed but actively seeking work. This finding is consistent with DoD's 2015 Survey of Active Duty Spouses which found a 23% unemployment rate. Unemployment rates in surveys of military spouses tend to be significantly higher than rates in past academic literature, suggesting military spouse unemployment may be undercounted in past studies which did not rely on direct surveys of military spouse populations.



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**LGBT respondents feel comfortable on base, but identify healthcare as top area for improvement.** 90% were comfortable using on-base services such as the commissary, exchange, MWR, family readiness, and over two-thirds (68%) felt comfortable attending official military events with their partner. However, 38% felt Tricare's policies and familiarity regarding LGBT healthcare needs were inadequate and 28% felt accessibility to appropriate medical care from LGBT affirming/culturally competent providers was inadequate.

**The majority of military families earn a single income.** Military couples were 27% less likely to have dual incomes than married non-military couples with children under 18. Less than half (48%) of military families with a civilian spouse earned two incomes, as compared with two-thirds (66%) of the general U.S. population with kids under 18 who field two incomes.

**Civic engagement is high among military families and veterans.** Military families volunteer at rates three times higher than the general US population, 73% of military family and 65% of veteran respondents volunteered in the past year. Military and veteran families are more involved in their communities than the general U.S. population, with 96% indicating that working with others in one's neighborhood to improve conditions in one's community is an important civic responsibility.

**Post-9/11 GI Bill continues to be a powerful recruitment and retention tool.** Education benefits were the top reason for joining among active duty and veteran millennials, 78% of active duty families indicate that they plan to transfer the GI Bill to their spouse or child and 26% of military families felt that removing dependent BAH support from the GI Bill would cause them to leave service earlier than they currently planned. 46% of all active duty and veteran respondents indicated education benefits as a top five reason for joining.

**Low hiring rate among military spouses using federal special hiring authority.** Federal employment is not a successful strategy for military spouses despite special military spouse hiring authority, with 79% of military spouses who applied for employment and who used the hiring authority not obtaining employment.

**Veteran transition to civilian life remains difficult.** 56% of veterans who attended Transition GPS reported that it prepared them for a successful transition, while 49% of veterans who reported attending any transition programming said the programming prepared them for a successful transition. The Top 5 most useful resources during transition were: VA vocational rehab (37%); VA disability benefits (26%); family and friends support system (25%); VA healthcare (23%); and Transition Assistance programming (20%).

**BAH cuts may negatively impact military child education.** Like civilian families, many military families rent or buy homes based on the quality of the local public schools. When BAH is cut, military families may be less able to rent or purchase homes in areas with high-quality public schools—especially when families are assigned to duty stations with very high costs of living. 13% of qualitative responses described quality of school and living in substandard housing or unsafe areas as impacts of BAH cuts. Given the numerous challenges facing military children's education such as attending an average of 6-9 schools from K-12th grade, only one-third (33%) of parents indicated their children's school was doing a good job complying with the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children.

**Military spouses and service members are likely to come from military families.** Military spouse respondents indicated they had a parent who served (47%) at a rate slightly higher than reported by service members (45%), while 57% of veteran respondents had a parent who served.

**Mental healthcare stigma persists among active duty.** 41% of active duty respondents were uncomfortable seeking mental health care from a military provider and 40% felt seeking mental health care programs or services would harm their career.

**Childcare continues to be a top need.** Additional support for flexible and affordable childcare remains a top request, with 66% of military families indicating they are not always able to find the childcare they need. When asked "What could DoD do to make it easier for you to ensure your family is healthy and happy during your loved one's military service," the top theme among qualitative responses was "offer accessible and affordable childcare."

*Funding for the 2016 annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey is provided through the generosity of our presenting sponsor USAA and from Lockheed Martin Corporation, UnitedHealthcare Military and Veterans, Fisher House Foundation, Facebook, and the USO.*



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2016 MILITARY FAMILY LIFESTYLE SURVEY

# SNAPSHOT MILITARY LIFESTYLE

## TOP LIFESTYLE STRESSORS

1. DEPLOYMENT
2. SEPARATION
3. RELOCATION

## BEST WAYS DOD CAN SUPPORT MILITARY FAMILIES

1. AFFORDABLE & ACCESSIBLE CHILD CARE
2. IMPROVE HEALTH CARE
3. DEPLOY LESS

### SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT

**48%** Employed  
**29%** Not in Labor Force  
**21%** Unemployed  
(primary spouse work in past 4 weeks)

**79%** of military spouses who applied for a GS position were **not hired**

**63%** of military spouses have **not** experienced a work **promotion** since **marrying** their active duty spouse

**51%** of military families identified spouse under/unemployment as top obstacle to **financial security**

### THE CHANGING FORCE

**54%** of active duty support opening all military occupations to women

**39%** of LGBT feel Trease's LGBT healthcare policies are **inadequate**

**38%** of active duty **not confident** they will receive promised retirement benefits

**23%** desire **more information** on lifting transgender service member ban

### FINANCIAL READINESS

**45%** worry DoD won't provide adequate training on new retirement benefit

**38%** of active duty have **more credit card debt than the average American**

### MILITARY CHILDREN

**66%** cannot obtain reliable childcare

**38%** of military families spend \$500 or more on childcare

**33%** indicate school does good job complying with Interstate Compact of Educational Opportunity for Military Children

**9%** homeschool their children

### CAREGIVERS

**31%** are caregivers

Caregivers providing over 40 hours of care per week is increasing

2014	15%
2015	18%
2016	22%

### CIVIL-MILITARY DIVIDE

**88%** feel general public does not understand sacrifices made by service members and their families

**73%** volunteered last year, of those **84%** volunteered in their civilian community

### MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

**40%** of active duty feel seeking mental health care will **harm their career**

**37%** of military couples experienced relationship challenges in past year related to **worry over future deployments**

### SUICIDE

Admit suicidal thoughts during time in military

**7%** Military Spouses  
(2% in past year)

**12%** Active Duty Service Members  
(4% in past year)

**14%** Veterans  
(6% in past year)

**18%** Post-9/11 Veterans  
(12% in past year)

2016 BLUE STAR FAMILIES  
**MILITARY FAMILY LIFESTYLE SURVEY**

# READINESS

MILITARY FAMILIES ARE A FORCE MULTIPLIER

**72%** FEEL THE CURRENT OPTEMPO EXERTS AN UNACCEPTABLE LEVEL OF STRESS

- 42%** EXPERIENCED MORE THAN 6 MONTHS OF FAMILY SEPARATION IN THE LAST 18 MONTHS
- 31%** OF SERVICE MEMBERS CITE IMPACT OF DEPLOYMENT ON CHILDREN AS A TOP 5 ISSUE
- 32%** EXPERIENCED MORE THAN 4 YEARS OF FAMILY SEPARATION SINCE 9/11

**MILITARY FAMILY FINANCIAL READINESS**

- 37%** FEEL INSECURE ABOUT THEIR FUTURE
- 63%** EXPERIENCE STRESS DUE TO CURRENT FINANCIAL SITUATION

**TOP 5 OBSTACLES TO FINANCIAL SECURITY FOR ACTIVE DUTY FAMILIES**

- 51%** SPOUSE UNDER/UNEMPLOYMENT
- 39%** SAVING FOR RETIREMENT
- 38%** COST OF HOUSING
- 30%** SAVING FOR CHILD'S COLLEGE
- 26%** FREQUENT MOVES/PCS

**MENTAL HEALTH**

- 41%** of service members were **uncomfortable** seeking mental health care from a military provider
- 40%** felt seeking mental health care programs or services would **harm their career**

**MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA**

- 3%** service members reported **forced sexual contact**; of those who experienced MST, **21%** active duty & **12%** of vets **RECEIVED HELP**

**HEALTHCARE**

Military Spouses Satisfied with Care	Quality of Care
Tricare Standard	92%
Tricare Prime - Private Provider	86%
Tricare Prime - MTF Provider	73%

	Ease of Access & Timeliness of Care
Tricare Standard	84%
Tricare Prime - Private Provider	75%
Tricare Prime - MTF Provider	54%

- 20%** have a child with **special needs**
- 35%** **do not feel** their child's needs are being **adequately addressed**
- 59%** OF LGBT FEEL MILITARY SYSTEM LACKS LGBT-COMPETENT MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS

**MILITARY CHILDREN**

- 51%** DoD support services are inadequate to support military children in coping with deployments
- 66%** of military families are not able to find the childcare they need

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2016 BLUE STAR FAMILIES MILITARY FAMILY LIFESTYLE SURVEY

# RECRUITMENT

FAMILIES ARE CENTRAL TO RECRUITMENT

**LIKELY**

IF BENEFITS PROMISED WHEN JOINING SERVICE ARE KEPT

- ACTIVE DUTY SERVICE MEMBERS
- OFFICER TO OFFICERS
- SERVICE MEMBERS WITH 2 OR FEWER DEPLOYMENTS
- EMPLOYED MILITARY SPOUSES
- TO YOUNG PEOPLE NOT THEIR CHILDREN

**WHO RECOMMENDS SERVICE**

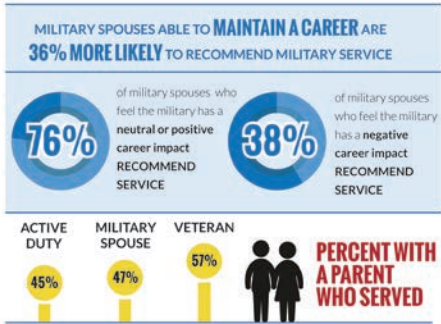


**UNLIKELY**

IF CURRENT TREND OF CUTTING OR ALTERING BENEFITS CONTINUES

- MILITARY SPOUSES
- ENLISTED PERSONNEL
- SERVICE MEMBERS WITH 3 OR MORE DEPLOYMENTS
- UNEMPLOYED SPOUSES
- TO THEIR OWN CHILDREN

**19%** WOULD RECOMMEND SERVICE IF THE CURRENT TREND OF CUTTING BENEFITS CONTINUES



2016 BLUE STAR FAMILIES MILITARY FAMILY LIFESTYLE SURVEY

# RETENTION & REINTEGRATION

RETAINING TOP TALENT REQUIRES RESPONSIBLY TRANSITIONING MILITARY FAMILIES

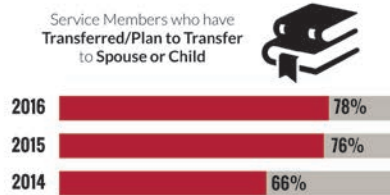
## PAY & COMPENSATION

76% COMPENSATION NOT KEEPING UP WITH INFLATION

79% COMPENSATION NOT KEEPING UP WITH CIVILIAN COMPENSATION

## POST-9/11 GI BILL

REMAINS TOP BENEFIT & POWERFUL RETENTION TOOL



**"GETTING OUT" 26%** ARE LESS LIKELY TO SERVE 20 YEARS IF POST-9/11 BILL BAH FOR DEPENDENTS IS DECREASED

**19%** PLAN TO EXIT SERVICE IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS

63% RETIREMENT BENEFITS

59% HEALTHCARE BENEFITS

45% FINANCIAL SECURITY

37% DESIRE TO SERVE

33% JOB SECURITY

## REASONS FOR STAYING

### TRANSITION IS DIFFICULT

TOP 3 TRANSITION CHALLENGES FOR POST 9/11 VETERANS

- 49% loss of sense of purpose/camaraderie
- 47% loss of connection with military community
- 45% finding employment

38% don't feel confident they'll receive the retirement benefits promised when they leave service.

### RETIREMENT UNCERTAINTY

45% of service members worry DoD won't provide adequate training on the new Blended Retirement System

### CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- 73% volunteered last year; of those 84% volunteered in their civilian communities
- 96% feel voting in elections is an important responsibility
- 96% feel working with others in neighborhood to improve conditions is an important responsibility

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Senator TILLIS. Thank you.  
Ms. Barna?

**STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE BARNA, ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS**

Ms. BARNA. Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand, I appreciate the opportunity to be with you today, together with Ms. Roth-Douquet and Ms. Raezer of the National Military Family Association.

The Department works closely and collaboratively with both Blue Star Families and with NMFA on a regular basis, and both have

provided us with unflagging support in our efforts to improve the quality of life of our military personnel, our families, and to ensure military family readiness.

Our nearly 3 million military family members may not wear a uniform, but they do serve and they do sacrifice. We believe that our single servicemember and military family programs are absolutely essential to maintaining the readiness of our Armed Forces. With your support, we back that belief with an investment of effort, of ingenuity, and dollars.

The commitment starts at the very top echelon of the Department of Defense. In his statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee considering his nomination, Secretary Mattis said, "I will hold servicemembers, civilians, and their families foremost in my thoughts and give them the best chance for victory."

In his first message to the entirety of the Department of Defense as our Secretary, he called out the uniformed and civilian members of the Department and their families saying, "You are representative of the fundamental unity of our country."

In his very first tasking to my office, he asked, "Tell me what this Department is doing for our military families and what we can and will do better."

The challenges inherent in the military profession, deployments, operations, training, and the mobile military lifestyle impose great burdens on our military families. In the Department, we analyze measures like OPTEMPO [Operational Tempo] and PERSTEMPO [Personnel Tempo], but to our military families, these mean only one thing, that their loved one is gone again. We believe that military families need and deserve our continuous support no matter the reason for a servicemember's absence.

Some have concluded that as our commitments shift in Iraq and Afghanistan and as many of our servicemembers return home, that the need for robust military family programs and services has abated. We believe it is quite the opposite. Periods of readjustment and periods of reintegration are actually among the most stressful in our military families, and they require our continuous attention, our caring, our support, and our investment.

The Department will continue to prioritize support for servicemembers and their families by providing and resourcing quality of life and military family readiness for our people. As the needs of our servicemembers and their families change for a new generation, we will continue to adjust and rebalance our programs best to serve our entire military community.

Led by my office, the military services are currently conducting a review of all assignment and relocation policies, and the effects of those policies on military family stability and quality of life. We want to ensure that we are optimizing the use of existing authorities and resources. This report will inform our report that is due to you in June of this year.

Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand, I thank you for having us here today, and I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Barna follows:]

## PREPARED STATEMENT BY MS. STEPHANIE BARNA

Thank you, Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and Members of this distinguished subcommittee, for your unflagging support of quality of life programs that keep our military members and their families strong and resilient. The Department is committed to providing quality programs and services to our servicemembers and their families and survivors. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to highlight some of the family readiness programs in the Personnel and Readiness portfolio.

Our servicemembers respond without hesitation to our Nation's call, both here at home and in combat and humanitarian operations overseas. The challenges of military service can strain even our most self-sufficient members and their families. Military quality of life programs, including family readiness and morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR) programs, are critical to their overall well-being and resiliency. Participation in family support, childcare and youth programs, financial education services, recreation, fitness, sports, cultural arts, and other leisure activities contributes to personal health and well-being, and helps build strong military families and healthy communities. As force structure and funding levels have shifted in recent years, the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) has undertaken proactive partnerships with the military services on a number of family readiness initiatives to enhance these programs and services for our military community.

## CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROGRAMS

The military is a young force with many young families. According to the 2015 Demographics Report published by the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, 66 percent of the Active Duty force is 30 years of age or younger. Slightly more than 41 percent of military personnel have children; about 42 percent of the children of Active Duty servicemembers are less than 5 years old. Responding to the needs of this demographic, more than 55 percent of Department of Defense (DOD) child development center care capacity is focused on children under the age of 3 years.

DOD recognizes the importance of providing families with access to quality, affordable child development programs and is committed to meeting this need through a comprehensive and robust childcare delivery system. A quality childcare system helps families balance the competing demands of work and family life, and contributes to the efficiency, readiness, and retention of the total force.

As the largest employer-sponsored childcare program in the country, DOD provides child development services each day for approximately 180,000 children ranging in age from birth to 12 years. The system includes more than 700 child development centers and school age care facilities, and approximately 2,600 family childcare homes, at over 230 locations worldwide. DOD maintains rigorous compliance with national standards and oversight requirements to ensure that our children's health and safety needs are met, with 97 percent of DOD child development centers maintaining national-level accreditation. Childcare options through comparable community-based centers and family childcare homes provide alternatives to installation-based center care, when available. Community-based programs support families who may be unable to access installation-based care as well as those families who are geographically dispersed. Such childcare options are partially subsidized by DOD, and provide increased capacity and greater flexibility for our military families.

DOD applies the criteria of "available, affordable, and quality" to ensure a safe, healthy, and developmentally-appropriate childcare environment for our children. DOD has implemented a number of initiatives to provide critical services and support for our servicemembers, civilians, and their families with young children, facilitating accomplishment of the military mission, especially in today's dynamic operational environment.

- DOD and the military services launched a new online childcare request portal, MilitaryChildCare.com, in January 2015. The website is designed to make it easier for families to identify childcare options in locations around the world and request childcare, while improving the management of childcare waiting lists. Standardized request and waitlist procedures, together with the efficiency and transparency afforded by an online system, will reduce the length of time families spend waiting to receive childcare services and keep families well informed about the status of their request for care.
- Service-initiated hiring fairs expedite the onboarding process for child and youth program staff and are successfully bringing additional childcare employees on board.

- Updated processes for criminal history background checks have reduced the delays in authorizing new childcare employees to begin working on a provisional basis.
- The Department's Extended Child Care Initiative affords installation commanders the discretion to extend child development center operating hours to 14 hours a day, based on servicemember and family needs, and mission and utilization requirements.
- DOD's new Nursing and Lactation Room policy establishes facility standards and best practices for the setup and operation of "mother's rooms" where military members and civilian employees can nurse or express milk close to their work areas, better meeting the needs of both the individual and the command.

#### SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

As a result of the mobile military lifestyle, military spouses continue to face multiple challenges in maintaining a career with an upward trajectory. The most recent Active Duty Spouse Survey, conducted by DOD in 2015, indicates a spouse unemployment level of 23 percent. Various studies also indicate a high level of underemployment and a 25 percent wage gap between female military spouses and their civilian counterparts. This is despite the fact that 85 percent of military spouses possess some college education, a percentage substantially higher than their civilian counterparts. Military spouses are a young (with an average age of 35), techsavvy, educated workforce. The greatest challenge facing military spouses in relation to their careers is that of relocation. Military families relocate 14 percent more frequently than civilian families; these relocations are generally across state lines, with a high number occurring overseas. Of note, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 (NDAA FY17) removed the 2-year time limit on spouse eligibility for non-competitive appointment as a DOD civilian employee. Prior to that change, a military spouse could be non-competitively appointed only within 2 years of the date of the sponsor servicemember's Permanent Change of Station orders; the NDAA removed that limit altogether—a significant step forward in affording our military spouses greater opportunities for Federal employment. We thank the subcommittee for its role in enacting this change.

The DOD remains committed to providing military spouses with the necessary tools, information, and resources to assist them in meeting these challenges. The Department's Spouse Education and Career Opportunities (SECO) program provides military spouses with expert education and career guidance. The SECO suite of initiatives continues to evolve and grow.

The program supports career exploration, education, training and licensing, employment readiness, and career connections. SECO is delivered through the 24/7/365 servicemember and family support website, Military OneSource ([www.militaryonesource.mil](http://www.militaryonesource.mil)). Military OneSource is designed to augment the local, installation-based programs delivered by the military services, allowing military spouses to receive information and utilize tools when and where they choose.

One SECO initiative is the Military OneSource Spouse Career Center. The Career Center provides military spouses with access to masters-level, certified career counselors at no charge, and as often as needed. These career counselors, many of whom are military spouses or veterans themselves, provide a suite of assistance options to military spouses. This includes helping spouses to develop a path toward their chosen career, implement job search strategies, make decisions on training and education, identify financial assistance resources, develop strong resumes, and conduct mock interviews. In 2016, the Career Center provided more than 170,000 counseling sessions and maintained a 97 percent satisfaction rate with users.

The Department also helps military spouses who are pursuing their education goals obtain financial assistance. The MySECO website, accessed via Military OneSource, provides military spouses with tools to cope with this challenge: an Individual Career Plan Wizard, a resume builder designed specifically for military spouses, and an online database of military spouse scholarships and financial assistance, including the My Career Advancement Account (MyCAA). MyCAA provides up to \$4,000 in scholarship funds to assist spouses of our junior military personnel in attaining the training, licensing, and education necessary to enter into a portable career field. In 2016, more than 22,000 spouses utilized MyCAA scholarships to take more than 41,000 courses. SECO also works closely with non-profit military service organizations—like the National Military Family Association—that offer educational financial assistance to military spouses.

DOD recognizes that we cannot tackle the issues of spouse employment alone. The Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP) is a SECO initiative that connects military spouses with businesses and corporations that have committed to re-

cruiting, hiring, promoting and retaining them. Since June 2011, MSEP has grown to more than 335 partners who have hired more than 100,000 military spouses. Representing nearly every industry sector and employment field, MSEP partners have advertised more than 5 million jobs through the MSEP Career Portal, an online tool that allows spouses to connect to participating partners.

Through the MSEP initiative, the Department has partnered with more than 20 military-serving, non-profit, and government organizations to assist with spouse employment. Organizations such as the National Military Family Association and Blue Star Families, and government agencies such as the Department of Labor and the Small Business Administration's (SBA) Office of Veteran Business Development, play an integral role in this effort. We are working with SBA to secure access to tools and resources for our spouse entrepreneurs, and with the Department of Labor to secure priority service for military spouses at their American Job Centers.

In trying to maintain their careers and employment, military spouses are faced with the additional challenge of maintaining professional licensing when they relocate across state lines. Thanks to the efforts of the Defense State Liaison Office over the last 4 years, all 50 states have now adopted legislation to support the portability of licenses and credentials for military spouses. Although the Department is proud of this accomplishment, more work remains to be done. DOD is currently engaged in a study to examine how this legislation is being applied in each state, and identify how efforts might be strengthened.

Spouses who move overseas with their servicemember face additional challenges in maintaining employment; our Military OneSource career counselors are well equipped to discuss career options available to spouses living overseas. DOD continues to work with local officials to understand and hopefully ease any restrictions on spouse employment imposed by the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the host nation, and to maximize spouse employment opportunities on U.S. military installations overseas.

#### PROGRAMS FOR FAMILIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The Office of Special Needs (OSN) was established to enhance and improve the Department's support of military families with special medical or educational needs. OSN achieves this mission through oversight of educational services for children with disabilities provided by the DOD under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and through the standardization of Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) processes.

Under the auspices of IDEA, approximately 10,000 children from birth through age 21 receive early intervention and special education services from DOD. OSN develops and oversees the policies and procedures through which DOD provides these services. DOD requires the Military Departments and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) to provide early intervention services, special education, and related services for eligible family members. These services include programs in the home, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and specialized instruction to supplement the family member's general educational experience. The Department also conducts surveillance visits to monitor the status of policy and IDEA compliance within the military departments and DODEA.

In the EFMP arena, OSN and the military services have successfully standardized key programmatic functions. This standardization has provided greater support for military families with special needs, a more consistent EFMP experience, and the same level of access to services, regardless of military service affiliation or location. For example, OSN and the Services collaborated to develop and field a standardized Family Needs Assessment/Inter-Services Transfer Summary to assist in the identification of family support needs and coordinate family support information when a family transfers from one Family Support Office to another sister-Service location. In addition, OSN and the Services successfully launched a family member travel screening pilot to test newly-standardized forms and processes across the Services; this program will ultimately benefit all families, not only those with special needs.

Other EFMP accomplishments include developing extensive training and information materials for families and staff on subjects such as navigating social services systems, developing assessments and services plans, and locating and leveraging available community resources. Additionally, EFMP has developed and successfully piloted a data repository to collect standard demographic breakouts of the special needs community across the Services along with data on types of activities, assignment concerns, and gaps in support; we expect to implement this database DOD-wide in the near future. EFMP has also completed a process-and-outcome metrics pilot that allows families to provide feedback on the family support services they receive. OSN will use this feedback to prioritize and pursue additional initiatives

to meet the evolving requirements of military families with special needs and improve their experience with the EFMP.

#### FAMILY ADVOCACY

The Department is committed to keeping our children safe and healthy and to doing all that it can to prevent child abuse and neglect and domestic abuse/intimate partner violence in our military communities. Now in its 36th year, the Family Advocacy Program (FAP) provides comprehensive prevention, advocacy, and early identification and treatment of child and domestic abuse victims and offenders.

FAP is the policy proponent for DOD's Coordinated Community Response system which includes medical, law enforcement, legal, child and youth, chaplain, and DODEA participants. The Coordinated Community Response system plays a key role in the prevention of, and response to reports of child abuse and neglect, and domestic abuse in military families. DOD provides FAP services across the military services through licensed clinical providers, domestic abuse victim advocates, new parent support home visitors, and expert prevention staff. FAP executes its mission in cooperation with civilian social service agencies, and military and civilian law enforcement agencies. FAP is mandated to report child abuse and neglect in military families to state and local Child Protective Services (CPS), and works in collaboration with CPS to respond to incidents of child abuse and neglect.

Although the DOD rates of child abuse and neglect are about half of their counterpart rates in the U.S. civilian population as compiled by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, there has been a slight upward trend in the rate from fiscal years 2009–2014. As a result, the Department and the military services initiated prevention and research efforts to target risk factors: preventing infant abusive head trauma related to shaking, strengthening father-child bonding, decreasing distracted parenting, and creating safe sleeping environments to prevent suffocation.

The Department has enhanced its focus on the prevention of child abuse and neglect through multiple initiatives, to include the execution of the Family Advocacy Program 5-year Strategic Prevention Plan, and the Coordinated Community Response Integrated Project Team systems review. DOD will continue its focus on prevention through programs such as intensive home visitation with the New Parent Support Program, evidence-based programs to include infant massage focused on father engagement and attachment, and dissemination of Purple Crying materials produced by the National Center for Shaken Baby Syndrome.

Notwithstanding these efforts, the Department recognizes that there is more work to be done as we strive to enhance our prevention efforts to prevent incidents of child abuse and neglect and domestic abuse and provide effective treatment and resources for military families.

#### MILITARY FAMILY READINESS COUNCIL

The Military Family Readiness Council (MFRC), a congressionally mandated, non-discretionary federal advisory committee sponsored by DOD, continues to review and evaluate the full range of military family readiness policies, programs, plans, and initiatives. At the Council's next meeting, to be held on February 15, 2017, the focus will be on the support and services provided to families with special needs. Other 2017 focus areas include educational benefits for service and family members, issues associated with the mobile military lifestyle, and the identification of viable resourcing options that could provide needed support for military family support programs and services.

#### MORALE, WELFARE, AND RECREATION (MWR)

MWR programs provide recreation, fitness, sports, cultural arts, and leisure activities worldwide. These vital programs contribute to military family readiness and support strong military families and healthy communities. Services are provided in many formats, including in person, online, and through community partnerships. Ongoing efforts to prioritize and streamline offerings will result in a portfolio of programs that meet the changing needs of the dynamic military population.

Studies show that communication between family members during deployment promotes better resiliency outcomes, including higher marital satisfaction post deployment. The Department provides over 85 MWR internet cafes and 55 morale satellite units at main operating and remote and isolated contingency operation locations, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In fiscal year 2015 this program enabled our deployed servicemembers to enjoy more than 3 million minutes of talk time with family and friends at home.

For our single servicemembers, each military service offers MWR-targeted programming. While each Service uses a different program delivery model and program

name, all have the same core vision: engaging single servicemembers in MWR activities that will help them unwind, connect, and recharge. Engagement in positive recreational activities during off-duty hours helps single servicemembers build their social circles, increase physical fitness, acclimate to the climate and culture, engage in outlets for stress, and make better behavioral choices.

During 2016, MWR focused on two programs in particular, fitness centers and libraries, and published updated program standards for implementation in fiscal year 2017. Fitness facilities support mission readiness, active lifestyles, and health and wellness by offering an array of fitness equipment, programming, and instruction appropriate to the fitness goals of servicemembers and their families. The updated fitness standards address pre-activity screening, administrative operations, staffing, health, safety, and security issues, requirements for unstaffed fitness facilities that allow patrons 24/7 access, fitness programming, and equipment.

Through a partnership with the Armed Services YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association], more than 105,600 fitness memberships have been provided to servicemembers and families since the program's inception in 2008. This includes 40,371 individual and 65,269 family memberships, as well as support for approximately 142,325 military children. Eligible participants enjoy free YMCA memberships, private fitness memberships, and respite childcare at approximately 1,574 YMCAs and 1,802 private fitness centers across the U.S.

Library activities support readiness and the military mission, professional military and technical education and training, personal and technical skill development of members of the military community, quality of life, voluntary education and lifelong learning, transition and career assistance, relocation assistance, and leisure needs of the military community. Updated library program standards focus on key areas such as staffing, library operations, customer programs and services, technology infrastructure, and facilities.

Approximately 20 library online databases provided through Military OneSource and DOD service portals support DOD life-long learning, affording easy access to personal financial management and transition assistance information, professional skills reading, and a variety of family and child and youth programs. These databases drew approximately 48 million users in fiscal year 2016. In the same year, more than 227,000 tutoring and online skills sessions were provided to DOD dependent children through an online 24/7 live homework support network.

The 2016 summer reading program, entitled "Read for the Win," was hosted at 215 DOD libraries around the world, and boasted 38 million minutes (more than 72 years) of reading time by children of all ages.

The MWR library program also provides library support to servicemembers in deployed environments. Approximately 30 locations receive paperback book kits, and approximately 130 locations receive mp3 audiobook kits. These kits contain best seller titles, as well as books on military history, leadership, and spiritual topics.

The Department conducted the third military-wide survey to assess customer satisfaction with MWR programs in 2014. Approximately 22,298 Active Duty servicemembers participated, rating customer service, operational hours, facility condition, and quality of service.

The survey showed that unit participation in MWR programs has a positive effect on readiness, as well as retention and unit cohesion. The readiness score increased by one point from the previous survey in 2011. Retention intentions showed no change from its positive showing in the 2011 survey, but unit cohesion increased by two points. The Customer Satisfaction Index is an important tool that helps leaders to rebalance resources within MWR programs to align better with the most critical challenges and priorities. Data collection for the 2016 DOD MWR Customer Satisfaction Survey closed in January 2017, and analysis of its findings is anticipated in the summer of 2017.

#### NONAPPROPRIATED FUND CONSTRUCTION

The DOD Commissary Surcharge, Nonappropriated Fund (NAF), and Privately Financed Construction Program supports a portfolio of activities offered at installations based on the needs of Active Duty servicemembers and their families, as well as other authorized patrons who comprise the military community at each location. Whether it is a golf club house, family camp, youth center, or an outdoor recreation facility, these projects help servicemembers and their families cope with the stresses of military life and afford opportunities to de-compress through participation in recreational, social, or cultural programs and services based on their interests.

Many of these projects also support servicemembers by generating revenue that helps offset the cost of other MWR programs that are not self-sustaining, such as

skills development or base-wide picnics. NAF construction projects are important to maintaining the viability of these programs.

#### APPROPRIATED FUND SUPPORT TO MWR CATEGORY A AND B PROGRAMS

The continued vitality of MWR programs depends on sound management, meeting command and customer needs, generating a predictable stream of NAF revenue, and critical appropriated fund (APF) support for authorized activities.

In fiscal year 2015, APF funding for MWR programs was \$1.66 billion for direct baseline support, with \$800 million for MWR activities and \$860 million for child and youth programs. Funding in fiscal year 2015 decreased by \$254 million from fiscal year 2014. Funding results for fiscal year 2016 will not be available until March 2017. The military services anticipate further reductions to APF based on current trends.

APF support to MWR programs was not in full compliance with DOD funding policy in fiscal year 2015. Category A activities, which include mission-sustaining programs such as physical fitness, libraries, and single servicemember programs, are required to be funded entirely with appropriations. The Department sets a minimum standard for Category A activities that require at least 85 percent of total expenses be supported with APF; three of the four Services exceeded that 85 percent minimum standard in fiscal year 2015. Category B activities include basic community support programs such as child and youth development programs, outdoor recreation, crafts, and automotive skills. APFs are required to support at least 65 percent of the total expense in Category B, but all four of the military services fell below the minimum Category B funding standard in fiscal year 2015.

Most of the decrease in funding is attributed to competing priorities within installation services and management. The military services mitigated the impact of constrained funding by adjusting hours of operation, reducing personnel requirements, and cutting back on the number of program offerings. They prioritized and funded the most critical services, explored opportunities for partnering, and considered alternative methods for delivering programs and services where APFs were reduced or no longer available. To sustain the delivery of programs to meet customer demand, the military services also increased the use of nonappropriated funds, which affects the future recapitalization of revenue-generating MWR activities. This is not a sustainable APF/NAF funding model and, if future funding continues to be constrained, the breadth and availability of MWR programs available to servicemembers and their families will continue to decrease. Efforts are underway to evaluate the existing model and recommend a viable path forward to meet the ever-changing needs of servicemembers and their families.

Our goal is to ensure MWR programs and services remain relevant and financially sustainable, particularly in light of changes in the needs, attitudes, and lifestyles of servicemembers. We continue to develop innovative strategies that will better serve the needs and interests of all members of our military community.

#### MILITARY ONESOURCE

In recognition of our enduring commitment to supporting servicemembers and their families, the Department provides confidential help through the Military OneSource and Military and Family Life Counseling programs. Military OneSource is both a 24/7/365 call center and an interactive website that provides comprehensive information, referrals, and assistance on every aspect of military life to Active Duty, National Guard and Reserve members, their families, and survivors. Services include confidential non-medical counseling, financial counseling, and specialty consultations, with more than 750,000 contacts annually. Masters-level consultants and non-medical counselors receive between 30,000 and 40,000 calls each month, and are available to provide expert assistance by telephone, online, through video, or in face-to-face meetings. Military OneSource also maintains a vetted, comprehensive community resource repository that contains information used by Military OneSource service providers to assist and refer servicemembers and their families.

#### NON-MEDICAL COUNSELING

The Military and Family Life Counseling program provides confidential in-person, non-medical counseling sessions and briefings, both on and off military installations worldwide. Currently, more than 2,100 Military and Family Life Counselors (MFLCs) are available to provide short-term, solution-focused counseling when and where military families need it most. Counseling support is available at family centers, child and youth programs, schools, youth summer programs, embedded within military units, targeted "surge" locations for emerging issues, and on-demand for up to 3 days at Yellow Ribbon and other unit and family oriented events. MFLCs also

support DOD's Military Caregiver PEER Forum initiative by facilitating virtual and in-person forums for military caregivers at more than 70 installations worldwide.

#### DEFENSE STATE LIAISON

The Department recognizes that many issues impacting the well-being of servicemembers and their families are best addressed by state governments. Issues encompassing family law, voting, consumer protection, health, and education are defined primarily by the states, often without having considered the impact on military families. In 2004, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness established an outreach program (USA 4 Military Families) and the Defense State Liaison Office (DSLO) to engage with state policymakers, educate them on unintended barriers created by their policies, and promote state awareness of other issues important to the well-being of servicemembers and their families.

Annually, DSLO consults with the personnel community throughout DOD to develop a list of ten key issues on which it will focus its engagements with the states. Initiatives championed by DSLO have included the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunities for Military Children, enacted by all 50 states and the District of Columbia; credit for military training and experience toward professional licenses for separating servicemembers, presently enacted in 47 states; license portability (other than for teachers and attorneys) for military spouses, enacted in all 50 states; unemployment compensation eligibility for military spouses in 47 states; child custody protection in 50 states; and veterans' treatment courts in 44 states. The 2017 list of key issues includes Medicaid waiver eligibility for family members with special needs, child abuse and neglect identification and reporting, teacher certification portability for military spouses, and pro-bono legal representation for military families.

#### FINANCIAL READINESS

The financial readiness of servicemembers and military families remains a priority for the Department. Financial readiness is essential to sustaining both quality of life and overall operational readiness. The less our servicemembers have to worry about the financial wellbeing of their families, the more they can focus on achieving the mission. Financial setbacks or mismanagement can quickly escalate into major financial problems. Through the military services' personal financial managers and counselors located at each military installation, as well as in-unit financial liaisons, servicemembers and their families have access to face-to-face financial counseling and education classes on various financial topics to help them set and meet financial goals and establish financially-responsible behavior.

Several recent changes to law and regulation have driven expansion of the financial readiness mission. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 (NDAA FY16) authorized a new, modernized military retirement system, known as the Blended Retirement System (BRS). Over 1.7 million servicemembers will be eligible to choose whether to remain under the current military retirement system or opt-in to the new plan when it becomes effective on January 1, 2018, and the Department has deployed a robust education strategy to ensure that members have the knowledge necessary to make an educated decision that meets their personal and professional needs. Training and education for these servicemembers will focus on the components of the new BRS and how savings and benefits can be maximized under the new system. This educational strategy extends to leaders at all levels, financial educators and counselors, and family members who are part of any major household financial decision. Eligible servicemembers will have all of 2018 to make their decision and enroll in the BRS, if they so choose. After January 1, 2018, the BRS becomes the retirement plan for all new military accessions.

NDAA fiscal year 2016 also expanded financial literacy training by identifying several personal and professional events or "touch points" across the military lifecycle. These distinct events represent timeframes when training should be provided to help servicemembers and their families understand and respond to commonly associated financial implications. To support the existing and expanded programs deployed by the Services, the Department has developed an innovative online and downloadable "app" that will host micro-learning modules aligned with each lifecycle touch point, intended to respond to the changing preference of our servicemembers for short and interactive "just in time" training. Additionally, the Department has expanded the footprint of the personal financial counselor program from 110 to 216 counselors in order to support additional financial education requirements, with plans to expand to 336 counselors in fiscal year 2017. This program provides the Department with a highly-flexible cohort of financial counselors

that can respond to the varying needs of the Services, and, in particular, address the unique requirements of the Reserve components.

Consumer protection is also an important component of financial readiness. In July 2015, the Department amended the Military Lending Act (MLA) regulations to expand the definition of “consumer credit” to be consistent with the Truth in Lending Act. The MLA provides specific protections for servicemembers and their families, including capping the cost of credit to a 36 percent Military Annual Percentage Rate (including finance charges and fees). To ensure compliance, the Department relies on the Federal regulatory agencies to enforce relevant regulations. For example, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has recovered more than \$120 million on behalf of servicemembers and families.

#### CONCLUSION

The Department will continue to prioritize support for servicemembers and their families by providing quality of life and military family readiness programs for our most important asset—our people. As the needs of servicemembers and their families change for a new generation, we continue to strive to adjust and rebalance our programs to best serve the military community. We look forward to working with this subcommittee and Congress in this effort.

Senator TILLIS. Ms. Raezer?

#### **STATEMENT OF JOYCE W. RAEZER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL MILITARY FAMILY ASSOCIATION**

Ms. RAEZER. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Gillibrand, thank you so much for the invitation to the National Military Family Association to speak about military family readiness. Our statement for the record highlights many of the issues important to these families. I am going to touch on a few.

Nothing is more important, say our military families, to their readiness than access to quality health care. I want to thank members of this subcommittee, the entire Senate Armed Services Committee, and Congress for your dedication last year to creating meaningful reforms in the military health system to enhance medical readiness, provide the best care for our troops in combat, and improve military families’ access to care. These reforms are needed.

In our recent survey of 9,000 military spouses, 30 percent who use a military hospital reported they rarely or never get an acute care appointment within the 24-hour access standard, a finding that is reinforced by the Defense Health Agency’s own transparency data. We urge you to hold DOD accountable for meeting both the letter and the spirit of the law you have just passed as they implement these reforms.

Please help ensure ongoing work to improve pediatric care and support for special needs families does not get lost in the rush to implement both the legislative reforms and the next round of TRICARE contracts this year.

While DOD has made progress in making the Exceptional Family Member Program more consistent across the Services, military families still need better coordination between the relocation, education, health care, and family support elements of the program.

We also urge you to adopt the recommendations of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission and direct DOD to align coverage under the ECHO [Extended Care Health Option] program, especially respite care, with State Medicaid waiver programs.

Military spouses face barriers in obtaining an education, getting a job, and moving up in a career, all while managing the frequent

moves, deployments, and other stressors of military life. We thank you for questioning the senior enlisted advisors on this issue. Military spouses need help funding their education, to include loan forgiveness for professions such as behavioral health. They need relief from transferring multiple professional licenses, employers who value their skills, and better access to childcare. Please address the continuing childcare shortage by working to ensure that installation child development centers are adequately staffed and to increase availability of part-time and hourly care and more access to the childcare fee assistance program.

We also ask you to ensure that as the nature of deployments continues to evolve and as the Services increase end strength, the programs that support military families and keep them both physically and financially fit, health care and childcare access, and the pillars of military compensation all remain strong.

Military family and servicemember readiness are inexorably linked. Military families shudder when they hear their servicemember may not have the training and equipment they need to do the job. Servicemembers cannot focus on that job if their spouse cannot get a job, their sick child cannot get a doctor's appointment, or if there is no quality childcare available.

Families faltering with the demands of military life will also be less prepared for transition out of the military. Programs to support these families must be responsive, consistently funded, and constantly evaluated as the needs of our military families evolve with the demands of the mission.

Thank you for your support of military families.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Raezer follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL MILITARY FAMILY ASSOCIATION

The National Military Family Association (NMFA) is the leading nonprofit dedicated to serving the families who stand behind the uniform. Since 1969, NMFA has worked to strengthen and protect millions of families through its advocacy and programs. We provide spouse scholarships, camps for military kids, and retreats for families reconnecting after deployment and for the families of the wounded, ill, or injured. NMFA serves the families of the currently serving, retired, wounded, or fallen members of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Commissioned Corps of the USPHS and NOAA.

Association volunteers in military communities worldwide provide a direct link between military families and the Association staff in the Nation's capital. These volunteers are our "eyes and ears," bringing shared local concerns to national attention.

The Association does not have or receive federal grants or contracts.

Our website is: [www.MilitaryFamily.org](http://www.MilitaryFamily.org).

JOYCE WESSEL RAEZER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Joyce became the Executive Director of the National Military Family Association in 2007. In that position, she leads the Association's programs and initiatives to meet the needs of the families of the seven Uniformed Services and promote improvements in their quality of life. She is frequently called on by government officials, other organizations, and the press to share her expertise on the issues facing military families. She began her work with the Association in 1995 as a Volunteer in the Government Relations Department and subsequently served in various staff positions, including Government Relations Director.

Joyce has represented military families on several committees and task forces for offices and agencies of the Department of Defense (DOD) and Military Services. Joyce has served on several committees of The Military Coalition, an organization of 36 military-related associations. She was co-chair of the Coalition's Personnel, Compensation, and Commissaries Committee from 2000 to 2007. In 1999 and 2000,

she served on a congressionally-mandated Federal Advisory Panel on DOD Health Care Quality Initiatives. From June 1999 to June 2001, Joyce served on the first national Board of Directors for the Military Child Education Coalition. In 2004, she authored a chapter on “Transforming Support to Military Families and Communities” in a book published by the MIT Press, *Filling the Ranks: Transforming the U.S. Military Personnel System*. She has served on the Strategic Board of the Department of Defense Millennium Cohort Study Program since 2015.

In 2006, Joyce received the Gettysburg College Distinguished Alumni Award. She was the 1997 recipient of NMFA’s Margaret Vinson Hallgren Award for her advocacy on behalf of military families. She also received the “Champion for Children” award from the Military Impacted Schools Association in 1998. In 2007, *Military Spouse Magazine* listed her on its Who’s Who of Military Spouses. On May 29, 2012, she was honored as a Daily Point of Light by the Points of Light Foundation. In 2014, she received the Community Hero Award from the PenFed Foundation.

A Maryland native, Joyce earned a B.A. in History from Gettysburg College, and a M.A. in History from the University of Virginia. The spouse of an Army retiree, she is the mother of two adult children. She is a former teacher and served on the Fort Knox Community Schools Board of Education from 1993 to 1995.

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States military is the most capable fighting force in the world. For more than a decade of war, servicemembers and their families never failed to answer the call, steadfastly sacrificing in order to protect our Nation. They made these sacrifices trusting that our government would provide them with resources to keep them ready. Continued national fiscal challenges have left military families confused and concerned about whether the programs, resources, and benefits contributing to their strength, resilience, and readiness will remain available to support them and be flexible enough to address emerging needs. The Department of Defense (DOD) must provide the level of programs and resources to meet this standard. Sequestration weakens its ability to do so. Servicemembers and their families have kept trust with America through 16 years of war with multiple deployments and separations. Unfortunately, that trust continues to be tested.

#### *We ask Congress:*

As you evaluate proposals submitted by DOD, consider the cumulative impact on military families’ purchasing power and financial well-being, as well as the effects on the morale and readiness of the all-volunteer force now and in the future.

Please:

- Reject budget proposals that threaten military family financial well-being as a way to save money for the government.
- Keep military pay commensurate with service and aligned with private sector wages.
- Preserve the savings military families receive by shopping at the commissary and oppose any reform measures that would reduce the value of the benefit.

We especially ask Congress to end sequestration, which places a disproportionate burden on our Nation’s military to reduce the deficit.

We also ask Congress to make improving and sustaining the programs and resources necessary to keep military families ready a national priority.

We ask Congress to:

- Provide oversight to ensure DOD and the individual Services are supporting families of all components by meeting the standards for deployment support, re-integration, financial readiness, and family health. Fund appropriately at all levels.
- Ensure adequate funding for military child care programs, including child care fee assistance programs. Improve access to installation-based child care and increase availability of part-time and hourly care.
- Facilitate easier paths to both licensure and employment for military spouses and veterans who are in the mental health field when they work with our servicemembers and their families. Include military spouses who enter the mental health profession in federal loan-forgiveness programs.
- Expand servicemember and family access to Military OneSource counseling and other assistance to 1 year post-separation.
- Ensure appropriate and timely funding of Impact Aid through the Department of Education (DOED).

- Continue to authorize DOD Impact Aid for schools educating large numbers of military children and restore full funding to Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) schools and the DODEA Grant Program.
- Bring the Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) benefits on par with State Medicaid waiver programs and extend ECHO eligibility for 1 year following separation.
- Correct inequities in survivor benefits by eliminating the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) offset to the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP). Make the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) permanent.
- Ease the financial burden and coverage confusion faced by Medicare-eligible, medically-retired wounded, ill, and injured servicemembers.

After 16 years of war, we continue to see the impact of repeated deployments and separations on our servicemembers and their families. We appreciate Congress' recognition of the service and sacrifice of these families. Your response through legislation to the ever-changing need for support has resulted in programs and policies that have helped sustain our families through these difficult times.

On January 23, 2017, the National Military Family Association posted this letter to our incoming Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, on behalf of the military families we serve:

DEAR SECRETARY MATTIS . . .

The National Military Family Association would like to congratulate you on becoming our Nation's 26th Secretary of Defense (SECDEF). We realize you have your work cut out for you, so we extend our commitment to helping you keep up with the pulse of our military families.

As you know, military life is something unknown to many Americans. Your new role gives you an opportunity to elevate the strengths and the challenges of today's servicemembers and their families. You will have numerous opportunities to help narrow the military-civilian divide that widens as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan continue to fade from public view. Your inspiration will show Americans that their support and understanding is critical to the well-being and success of the ones who stand on, and behind, our front lines.

While the nature of military deployments has changed, the frequency of those deployments hasn't. Military families still need continuous support, no matter what type of deployment they face. Because for military families, gone is gone, and they're still "one man down" on the home front.

A strong family is essential to an individual servicemember's mission readiness. Military families need your commitment to provide the necessary support to promote family readiness. We recognize the burden of sequestration is heavy—we've seen military families carry the weight of unfair and unbalanced budget cuts since sequestration began. They'll look to you to ease this hardship. As the voice of military families for more than 4 decades, we are eager to share their real-life experiences with you. Military family support and services should not be casualties of budget battles on Capitol Hill, and we are ready to arm you with the information to justify their necessity and end sequestration.

With the launch of a new military retirement system and upcoming congressionally-mandated changes to military health care, it is urgent that you fill vacant senior leadership positions within the Department of Defense with the best quality people as quickly as possible. The programs and services that fall under those positions—such as the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Assistant Secretary for Health Affairs, and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Military Community and Family Policy—address the specific 'day-to-day' challenges of our military families. Without the required oversight and support these key positions provide, readiness will be compromised, and families will be at risk.

Secretary Mattis, military families are the war-weary backbone of our military, and our Association is committed to working with you to preserve their resilience. As our military moves towards an enhanced state of readiness with ever-changing demands and missions, we pledge to stand by you as the trusted voice of our nation's families. We look forward to being your ally, because together we're stronger.

*Members of Congress, we ask the same of you.*

#### *Pay and Compensation*

We appreciate Congress making the pay raise at Employment Cost Index (ECI) a priority in the Fiscal Year 2107 National Defense Authorization Act (FY17 NDAA). Congress chose the Employment Cost Index (ECI) as the standard for Active Duty pay raises in order to recruit and retain the quality of servicemembers

needed to sustain the all-volunteer force and we thank you for meeting that standard this year.

We believe that Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) is an essential component of military compensation. We oppose any changes that threaten to reduce military families' pay.

We ask Congress to keep military pay commensurate with service and aligned with private sector wage increases.

#### MILITARY HEALTH SYSTEM REFORM

Our Association thanks the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) Personnel Subcommittee Members and professional staff for their extraordinary efforts and dedication to addressing military family concerns during the Military Health System (MHS) Reform process. The fiscal year 2017 NDAA health care provisions represent a massive restructuring of the direct care system as well as significant changes to purchased care contracting, and many provisions clearly reflect concern for the beneficiary experience. Our Association is hopeful MHS reform will eventually enable more military families to consistently access the right care at the right time and in the right place as well as improve the patient experience within military hospitals and clinics.

NMFA has three objectives to communicate through this statement. We seek to:

- Provide an overview of the current state of the MHS focused on problems that must be resolved to provide military families with an appropriate health care benefit
- Outline our reactions to the fiscal year 2017 NDAA health care reform provisions, particularly as they relate to the problems outlined above
- Identify gaps or MHS problem areas not addressed by the fiscal year 2017 NDAA or the upcoming implementation of the T17 contracts, and suggest possible solutions for future policy changes or legislative action

The quality and value of the military health care benefit should reflect the extraordinary demands of military service. MHS care should be on par with services provided by top performing civilian health systems. Military treatment facility (MTF) policies, procedures and customer service should have a beneficiary focus designed to facilitate access to care. TRICARE networks and reimbursement policies should be on par with high quality commercial plans. In short, military health care should be an unmitigated benefit to families—not another sacrifice to add to the many that military families already make in support of their servicemembers. We truly appreciate your efforts on MHS reform that will get us closer to that goal.

#### MHS REFORM VISION: ARE WE ALL ON THE SAME PAGE?

The MHS is unique with its dual readiness and benefit provision missions. Its readiness mission must achieve both a medically ready fighting force that is healthy and capable of deploying as needed and a ready medical provider force capable of delivering health and combat-casualty care for servicemembers in operational environments. The MHS benefit provision mission delivers the earned health care benefit to family members, retirees, and survivors. The two missions intersect when military medical personnel provide care to family members and retirees in MTFs, honing their medical skills in the process.

As we interpret the fiscal year 2017 NDAA MHS reforms we see congressional intent to “right size” the direct care component, retaining only beneficiary care that directly contributes to the readiness mission and outsourcing the rest to civilian providers via the TRICARE program. We also see a variety of related provisions intended to beef up the purchased care component. These changes should help ensure access for beneficiaries who must transition their healthcare to the private sector as a result of right sizing. They should also allow families to access care with high performing civilian providers and health care systems. Other provisions are intended to improve integration between the purchased and direct care components. Still others focus on purchased care cost savings to DOD.

Our Association supports this vision for MHS reform. Over the past 15 years when MTF capacity contracted due to medical provider deployments, many families were moved to civilian providers in the community. Our families were generally very satisfied with quality and access to care with their community providers. In fact, we only heard complaints about this policy when families were forced to move back into the MTFs. With the emphasis on improved access to high quality purchased care running throughout the reform provisions, we enthusiastically support this vision of MHS reform.

Under our interpretation of the congressional intent for MHS reform, we have four main concerns regarding the reform process:

- In meetings with DHA, the managed care support contractors and other military and veteran service organizations (MSO/VSOs), we have noted that MHS reform is not being discussed in terms of a vision or overarching strategy. Out of necessity, Congress presented the reform in a series of complex NDAA provisions that direct specific changes with no opportunity to explain linkages or outline the strategic vision for the MHS. Extraneous provisions (e.g., hearing aids, medical foods) that are valued and appreciated but not directly related to MHS reform also detract from the big picture. We believe the lack of shared strategic vision presents an obstacle to effective implementation of MHS reform.
- As beneficiaries are moved from direct to purchased care, problems with TRICARE's reimbursement policies will become more prevalent as they impact more families. We fear this will be a particular problem for families with young children, given TRICARE's historic pediatric reimbursement issues, caused by an inappropriate alignment with Medicare reimbursements. Reform measures did not address the challenges faced by patients needing care involving emerging treatments and technologies. If the intent is to move a significant portion of military family care into the purchased component, Congress must soon focus on fixing TRICARE reimbursement issues so they don't impede beneficiary access to appropriate care.
- We fear DOD will determine only minimal right-sizing is necessary and retain most military family care in the MTFs. If this happens, we believe future MHS reforms will be necessary to make additional tangible improvements to access, quality of care, and the patient experience within MTFs.
- Massive change in a health system where the primary focus—the reason for being—is medical readiness and combat casualty care, will lead to reduced focus on some beneficiary issues. What will happen, for instance, to progress on pediatric care problems while MTF management responsibilities are being shifted to the DHA and managed care support contractors are being restructured and a Joint Trauma Center is being developed? We believe that even advances on access to care may be at risk as the MHS turns its attention to implementing fiscal year 2017 NDAA health care reforms versus improving day-to-day operations.

Our concerns about day-to-day operations and non-reform related improvements are exacerbated by the timing of the new TRICARE managed care support contracts (T17 contracts). With T17 contracts slated to go live in October 2017, DHA will be simultaneously implementing several significant organizational changes as well as managing T17 implementation that includes a Managed Care Support Contractor (MCSC) change for approximately two-thirds of CONUS [continental United States] beneficiaries. Additionally, MHS reform will necessitate modifications of the T17 contracts even before they are implemented. From a military family perspective, the current timing means TRICARE beneficiaries will experience a MCSC change in October 2017 and then almost immediately face the TRICARE program restructure in January 2018. We believe it would be beneficial to delay T17 implementation until January 2018 to align with the introduction of TRICARE Select. Delaying T17 implementation will create one major communication event regarding TRICARE changes versus staggering multiple messages across several months.

In an MSO/VSO meeting with a senior DOD official late last year, we recommended a formal process for MSOs and VSOs to provide feedback on T17 implementation and the MHS reform process. DHA has embraced this suggestion and developed a construct for regularly gathering Association input. We hope this approach will be institutionalized so it continues even as leadership in the DHA and the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs turns over. While we believe this partnership will ensure beneficiary perspectives are included in MHS reform implementation, we remain concerned about beneficiary problems with the MHS that are not addressed by T17 or the fiscal year 2017 NDAA. What happens to issues such as concurrent hospice for terminally ill military kids, diagnostic genetic testing coverage denials, and Extended Care Health Option improvements to bring the program in line with state Medicaid waiver services? These issues cannot be put on the back burner for the next few years as focus is shifted to MHS reform.

#### TRICARE SELECT AND OTHER TRICARE REFORM

Before we move into an overview of MHS deficiencies and how the fiscal year 2017 NDAA health care provisions address them, we'd like to provide our perspec-

tives on the TRICARE reform plan outlined in section 701 since this TRICARE program restructure is not directly linked to identified beneficiary problems.

As we review section 701, it is our understanding TRICARE reform outlined in that section does the following:

- Eliminates the current TRICARE self-managed options—TRICARE Standard (non-network) and TRICARE Extra (network)—and replaces them with a self-managed preferred provider option called TRICARE Select that, like TRICARE Standard, includes the option of using non-network providers for slightly higher copays/cost shares
- Establishes an enrollment requirement for TRICARE Select
- Creates two tiers of beneficiaries for the purpose of out-of-pocket costs under TRICARE Select:
  - NEW Active Duty Family Members (ADFMs) and future NEW Retirees = those who enter service on or after January 1, 2018
  - grandfathered ADFMs and Retirees = those who entered service before January 1, 2018
- Maintains current out-of-pocket costs for grandfathered beneficiaries except for a new TRICARE Select enrollment fee and catastrophic cap increase for grandfathered retirees that will go into effect in 2020 contingent on TRICARE Select performance improvements relative to TRICARE Standard/Extra
- Changes and/or increases out-of-pocket costs for NEW beneficiaries in a variety of ways:
  - Increases the catastrophic cap for NEW retirees
  - Converts many health care encounter fees from cost shares to fixed dollar copays for all NEW beneficiaries
  - Applies an annual index to all fixed dollar fees based on the military retiree cost of living adjustment (COLA) for all NEW beneficiaries
  - Increases the TRICARE Prime enrollment fee for NEW future retirees
  - Establishes a new TRICARE Select enrollment fee for NEW future retirees
- Eliminates the preauthorization requirement for TRICARE Prime specialty care referrals

We are disappointed in the choice to create a two tier system based on when someone enters military service because it injects a new level of complexity into an already complex system. However, we are especially grateful Prime is maintained as a zero out-of-pocket cost option for ADFMs and that costs for NEW ADFMs remain largely unchanged for TRICARE Select (the only increase is an index applied to fixed dollar fees including the deductible and catastrophic cap). We appreciate that Congress chose to link moderate grandfathered retiree cost increases to improved TRICARE Select performance/value.

Our Association believes that NEW retiree out-of-pocket cost adjustments are reasonable and future increases will be predictable and linked to retiree COLA. Relatively low out-of-pocket costs reflect the value of service while catastrophic caps protect families from potential financial hardship related to medical expenses. Given the extraordinary risks assumed during the course of military service, we believe it is appropriate to protect servicemembers, retirees, their families, and survivors from financial risk wherever possible.

We welcome the attempt to streamline access to specialty care by eliminating the specialty care preauthorization requirement. It will be important to educate families that without preauthorization there is no guarantee TRICARE will pay for specialty care even if referred/recommended by their Primary Care Manager (PCM.)

The fiscal year 2017 NDAA mandates 85 percent network coverage of TRICARE beneficiaries. However, we and others have raised concerns about how robust TRICARE Select's PPO [Preferred Provider Organization] network will be across the country and how much beneficiary choice it will provide. The promise of a PPO network with better access and cost will create an expectation among beneficiaries who must now pay an enrollment fee to access their basic TRICARE benefit. What happens if DOD and its TRICARE contractors cannot deliver on the promise? What costs will TRICARE beneficiaries not residing in a location with a PPO network incur for the enrollment fee they now must pay? How will the new TRICARE Select option work for beneficiaries who currently use TRICARE Standard as second-payer to their employer-sponsored plans?

Why are these questions important? Military families must be able to understand TRICARE Select and what the change means in how they access and pay for health care. Given the recent cuts to the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH), reductions in family support programs, and continued threats to the commissary benefit, military families are poised to perceive TRICARE Select as a diminished benefit relative

to TRICARE Standard/Extra. It is critical that DHA, the managed care support contractors, and military associations can clearly communicate about TRICARE Select.

We thank Congress for including a TRICARE Select enrollment grace period to ensure beneficiaries maintain coverage during the transition period. The unprecedented Select enrollment requirement demands an effective communications plan and we appreciate Congressional oversight via the DOD Enrollment Plan report requirement.

Oversight and accountability are crucial during reform of this magnitude so we thank Congress for including the DOD and GAO report requirements to monitor access to purchased care.

While we are generally supportive of TRICARE Select and the other TRICARE reform measures, that support is dependent on the assumption that access to care is enhanced and the adjusted fees and COLA-based index will put an end to the sporadic and unpredictable health care fee increases that we have experienced over the past several years. A well-defined and predictable health care benefit is critical in keeping the faith with the all-volunteer force.

MHS BENEFICIARY CARE PROBLEMS AND MHS REFORM PLANS: HOW WELL DO THEY MATCH UP?

In the past, our testimony has outlined problems military families encounter with the direct and purchased care systems. In this document, we seek to recap those issues and identify which will be addressed with fiscal year 2017 NDAA health care provisions, where gaps still exist, and potential solutions for unresolved issues.

First, we would like to thank Congress for Sec. 704, which removes the referral and preauthorization requirements for TRICARE Prime beneficiaries seeking urgent care. This is an enormous improvement in acute care access and allows military families to access care in an appropriate setting, not the ER [emergency room]. Removing the referral requirement simplifies the policy so it is easily understood and implemented by families, providers and managed care support contractors. This provision will have such a positive impact on military families seeking care for sick or injured family members when their PCM is unavailable or when they are traveling or PCSing.

*PROBLEM: MTF Acute Appointment Shortages*

For years, military families have asked for better access to MTF acute care appointments for medical problems such as ear infections and strep throat—conditions that aren't emergencies, but must be treated promptly. The inability to make sick appointments at the MTF continues to be one of the main complaints we hear:

- Multiple data sources validate the anecdotal information we receive from our volunteers and military families. From October 2016 through January 2017, our Association fielded a survey of 9,566 military spouses. Thirty percent of respondents who use an MTF for primary care indicated they rarely or never get an acute appointment within the 24 hour access standard.
- This problem is further substantiated using DHA transparency data. From April through August 2016, the number of MTFs that failed to meet the 24 hour access standard for acute care appointments ranged from 48 percent to 68 percent. While we recognize this timeframe covers PCS season—when both the beneficiary population and uniformed MTF staff may be in flux leading to scheduling challenges—the number of noncompliant MTFs still seems unacceptably high.

We appreciate that Section 704: Access to Urgent and Primary Care Under TRICARE Program directs DOD to determine MTF primary care clinic hours based on the MTF's requirement to meet TRICARE Prime access standards and primary care utilization patterns and authorizes DOD to expand clinic hours if necessary. However, we would have liked to see DOD and/or GAO reporting requirements to ensure transparency and accountability in the implementation of this provision, which may require shifting or adding staff.

Given that MTF acute appointment access remains the most prevalent complaint regarding direct care, and is substantiated by both survey and DHA transparency data, we believe more must be done to ensure improvements. Most importantly, DOD must monitor acute appointment access using meaningful metrics that identify underperforming MTFs. This information should be used to understand obstacles to meeting access standards and develop solutions focused on addressing those obstacles. If acute access problems persist, we ask that you consider future legislation mandating enhanced reporting and data-driven process improvements on the acute care access issue.

We appreciate DHA has included representatives from the Services' Surgeons General offices in MSO/VSO Working Group and Executive sessions to brief on access to care initiatives. As the MTF management structure evolves, we would like to see a point person(s) responsible for MTF beneficiary access continue to participate in those meetings and be held accountable for MTF performance against published access standards.

*PROBLEM: MTF Routine Care Scheduling Challenges*

Families report delays in scheduling preventative, routine, and follow up care.

- In NMFA's military spouse survey, 30 percent of MTF users said they rarely or never get a routine appointment within the 7 day access standard.
- DHA's transparency data indicates that 26–42 percent of MTFs failed to meet the 7 day access standard for routine appointments during the April-August 2016 timeframe.
- Please note MTF access problems are not exclusive to family members. We regularly hear about servicemembers who are unable to get timely appointments. Failure to provide timely care to servicemembers is a readiness issue.

Not only are some families unable to schedule routine appointments within a reasonable time frame, but the process for scheduling is cumbersome. Families are frequently required to call the appointment line multiple times in the hopes of finding an opening within the currently available appointment book and are often confronted with an entirely different set of rules from one installation to the next.

We appreciate Sec. 709: Standardized System for Scheduling Medical Appointments at MTFs. A standardized appointment scheduling system, together with the first call resolution mandate, should alleviate many challenges families currently face when making MTF appointments. Assuming the online option is user-friendly, it should appeal to military families accustomed to conducting much of their family business online and via mobile apps.

Thank you for requiring a section 709 Implementation Plan from DOD. As you review the plan, please consider the following:

- The online appointment system should be easy to access. Unless there are major improvements to TRICARE Online, it should not be part of the new system.
- The online system should include the ability to not only schedule an appointment, but to change or cancel an appointment as well.
- The system should include an ability to track first call resolution rates.
- Both the online and manual systems should allow families the option to schedule acute appointments with providers other than their PCM, or even outside of their Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH) if there is no availability in the PCMH.

*PROBLEM: Direct Care System Variable Quality and Safety*

We remain concerned about the mixed results found during DOD's 2014 MHS review, which identified considerable variation across the system for both specific clinical quality measures and for individual MTFs. Issues identified in the review are consistent with feedback we continue to hear from military families. Some are very pleased with their MTF care, while others relay stories that clearly demonstrate quality and safety issues.

*"I had a visible lump on my knee that developed over several years following a trauma. It was causing pain to the point I needed crutches at times and my PCM sent me for ultrasound and an ortho referral. Ortho ordered an MRI which they claimed to show nothing abnormal. After seeing the head of ortho at the military hospital and being accused of being a drug seeker, despite the visible lump about the size of an egg on my knee, I finally got a referral to a civilian specialist who took one look at the MRI and said, there's a ball of scar tissue sitting on your nerve, we can book you for surgery in 2 weeks."—Military Spouse*

*"Over a year ago, I went to see my doctor at the MTF to discuss some symptoms I'd been having. He dismissed my concerns and I subsequently went back at least 5 times for the same issue. They never took it seriously, even when I told them I was having trouble swallowing solid food. I finally decided to switch to TRICARE Standard so I could see a civilian specialist. He listened to my symptoms and immediately scheduled further testing ... for the next day. During that test, the civilian specialist discovered a problem that needed surgery very quickly. This diagnosis explains the symptoms*

*I had been complaining about to the doctors at the MTF and military emergency rooms for the past year. I believe I could have (and should have) had this surgery a year ago, if one of the PCMs I saw at the MTF (because I never did see the same PCM twice) had given me the referral I asked for again and again. Unfortunately, because my condition had gotten so much worse, they were unable to correct it with laparoscopic surgery and had to do a much more invasive surgery. As a result, my recovery has been much lengthier and more difficult.”—Air Force Spouse*

Another finding of particular concern involved follow up on sentinel events. The MHS review found the execution and content of root cause analysis (RCA) to understand the possible causes of adverse health events related to care (sentinel events) remains highly variable across the Services and MTFs. In addition, there has been a failure to routinely follow up on reported RCAs to ensure systemic issues identified were corrected.<sup>1</sup>

Section 702: Reform of the Administration of the DHA and MTFs requires a DHA professional staff, including a Deputy Assistant Director for Medical Affairs with responsibility for clinical quality, patient safety, and the patient experience. We trust this position will be held accountable for improved quality of beneficiary care. It is also critical that DHA’s High Reliability Organization initiative, established in response to findings of variable quality across MTFs in the 2014 MHS review, be continued.

We appreciate that Section 726: Program to Eliminate Variability in Health Outcomes & Improve Quality of Health Care Services Delivered in MTFs establishes a program of clinical practice guidelines for certain diseases and conditions and hope this enhances quality of care for beneficiaries with chronic health conditions.

We also thank you for Section 727: Adoption of Core Quality Performance Metrics. However, we feel this is only a partial solution since it assumes there is an existing culture of data-driven process improvements within the direct care component. Simply requiring performance metrics does not ensure they will be appropriately applied to enhance quality of care.

We appreciate that Section 751: Comptroller General Reports on Health Care Delivery and Waste in the MHS requires a GAO report to assess the delivery of health care within the MHS (including processes for reporting and resolving adverse medical events). If this report indicates the MHS has not fixed the highly variable RCA sentinel event reporting and follow up uncovered in the 2014 MHS review, it will be imperative for Congress to mandate corrective action.

Our Association is concerned fiscal year 2017 NDAA health care reform provisions don’t go far enough to address the primary care quality problems reported by our military families. While we don’t believe Congress should prescribe medical treatment protocol, we do believe it is important for Congress to require and monitor the implementation of data-driven process improvements that are the cornerstone of modern high performing health systems.

Once the fiscal year 2017 NDAA quality metrics are adopted, it will be critical to ensure they are used to identify beneficiary care problem areas and develop plans for corrective action as necessary. We would like greater transparency not only with performance data, but how it is being leveraged to improve military family care. For instance, our analysis of DHA transparency data shows the direct care system is underperforming on a HEDIS pediatric primary care measure: Pharyngitis Pain/Pediatric Strep Testing Rates. According to HEDIS Outpatient Quality Measures, pharyngitis (inflammation of the throat) is the only condition among upper respiratory infections where antibiotic use may be appropriate. U.S. medical leaders recommend only children diagnosed with strep be treated with antibiotics. The HEDIS measure indicates what percentage of children prescribed an antibiotic received a strep test. The average for health plans nationwide is 85 percent. Approximately 3/4 of MTFs fall below the national average in terms of strep testing to verify appropriate antibiotic use. More than 1/3 of MTFs are at least 10 points below the national average. Data is only beneficial to military families if used to direct improvements at MTFs such as Bayne-Jones Army Community Hospital at Fort Polk or the 1st Special Operations Medical Group at Hurlburt Field where only 60 percent of military kids prescribed antibiotics are tested for strep.

We also suggest DHA develop a process to conduct “exit interviews” for Active Duty families who switch from TRICARE Prime to TRICARE Select. Given the new TRICARE Select enrollment requirement, it should be feasible for DHA to identify and contact families who make the switch. We believe there is great opportunity for identifying direct care problem areas by talking to families who elect to leave

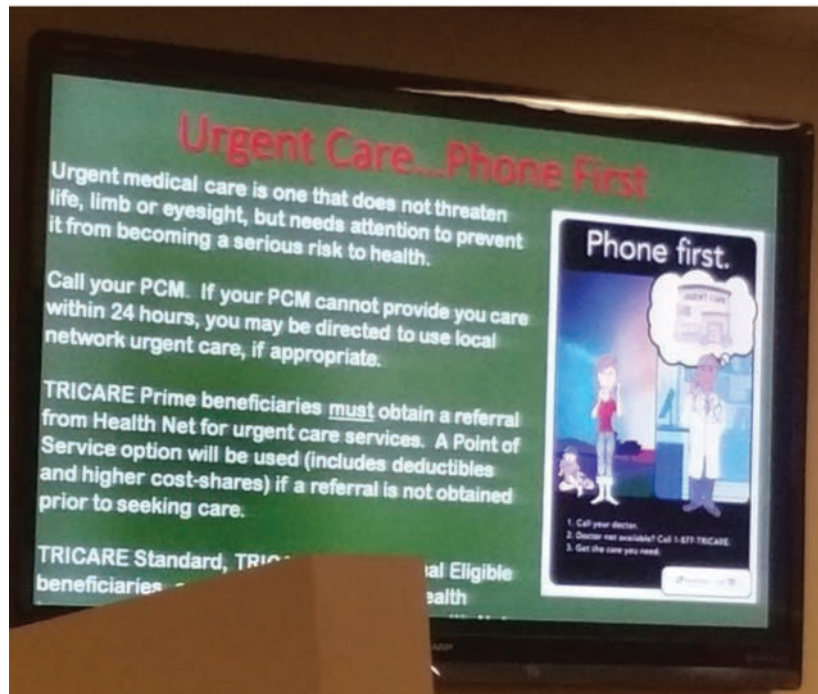
<sup>1</sup>Military Health System Review Final Report to the Secretary of Defense—August, 2014

TRICARE Prime's zero out-of-pocket cost option for TRICARE Select's deductible and copays. Identifying problems and taking corrective action will help not only military families, but it will contribute to DHA's goal of retaining family member care within the direct component.

*PROBLEM: Policies and Patient Experience Vary Across MTFs*

**Inconsistent Policy Implementation at the MTF Level:** MTF commanders currently have a great deal of authority when it comes to setting policies at their facilities. While this is understandable given the complexity of the MHS and the unique conditions of each location, the existence of policies and procedures that vary from one MTF to another can make it even harder for mobile military families to effectively navigate the system.

**Poor/Inconsistent Communication:** Related to inconsistent policy implementation is the varying quality and extent of communication at MTFs. For example, DOD announced the Urgent Care Pilot in January 2016 and started it on May 23, 2016. In January 2017, a family member visited the Dumfries Health Center (a clinic of the Fort Belvoir Community Hospital system) and saw this message on the electronic board stating that Prime beneficiaries must obtain a referral for urgent care services or face Point of Service charges.



The Dumfries and Fairfax clinic websites, accessible through the Fort Belvoir Community Hospital site, have a link to the TRICARE website about the Urgent Care Pilot in small print at the bottom of their websites. While small, this link is more accessible than anything to be found on the main Fort Belvoir Community Hospital page.<sup>2</sup>

Contrast the information provided by Fort Belvoir and its satellite facilities with that provided by the Guthrie Clinic at Fort Drum, NY. On the Guthrie Clinic home page, the Urgent Care Pilot is highlighted under Announcements. Guthrie has also

<sup>2</sup>Fort Belvoir Community Hospital: <http://www.fbch.capmed.mil/SitePages/Home.aspx>; Fairfax Health Center: <http://www.fbch.capmed.mil/About/fairfax.aspx>; Dumfries Health Center: <http://www.fbch.capmed.mil/about/dumfries.aspx> (accessed 2/11/17)

been promoting the Urgent Care Pilot rules on its Facebook feed.<sup>3</sup> MTF leaders must ensure benefit, policy, or procedural changes are communicated effectively and in a timely manner. They should not add to the misinformation already conveyed by some non-DOD sources.

Families often state they cannot count on getting accurate information from their MTFs. They also complain of difficulties in obtaining lab results, errors in medical records, and providers' failure to return phone calls.

Lagging Customer Service Innovations: DOD has been slow to adopt customer service innovations common in civilian health plans, such as the Nurse Advice Line (NAL) and Secure Messaging. New program rollouts often lack patient focus. While DOD has analyzed the NAL's business impact, it has not to our knowledge surveyed users to ensure the service meets beneficiary needs. Although Secure Messaging aligns with young military families' preferred communication methods, adoption rates at MTFs have lagged. We suspect this is linked to implementation issues such as the wide variety of names for the system (Relay Health, MiConnect, Medical Homeport Online, Army Medicine Secure Messaging and simply Secure Messaging) and inconsistent MTF, clinic, and provider adoption.

We appreciate that Section 702: Reform of the Administration of the DHA and MTFs requires DHA to assume responsibility for administration of all MTFs. Currently, DHA sets policy but MTFs have no accountability to the Agency for implementation of that policy. Consolidating MTF administration under DHA should allow the Agency to enforce policy and ensure consistent communication. In theory. However, the Fort Belvoir Community Hospital and its clinics—including the Dumfries clinic that displayed inaccurate information about the Urgent Care Pilot 7 months after it launched—are part of the Defense Health Agency's National Capital Region Medical Directorate. While we are concerned about Dumfries patients getting inaccurate information regarding the Urgent Care Pilot, we are even more concerned that this incident indicates a lack of expertise or motivation at all levels of the chain of command to ensure families get the right information. To us, it suggests that we will have to go beyond simply consolidating all MTFs under DHA to ensure accurate and consistent policy and information dissemination.

We thank you for including Section 718: Enhancement of Use of Telehealth Services in MHS directing DHA to incorporate telehealth into both the direct and purchased care components. By developing telehealth services to improve access to care and monitor individual health outcomes, DOD can provide health care industry leadership in telehealth. We look forward to seeing the benefits telehealth can provide to mobile families experiencing frequent geographic separations.

We're willing to give the new DHA/MTF management structure a chance. However, if policy variations and inconsistent communications persist after a reasonable start up period, we recommend that Congress require a management implementation plan focused on beneficiary facing issues and follow on monitoring similar to that required for Section 703: Military Medical Treatment Facilities.

*PROBLEM: Cumbersome Referral and Authorization Process:*

The referrals and authorizations needed to obtain network specialty care can result in delays and disruptions to care. These issues become more pronounced during PCS moves. Military families recognize continuity of medical care is one of the sacrifices they must make as a result of the highly mobile military lifestyle. Unfortunately, many TRICARE and MTF policies hinder rather than facilitate the smooth transition of care during PCS moves. For instance, specialty care requires a new referral and authorization in the new location while patients are often required to reconfirm an existing diagnosis before seeking treatment.

*"With my second, I had to establish care with a new PCM after a move at 35 weeks pregnant to get a referral to an OB. The provider (off-post) laughed her head off at my hugely round self when I explained I needed a referral. She sent it through marked urgent and Tricare denied the referral because she didn't have a documented pregnancy test in the billing codes. Another visit for in-office lab work and I got my referral, finally!" –Military Spouse*

Section 701: TRICARE Select and Other TRICARE Reform eliminates the specialty care preauthorization requirement for outpatient care. We welcome this attempt to streamline access to specialty care, but it is only a partial solution. As the preauthorization requirement is lifted, it will be important to educate families on the new policy so they understand that without preauthorization they face some risk that TRICARE may deny coverage for certain care and services. Since some of

<sup>3</sup>Fort Drum MEDDAC, <http://www.drum.amedd.army.mil/SitePages/Home.aspx> (accessed 2/11/17)

TRICARE's coverage policies are outside the civilian plan norm (e.g. denying coverage for many diagnostic genetic tests covered by commercial insurance and other government payers, "inpatient only" rules at odds with pediatric standards of care), families cannot count on their provider offices to know when a particular service is at risk of being denied.

The TRICARE T17 contracts include an electronic referral processing system. It is our understanding this system will make it feasible to transfer specialty referrals electronically from one geographic location to the next, even across TRICARE managed care support contractor regions. However, DHA seems reluctant to commit to utilizing this capability to streamline the transition of specialty care. Removing the requirement to get a new specialty care referral following a PCS, and allowing the existing referral to transfer electronically to the new duty station, would greatly help military families transition care in a timely fashion.

*PROBLEM: Areas with TRICARE Network Inadequacy*

In some locations, families complain of a shortage of network providers in the network and that many of those listed in TRICARE contractors' network lists are no longer accepting new TRICARE patients. We fear this problem will become worse as TRICARE reimbursement rates become less competitive relative to other payers.

We thank Congress for the multiple provisions that attempt to address this problem. The provisions focused on growing and improving the TRICARE network will also allow beneficiary care to shift from the direct to the purchased care component as DOD implements Section 725: Adjustment of Medical Services, Personnel Authorized Strengths, and Infrastructure in MHS to Maintain Readiness and Core Competencies of Health Care Providers. This provision directs DOD to "right-size" the MHS limiting MTF care, medical personnel end strengths, and MHS infrastructure to only that required for critical wartime medical readiness skills and servicemember medical readiness. It also requires that beneficiaries affected by these measures have the ability to receive care through the purchased care networks.

- Section 705: Value-Based Purchasing and Acquisition of Managed Care Support Contracts for the TRICARE Program requires DHA to transfer contracting responsibility for MCSCs to the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense Acquisition, Technology & Logistics. We hope this provision will enable DOD to improve TRICARE contract accountability to enhance access and quality of care as well as the health care experience.
- Section 705 also requires DOD to develop value-based incentive programs. We appreciate this provision says DOD must maintain assurance that beneficiaries will have timely access to care and not incur any additional costs.
- We appreciate that Section 706: Establishment of High Performance Military-Civilian Integrated Health Delivery Systems seeks to improve access to high quality care via partnerships with civilian providers. We believe aspects of this model have been successfully employed at Fort Drum, NY, and look for implementation of this provision to take military-civilian medical partnerships to the next level for both beneficiary care and medical provider readiness training opportunities.

*PROBLEM: TRICARE Slow to Cover Emerging Technologies and Treatment Protocols*

Health care is in a period of rapid change and innovation. Since TRICARE coverage policies are governed by statute, they are difficult to update to cover new technologies. As a result, TRICARE beneficiary care lags that of civilians. Military families who receive care at MTFs have better access to health care innovations, since the rules governing MTFs are less stringent than TRICARE's regulations for purchased care. Unfortunately, we don't see any provisions in the fiscal year 2017 NDAA that address this issue.

We appreciate Congress gave DOD the authority to cover emerging technologies in the fiscal year 2015 NDAA. However, DOD seems reluctant to exert that authority. In the case of Lab Developed Tests (LDTs,) TRICARE's demonstration project still covers only a fraction of tests covered under commercial plans, Medicare, and Medicaid. We have heard that dozens of military families have faced coverage denials for diagnostic genetic tests that are routinely reimbursed by other payers. As one physician familiar with TRICARE coverage said:

*"If DOD wants to insert themselves in the clinical decision making process, they must do it in a clinically relevant timeframe."*

In other words, taking years to review and evaluate diagnostic genetic tests that have widespread acceptance, use, and reimbursement in the medical community and commercial insurance plans is unacceptable.

If Congress succeeds in the goal of right-sizing the direct care component and shifting significant beneficiary care to the TRICARE program, the prevalence of these reimbursement issues will grow dramatically. The next iteration of MHS reform must address current TRICARE coverage gaps and create a process for the timely resolution of future coverage discrepancies.

*PROBLEM: TRICARE Customer Service Issues*

The contracting process leads to regular MCSC turnover. These changes rarely go smoothly and the result is customer service disruptions for military families. In some cases, where referral/authorization processing was disrupted, it has even affected access to care. TRICARE's T17 contracts move to two TRICARE Regions will result in a contractor change for approximately two-thirds of TRICARE beneficiaries. As mentioned before, we have significant concerns about a change of this magnitude being undertaken in conjunction with numerous MHS reform initiatives.

Additionally, the process for resolving TRICARE problems is disjointed, ineffective, and unclear to military families. We hear from many resourceful military families facing legitimate TRICARE coverage and reimbursement problems—they simply do not know where to turn when the standard MCSC customer service resources fail to resolve their problem. DHA's answer is typically to refer us to the TRICARE Regional Office (TRO). This is not a resource that is readily available to beneficiaries—most have never even heard of a TRO—and it should not be the only resource for resolving complex TRICARE issues. Military families should not face experiences such as the following relayed to us by a military mom and former Navy nurse after her son's life altering injury:

*"I do think that the cumbersome beyond belief system that we are putting our servicemembers and their families through at the worst time of their lives is within your scope of concern. As individuals, I believe that most of the people involved are kind hearted and sincerely doing their best. As a group, and there are at least two dozen people actively involved on my son's "team", it is a broken system. No one in charge or accountable, poor communication, control issues, lack of trust among the constituents, policies that defy common sense...we are completely beaten down. A Naval Academy grad, a retired admiral and a Navy nurse, and we are completely beaten down. Especially the fact that everyone involved says, "I'm sorry but this is the system." I love Navy medicine, but to have to fight every step of the way for what should be readily provided without red tape, delays, and difficulty has been the most disappointing experience of my life."—Military mom and former Navy nurse*

No fiscal year 2017 NDAA provisions address issues with TRICARE customer service. In fact, the implementation of section 702 and the assumption by DHA of administrative responsibilities in the MTFs could confuse patients receiving MTF care about what entity has the responsibility to resolve their concerns.

TRICARE, the MTFs, and the managed care support contractors must develop a better process allowing beneficiaries to escalate issues if they cannot be resolved with the typical customer service resources. If the TRO is intended to serve this purpose, all beneficiaries and those who support them (e.g., case managers, patient advocates) should be well-versed in the TRO's function and how to contact the appropriate person at the TRO. If significant patient volume is shifted from the direct to the purchased care component, customer service issues will become more prevalent making it even more important to institute a process for resolving problems and ensure adequate customer service resources from both the managed care support contractors and the TROs.

SPECIAL POPULATIONS TO ADDRESS WITH MHS REFORM

*Reserve Component Families*

National Guard and Reserve families are poorly served with their current TRICARE options. When activated, their families become eligible for TRICARE, but coverage and network providers may not align with their civilian plans. This leads to confusion and disruptions in care as families switch to providers in the TRICARE network.

We thank you for Section 748: Assessment of Transition to TRICARE Program by Families of Members of Reserve Components Called to Active Duty and Elimination of Certain Charges for Such Families to study Reserve component (RC) family mem-

ber difficulties in transitioning health care to the TRICARE program during Active Duty orders.

We have long advocated for more flexibility in allowing RC families to retain their servicemember's employer sponsored plan when activated, perhaps by paying them a stipend to help cover premiums. We believe MHS reform does not have to be a "one size fits all" solution. TRICARE coverage should be tailored to meet the unique needs of Reserve component families.

#### *Special Needs Military Families*

Caring for a special needs family member can be difficult and draining for any family. However, the impact for military families is magnified by the unique challenges associated with military service and TRICARE policy. We had hoped MHS reform would ensure military special needs families are appropriately supported as they navigate multiple systems of care for their family members.

- *PCS*: A PCS will, by definition, disrupt the continuity of care that is so important in managing complex medical conditions. After every move, special needs families must begin a lengthy cycle of referrals, authorizations and waitlists resulting in repeated gaps in care.
- *ECHO*: State Medicaid programs provide assistance not covered by TRICARE: respite care, custodial care, and more flexible medical coverage. TRICARE's Extended Health Care Option (ECHO) was designed to provide coverage for non-medical services often covered by Medicaid, but not allowed under TRICARE. However, the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) found ECHO benefits, as currently implemented, are not robust enough to replace state waiver programs.<sup>4</sup> DOD has assured us they are working on ECHO improvements. However, other than a policy update to cover incontinence supplies, there has been no tangible progress on this issue.
- *Case Management*: Families often run into roadblocks when establishing or re-establishing care for special needs family members. When this happens, they need effective case management services to help them navigate obstacles to obtain the needed care and services. Families who contact our Association have no idea where to turn when their existing case managers fail to resolve their problems.

Section 701's elimination of the preauthorization requirement for specialty care will streamline the process of transferring care during a PCS somewhat, but it is only a partial solution. T17 is supposed to include enhanced case management services. We look forward to learning more about those to see if they address military family concerns regarding case management.

Removing the requirement to get a new specialty care referral following a PCS, and allowing the existing referral to transfer electronically to the new duty station, would greatly help special needs military families transition care in a timely fashion.

We are encouraged by DHA's stated committed to addressing ECHO shortfalls. However, if there is no change in respite care policy—a well-documented gap relative to state Medicaid waiver programs—within the next year, we believe the next round of MHS reform must include a legislative fix to bring ECHO in line with the program's legislative intent.

#### *Pediatric Population*

The MHS provides care for 2.4 million military kids, but because TRICARE reimbursement is based on Medicare, a program for senior adults, its policies are not always optimal for pediatric care.

*Concurrent Hospice Care*: Last summer, the TRICARE for Kids (TFK) Coalition, of which NMFA is a member, was contacted about two terminally ill military kids who could not access hospice because it would mean foregoing curative care per TRICARE hospice reimbursement policy. This is an outdated policy, based on Medicare requirements for senior adults. Acknowledging that the path of a child's illness is unpredictable and parents refuse to give up hope and therefore curative care, Medicaid and commercial plans will now cover hospice in addition to curative care for pediatric patients.

When Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC/3rd) contacted DHA about the issue, DHA responded it is a statutory issue and implied that military kids are not lacking palliative care due to other TRICARE services and supports in place. The TFK Coalition subsequently met with members of a children's hospital palliative care team who

<sup>4</sup>Final Report of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission—January, 2015

explained in detail how military kids are not getting the same level of care as children on Medicaid and commercial health insurance who have access to hospice services:

- The goal of palliative care, of which hospice is a part, is to improve the quality of life of patients with serious/terminal illnesses. What kids want more than anything is to be at home.
- While TRICARE does cover in home nursing care, it is provided by an LPN. This is not the same level of care that hospice provides—typically RN care.
- Without RN level care, the child is at higher risk for future ER [emergency room] visits and hospital readmissions. Example: A child is sent home from the hospital. After several days, the child is in intractable pain. If that child has hospice, the family can ask the hospice nurse to evaluate the child. The hospice nurse can communicate with the child's medical provider and adjustments can be made to the pain control plan. Without hospice, the family only has LPN care. An LPN does not have this same level of authority so the family's only option for their child in intractable pain is an ER visit and likely readmission.
- According to the children's hospital representatives, they no longer even bring up the option of hospice care to military families (even though this is what they would normally recommend) because they know TRICARE will not cover it—this is probably why we aren't hearing directly from more families.
- The palliative care team also mentioned the hardships military families face when their terminally ill child is hospitalized. This team noted that our families typically don't have extended family or an established support system nearby to help out with other children and may be dealing with the servicemember's absence. Thus, military families are even more in need of hospice services to allow their child to remain at home than are typical families with a terminally ill child.

We have discussed the concurrent hospice issue with DHA leadership. Their response included supporting affected families on a case by case basis (although it is unclear what can be done if, in fact, TRICARE is prohibited from covering concurrent hospice by statute), as well as establishing a demonstration project to allow TRICARE to cover concurrent hospice for pediatric patients. Unfortunately, it will take about a year to get a demonstration up and running. We don't believe this is an adequate response. Military families with terminally ill children deserve access to the current standards of pediatric care, including concurrent hospice services.

*Medical Necessity:* TRICARE's adult-based definition of medical necessity prevents some kids from getting the care they need—care that is widely accepted and practiced in the civilian health care system and MTFs. TRICARE is authorized to approve purchased care only when it is "medically or psychologically necessary and appropriate care based on reliable evidence."<sup>5</sup> DOD's hierarchy of reliable evidence includes only "published research based on well controlled clinical studies, formal technology assessments, and/or published national medical organization policies/positions/reports."<sup>6</sup> While beneficiaries certainly want safe and effective treatment, such tightly prescribed data for children is not always available. TRICARE's strict adherence to this adult-based standard of reliable evidence results in coverage denials for widely accepted pediatric treatments.

*Habilitative Care:* Habilitation services are available only for Active Duty family members through the ECHO program and are subject to an annual dollar limit of \$36,000. This differs from the ACA [Affordable Care Act] which recognizes habilitative services and devices as an essential health benefit without lifetime or annual dollar caps on care. Habilitative services, provided for a person to attain or maintain a skill for daily living, are uniquely necessary for children due to their stages of growth and development. Habilitative services should be covered as a basic health benefit as medically necessary just as rehabilitation services are covered.

*Medical Nutrition:* TRICARE's current definition of medical nutrition is too narrow and counseling and management are only covered as part of diabetic care. TRICARE is not keeping pace with current best practices nationally for specialized pediatric care.

We are grateful for Section 713: Coverage of Medically Necessary Food and Vitamins for Certain Conditions Under the TRICARE Program that addresses the med-

<sup>5</sup>DOD Report to Congressional Defense Committees: Study on Health Care and Related Support for Children of Members of the Armed Forces—July, 2014

<sup>6</sup>DOD Report to Congressional Defense Committees: Study on Health Care and Related Support for Children of Members of the Armed Forces—July, 2014

ical nutrition problem outlined above by authorizing TRICARE to cover medically necessary food, vitamins and related supplies.

Although not part of Congress' MHS reform, we would also like to express our appreciation for a recent DHA policy update that brings TRICARE's well child care in line with the American Academy of Pediatrics Bright Futures guidelines.

*TRICARE Behavioral Health Changes Need Faster Implementation*

Sixteen years of war have left families with behavioral health problems and reintegration challenges that may last for many years. It is a moral imperative to provide servicemembers and their families with the help they need after years of enduring repeated combat deployments. While we appreciate the comprehensive revisions to TRICARE mental health coverage outlined in the final rule issued on September 2, 2016, the lack of timely policy implementation speaks to our concerns about DOD's capacity to parallel process multiple major changes as part of T17 and MHS reform. Although the TRICARE final rule on revised mental health regulations was "effective" October 3, 2016:

- The new regulations require between 90 and 100 changes to TRICARE policy and reimbursement manuals, which the Defense Health Agency projected would be completed by the end of 2016.
- The only TRICARE manual changes that DHA has released to date are related to eliminating the quantitative treatment limitations (day and dollar limits, copayments).
- The current managed care support contractors do not have any policy guidance to implement the new treatment services or to streamline the authorization of current institutional providers.
- Currently participating providers are operating under the outdated standards.
- New providers who would like to participate cannot, until DHA issues new policy guidance and the managed care support contractors put their implementation processes in place.

The managed care support contractors are ramping up for the consolidation to two regions and transition to T17 contracts; incorporating the new behavioral health elements does not appear to be in their work plans at the moment.

PERSPECTIVES ON HEALTH CARE AND READINESS

Affordable and timely access to health care is important to all families, but it is vital for military families. Repeated deployments; caring for the wounded, ill, and injured; the stress and uncertainty of military life; and the need to maintain family readiness demand quality and readily available health care. Families need a robust and reliable health care benefit in order to focus on managing the many challenges associated with military life versus worrying about how they are going to access and pay for essential health care. We appreciate your dedication to improving health care for our military families and stand by to help with future reform efforts.

COMMISSARY

Military families consistently tell us the commissary is one of their most valued benefits. We view the commissary as an important element of military compensation and thank Congress for fully funding it in the fiscal year 2017 NDAA. However, we are concerned about changes to commissary operations that the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) is implementing pursuant to provisions included in last year's Defense authorization. Specifically, DeCA is abandoning the previous "cost plus 5 percent" pricing model and replacing it with variable pricing, in which prices would fluctuate based on local competitors' prices. DeCA has also announced plans to introduce private label products.

Taken together, these changes represent a significant departure from DeCA's traditional business model. We are not convinced that DeCA officials have the expertise to manage these new systems. In addition, while we acknowledge that private label products might be popular with customers, we wonder how including them in the product mix will generate enough revenue to reduce the need for appropriated funds, as DeCA claims. If the changes do not generate the needed revenue—or if customers respond by shopping elsewhere—how will DeCA make up the shortfall?

It is worth noting that DeCA has embarked on this transformation with little to no input from the military families it serves. We have suggested that DeCA reinstitute the Patron Advisory Council, which would ensure greater transparency and accountability to commissary customers. Military families rightly expect the commissary to offer high quality products and shopping experience in addition to good

value. That focus on the customer must not be lost as DeCA undergoes changes in its operations.

It is also important to remember that the Exchange retail stores are highly dependent on foot traffic from nearby commissaries. Any threat to the health of the commissary is a risk to the military resale system as a whole. This is particularly concerning as Services reduce funds for installation Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) programs. These programs are increasingly dependent on the Exchanges for funding. If Exchange sales revenues decrease, funding for MWR programs will go down as well.

We are gratified that both Congress and DOD have recognized the importance of commissary savings to military families and have expressed their commitment to preserving the value of the benefit. However, we are concerned about what will happen if the changes do not generate the expected revenue.

Given the importance of the commissary benefit, we ask for close Congressional monitoring as DeCA embarks on this transformation.

#### MILITARY RETIREMENT SYSTEM

Servicemembers with fewer than 12 years of military service are faced this year with an important decision—whether to opt in to the “blended” retirement system created in the fiscal year 2016 NDAA or remain in the current system. This choice has significant long-term financial ramifications for servicemembers and their families. It is vital to ensure these young servicemembers—and their spouses—are given the tools and resources they need to make the decision that is in their financial best interest.

We are pleased DOD has recognized this responsibility and is taking steps to ensure that servicemembers are informed about the new retirement system. They have recently launched an online course that will educate servicemembers about the new plan and their options. We are especially glad the Department recognizes that the choice of retirement plan must be a family decision and is making the online course available to spouses as well.

However, while these initial steps are encouraging, more needs to be done to ensure servicemembers and spouses are fully educated about their retirement choices and the benefits and drawbacks of each choice. First, the Department must do more to raise awareness of the new retirement system, especially among military spouses. While we are pleased the online training will be available to spouses, it is currently housed on a site few spouses have cause to visit. We would like to see better utilization of Military OneSource to raise awareness of the new retirement system and the training available to families. In addition, in our view, online training is not sufficient. Better family access is needed to the financial education provided by Military Family Life Counselors and unit Personal Financial Managers. Servicemembers and families should receive in-person training and guidance to answer their questions and ensure they make the best choice for their long-term financial well-being.

We appreciate the new military retirement system will allow more servicemembers to accumulate retirement savings while preserving the defined benefit for those who serve a full career. However, we ask Congress to consider amending the plan to increase its value for servicemembers. Specifically, we ask Congress to increase the maximum level of matched contributions to servicemembers’ Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) accounts to 5 percent—the level recommended by the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC). Because the match is based on servicemembers’ basic pay, rather than total compensation, servicemembers should have the option of a higher match in order to maximize their retirement savings. We also ask Congress to extend the government match for the full career of the servicemember, rather than ending it at 26 years of service.

Finally, we note that the adoption of the new retirement plan is likely to affect the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP). Will future retirees elect to pay into SBP if they have TSP accounts to leave their survivors? What would a lower participation rate mean for the overall health of the SBP? These are important questions that need to be studied. We ask Congress to direct DOD to study the potential impact the blended retirement system will have on the Survivor Benefit Plan.

*We ask Congress to increase the maximum level of matched contributions to servicemembers’ TSP accounts to 5 percent—the level recommended by the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC).*

*We ask Congress to extend the government match for the full career of the servicemember, rather than ending it at 26 years of service.*

*We ask Congress to direct DOD to study the prospective impact the blended retirement system will have on the Survivor Benefit Plan.*

## CUMULATIVE EFFECTS OF CUTS THREATEN MILITARY FAMILIES' FINANCIAL READINESS

Recent years have seen military pay raises below the ECI and caps to servicemember housing allowances. Looking ahead, servicemembers face increased health care costs and the need to contribute to their retirement savings. Taken together, these changes represent reduced purchasing power for servicemembers and their families. We ask you to consider the cumulative effects of these policies on military families' financial well-being and reject any proposals that ask families to shoulder a greater financial burden.

*We ask Congress to reject budget proposals that threaten military family financial well-being as a way to achieve savings for DOD.*

## SEQUESTRATION: AN ONGOING THREAT TO FAMILY READINESS

The effects of sequestration have already resulted in cuts to benefits and programs military families utilize to maintain their readiness. Much of the funding for these programs is embedded in the Service Operations and Maintenance accounts, which have been the hardest-hit by sequestration. Understanding what is affected by sequestration has been confusing for families.

The total effect of sequestration on military families is unclear. What is clear is that military families do not deserve having to deal with such uncertainty—uncertainty of the availability of programs they rely on, uncertainty of whether their servicemember will receive the training they need to do their job safely, the uncertainty of not knowing what new cost they will be asked to absorb from their own pockets.

While the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 provided some relief for fiscal year 2016 and fiscal year 2017, we know with future cuts required down the road, military families will continue to see threats to the programs and resources they require for readiness.

*We ask Congress to end sequestration and end the threat to the resources military families depend on for their readiness.*

## WHAT DO TODAY'S MILITARY FAMILIES NEED TO ENSURE READINESS?

It has often been said while the military recruits a servicemember, it must retain a family. Our Association has long argued in order to build and maintain the quality force our Nation demands, the military must support servicemembers as they balance the competing demands of military service and family life. We were gratified to see significant family-focused proposals in recent years. We urge Congress to continue to strengthen the programs and services available to support all troops and families in diminishing uncertainty and meeting the daily challenges of military life.

One of the greatest challenges facing military families is instability caused by frequent military-ordered moves. The effect of these frequent relocations is most clearly visible when considering the issue of military spouse employment. Like their civilian counterparts, military families typically rely on two incomes to help make ends meet. However, despite the fact that most military spouses both need to and want to work outside the home, the unemployment rate these spouses is nearly 23 percent<sup>7</sup>—more than triple the national average. Much of this is due to constant relocations, which force military spouses to leave their jobs and start over in their new locations.

Military children are also affected by military-ordered moves. While most Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves occur during the summer months, not all do. It is not uncommon for children to be pulled out of school midway through the year and dropped into a new environment.

Military families tell us they need more flexibility in order to minimize the upheaval associated with moving. Yet, budget issues may reduce flexibility for families facing a military-ordered move. On February 8, the Navy announced sailors and families should expect a compressed household goods move schedule due to the constraints caused by the ongoing Continuing Resolution.<sup>8</sup> The military must evolve to meet the needs of today's military families, but it needs a predictable budget and appropriation to do so.

*We ask Congress to provide military families with greater flexibility in timing their relocation either before or after a servicemember's permanent change of station (PCS) report date.*

<sup>7</sup>2015 Demographics Report Profile of the Military Community, <http://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2015-Demographics-Report.pdf>

<sup>8</sup>"Household Goods Move Timelines Compressed Due to FYCR", February 9, 2017, <http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story-id=98793>.

## CHILD CARE

Military families frequently cite the lack of high quality, affordable child care as among the most significant challenges they face. In part, this reflects a national shortage of affordable child care options. However, the need for child care is especially pressing for the military community, which is disproportionately composed of young families. According to the 2015 Demographics Profile of the Military Community, more than 40 percent of military personnel have children. Of the nearly 1.8 million military-connected children, the largest cohort—37.5 percent—is under age five.<sup>9</sup>

Like all working parents, servicemembers with young children need access to affordable child care in order to do their jobs. However, the military lifestyle comes with unique challenges and complications for families. Servicemembers rarely live near extended family who might be able to assist with child care. Their jobs frequently demand long hours, including duty overnight. They are often stationed in communities where child care is expensive or unavailable. Servicemembers frequently deploy or travel for training or other assignments, putting strain on at-home parents.

We are gratified DOD has recognized the need for child care among military families and has made it a priority, to include exempting child care staffing from the recently-announced federal hiring freeze. They are to be commended for the high quality of many of their facilities and the standards they set for professional development and training of their staff. We were also pleased to see child care provisions such as expanded hours for installation child development centers (CDCs) included by DOD in last year's Force of the Future initiatives. However, while expanded CDC hours will address the needs of some military families, we urge Congress and the Department to consider additional steps in order to meet the needs of military families with young children.

**Ensure installation CDCs are adequately staffed:** For families living on or near a military installation, on-base CDCs are often the preferred choice for child care, offering a convenient location and high quality care at an affordable price. However, in some locations demand for spots at installation CDCs far outstrips supply. In many places the waiting list is so long the CDC is effectively not an option for military families. In some locations, the issue is lack of physical capacity. However, in many locations the reason for the insufficient supply of on-base care is not a lack of space; it is a lack of staff. The process of hiring CDC personnel is lengthy and arduous. It can be difficult for CDC directors to find, hire, and put into place qualified staff. This limits the number of children a facility can serve. DOD should analyze whether and how the hiring process can be streamlined while still ensuring that necessary background checks and training take place to ensure children's safety. We also urge Congress to ensure child care workers remain exempt from hiring freezes. Budget cuts should not prevent CDC directors from staffing their facilities appropriately.

**Increase availability of part-time and hourly care:** We hear from many military families frustrated by the lack of hourly or drop-in care at installation CDCs. Many military families—especially those overseas or in remote locations—do not have easy access to reliable caregivers. For those families, access to drop-in care at an installation child care facility can greatly enhance their quality of life, enabling parents to go to medical appointments, run errands, and volunteer in their communities. This service can be especially vital when a servicemember is deployed, providing the at-home parent with a much needed break. Increasing the number of hourly slots would also help address a common conundrum faced by military spouses after a PCS move: they can't look for work without child care, but thanks to DOD priority guidelines, they aren't eligible for child care if they're not working. DOD should evaluate the programs at installation CDCs to ensure the mix of care offered—full time, part-time, and hourly—meets the needs of the families they serve.

**Increase participation in the child care fee assistance program:** The fee assistance program operated by the services is an innovative, effective approach to the problem of insufficient child care availability on base. The program helps offset the cost of child care in the civilian community, ensuring participating families can access high quality care at an affordable cost. Unfortunately, relatively few families take advantage of this benefit. Expanding participation in the child care fee assistance program would address many families' child care needs. We recommend the following steps:

<sup>9</sup>2015 Demographics Profile of the Military Community, <http://download.militaryone.source.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2015-Demographics-Report.pdf>

- *Increase the number of eligible providers:* DOD has stringent requirements for child care providers participating in the fee assistance program, to include national certification, regular inspections, and background checks. However, many states have less stringent requirements for providers. In those locations, families often have difficulty locating a provider who meets DOD's eligibility requirements. The Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the Defense State Liaison Office (DSLO) have worked together to encourage states to increase their standards to meet DOD's and have had a great deal of success in this regard. We encourage them to continue with this effort.
- *Standardize Service requirements:* Because the fee assistance programs are operated by the individual Services, there are variations in eligibility requirements for providers and families. Some Services require families live a certain distance from an installation in order to participate in the program; others have no geographic restrictions. The Marine Corps requires providers to have a specific national certification that is not required by the other Services. These differences lead to confusion and frustration among families. We ask you to direct DOD to review Services' fee assistance programs with the goal of standardizing eligibility requirements.
- *Raise awareness of the program among military families:* We consistently encounter families who have no idea the fee assistance program exists. From our experience, it would seem most families learn about the program through word of mouth from other military families. If families are not aware of the fee assistance program and cannot obtain care on base, they may be forced to seek out less than optimal caregivers who provide care at a lower cost. DOD must ensure the Services are providing information about the fee assistance program to eligible families to ensure military children are receiving quality care.

#### MILITARY CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

The vast majority of military-connected students attend local public schools in their civilian communities. Districts serving large numbers of military children rely on funding from the Department of Education and the Department of Defense to help offset the additional expenses they incur. It is incumbent on DOD and the federal government to ensure that schools charged with serving military-connected children have the support they need to provide the best possible education. Military families often have no control over when and where they move. They worry about the effect multiple moves will have on their children's academic achievement. They deserve the assurance that their children will receive a high quality education wherever they happen to be stationed. We urge Congress to continue funding programs designed to support the education of military-connected children.

#### *Impact Aid*

We are grateful to Congress for authorizing \$30 million for DOD Impact Aid and \$5 million in Impact Aid for schools serving military children with special needs in the fiscal year 2017 NDAA. We ask Congress to increase this funding to offset the costs incurred by districts educating large numbers of military children. These funds help local school districts meet the education needs of military children in an era of declining state budgets. Both DOD and Department of Education Impact Aid funding are critical to ensuring school districts can provide quality education for military children.

#### *Department of Defense Education Activity Grant Program*

The John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007 established a grant program, administered by the Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA), to support public schools educating large numbers of military children. This innovative program allows DOD to offer tangible support to public schools charged with educating military-connected students. Schools and school districts are able to identify areas of need among the military children they serve and design programs to meet those needs. The grants have been used to bring Advanced Placement (AP) courses to high schools that would otherwise not be able to provide this level of instruction. Other grants have been used to fund special education, foreign language instruction, and programs to enhance students' proficiency in reading, science, and math.

Since 2009 this program has awarded \$433 million in grants. These three-year projects have supported over 530,000 military-connected students in more than 2,300 schools<sup>10</sup>. We thank Congress for extending the grant program for a year in the 2017 NDAA. However, this valuable program will sunset at the end of this fiscal

<sup>10</sup> Source: <http://www.dodea.edu/Partnership/grants.cfm>

year absent congressional action. It would be regrettable if military children lose access to the valuable educational programs that have been made possible through the DODEA grant program. A relatively small investment can make a huge impact at the local level. We ask Congress to reauthorize the DODEA grant program and allow DOD to continue supporting military-connected children in public schools.

#### SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION SUPPORT

Spouse employment and education support is a critical component of military family readiness. Much like their civilian counterparts, many military families rely on two incomes in order to help make ends meet. However, military spouses face barriers hindering their educational pursuits and career progression due in large part to challenges associated with the military lifestyle.

We are gratified in recent years Congress, DOD, the White House, and States have all taken steps to lessen the burden of an Active Duty member's military career on military spouses' educational and career ambitions. We fully support these initiatives, including DOD's portfolio of Spouse Education and Career Opportunities (SECO), which provides educational funding for select military spouses, career counseling, employment support, and the DOD State Liaison Office's (DSLO) state-level initiatives. However, while progress has been made, military spouses continue to face significantly lower earnings and higher levels of unemployment and underemployment than their civilian counterparts, greatly impacting their families' financial stability.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Grow Our Own*

One of our top legislative priorities is to ensure adequate access to behavioral health providers who are attuned to the unique stressors of military life for servicemembers and their families who have endured years of repeated deployments, long separations, and possible injuries or illnesses. We support efforts to educate and employ military spouses as mental health professionals.

As military families struggle to cope with the effects of 16 years of war, we are seeing an increasing demand for mental health services within our families and community. Since 2004, NMFA's military spouse scholarship and professional funds program has had almost 90,000 applicants. Data from this year's approximately 9,000 scholarship applicants, as well as from Active Duty spouse respondents to the 2015 health care survey done by the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), indicate increased rates of behavioral health usage among military families. Both surveys show between 40–50 percent of military spouses have sought behavioral health care for someone in their family.

Unfortunately, access to top-notch care is limited. The shortage of mental health professionals nationally is mirrored in the military community; it is even greater at military installations in remote areas. We believe our Nation has an obligation to prevent, diagnose, and treat the mental health needs of servicemembers and their families. Doing so in the face of a nationwide shortage of mental health professionals will require innovative solutions and strategic public-private partnerships including Congress, DOD, the VA, and other organizations. We believe military spouses may also be a source of help for their community.

Each year we've offered military spouse scholarships, the number of spouses pursuing mental health careers has increased. Our 2017 applicant pool had more than 500 spouses planning to pursue careers in mental health fields. Twenty-two percent of these mental health profession applicants are spouses of wounded or fallen servicemembers.

Many of our military spouses pursuing careers in mental health fields intend to serve military families. Helping these spouses overcome obstacles and pursue their careers has the dual benefit of assisting the individual spouse and family while addressing the shortage of mental health providers in the military community. However, these spouses face obstacles due to the unique challenges of the military lifestyle. In a February 2016 Facebook post a Marine Corps spouse shared an experience all too common for military spouse mental health professionals:

*"I'm looking for fellow military spouses who have completed the practicum and internship process for clinical mental health counseling or who have earned their LPC or LPCC by following California, Arizona, or North Carolina state requirements. We are currently stationed at Camp Pendleton, CA and I will start my practicum this June. I have excelled in my graduate pro-*

<sup>11</sup> Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Military Spouse Employment Report, Syracuse University (IVMF) February 2014: <http://vets.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/MilitarySpouseEmploymentReport—2013.pdf>

*gram and now I am facing major challenges finding a facility that doesn't require a year sign-on and who has openings for new interns starting this summer. One specific problem I'm facing is we aren't sure when new orders will come or where they will be (making it additionally hard to convince licensed supervisors to take a new intern on if I will only be there for a couple months). Is there anyone who can share a professional contact with me?*

We offer the following recommendations for Congress to consider:

- Include military spouses and others who enter the mental health profession in federal loan-forgiveness programs;
- Facilitate easier paths to both licensure and employment for military spouses and veterans in the mental health field when they work with our servicemembers and families;
- Provide a tax credit for spouses' re-licensing after a military move to offset the out-of-pocket cost of the additional license;
- Pass legislation to allow military spouses full reciprocity when transferring an Active unrestricted mental or behavioral health license from one state to another due to PCS;
- Support partnerships between the Military Health System and the VA to ease spouse difficulties in obtaining clinical supervision hours, reduce licensing barriers, and spur employment of military spouses and veterans in the mental health field.

*We ask Congress to increase access to behavioral health providers by supporting employment efforts of military spouses in the mental health profession.*

*We ask Congress to provide a tax credit for spouses' re-licensing after a military move to offset the out-of-pocket cost of the additional license.*

#### EXCEPTIONAL FAMILY MEMBER PROGRAMS

Military families with special needs family members are supported through the Services' Exceptional Family Member Programs (EFMP). The primary mission of the EFMP is assignment coordination, to ensure that special needs families are sent to locations that can meet their medical and educational requirements. However, the EFMP also includes a family support component. While we are grateful that DOD recognizes the importance of supporting special needs families, we hear often from families who tell us that EFMP family support programs are falling short. This is especially true when it comes to respite care.

Families with special needs children have unique child care needs. For those families, dropping a child off at a day care center or with a sitter may not be an option. Instead, parents of special needs children need respite care provided by trained caregivers. Access to quality respite care allows families to run errands, spend time with other children, and simply recharge.

Recognizing the importance of respite care, especially for military families far from the support of friends or extended family, the Services have provided respite care for military families with eligible special needs family members as part of the EFMP family support function. However, because the respite care programs are operated and funded by each of the individual Services, eligibility requirements and the number of respite care hours available to families vary. This is a significant source of frustration to families assigned to joint bases or installations managed by other Services. We are also concerned the current fiscal environment may lead the Services to reduce the level of respite care they offer.

#### *Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) and Medicaid*

For special needs military families, frequent relocation presents another obstacle: the inability to qualify for services through Medicaid waivers. Caring for children with complex medical needs can be incredibly expensive. We appreciate the MCRMC recognized this problem faced by our families with special needs. Most civilian families in this situation ultimately receive some form of public assistance, typically through state Medicaid waivers. State Medicaid programs provide assistance not covered by TRICARE: respite care, employment support, housing, supplies, and more flexible medical coverage. Because the demand for these services far outstrips the supply, there is a lengthy waiting list to receive assistance in most states. For that reason, these services are often out of reach for a military family who must relocate every 2 to 3 years. A military family who places their special needs child on a Medicaid waiver waiting list must start again at the bottom of the waiting list when they move to a new state. The Defense State Liaison Office (DSLLO) has recognized military families' inability to access care through Medicaid waivers as one of

its high priority issues and is working with state legislatures to address this problem. However, little progress has been made in resolving this disparity.

TRICARE's Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) program was designed in part to address this imbalance, by allowing families to access non-medical services not covered under TRICARE. According to TRICARE's website, benefits covered under ECHO include "training, rehabilitation, special education, assistive technology devices, institutional care in private nonprofit, public and State institutions/facilities and, if appropriate, transportation to and from such institutions/facilities, home health care and respite care for the primary caregiver of the ECHO-registered beneficiary." However, in practice military families find it difficult to obtain services through the program.

This reality was reflected in TRICARE's May 30, 2013 report, The Department of Defense Report to Congress on Participation in the Extended Care Health Option (ECHO), detailing military families' usage of the ECHO benefit. They reported, in 2012, 99 percent of funds expended through the ECHO program were spent on Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) therapy and ECHO Home Health Care (EHHC). Although these services are important and popular with special needs families, it is impossible to see this statistic and not wonder why families are not accessing the long list of other services ostensibly available to them under ECHO.

The MCRMC also found ECHO benefits, as currently implemented, are not robust enough to replace state waiver programs.<sup>12</sup> DOD has assured our Association they are working on ECHO improvements. However, other than a policy update to cover incontinence supplies, we have heard no specifics. Given the importance of ECHO to special needs families, DOD must examine how to bring the ECHO benefit on par with state Medicaid waiver benefits.

As stated previously, one service much in demand by families is respite care. Respite care is ostensibly available through the ECHO program, but TRICARE policies limit its utility. ECHO sets strict requirements for respite care providers, making it difficult for families to identify eligible providers.

Congress has given DOD much more discretion in its coverage of ECHO benefits than it has concerning medical benefits provided under the Basic Program. Thus, TRICARE has the authority to make changes that would enhance the ECHO program's utility to military families. Aligning ECHO coverage with that of state Medicaid programs, as the MCRMC recommends, would do much to enhance special needs military families' readiness and quality of life.

*TRICARE should enhance the ECHO program's utility to military families by ensuring it covers the products and services families need.*

The transition out of the military and into civilian life is difficult for many families but especially so for special needs families, who immediately lose access to ECHO benefits. Families may still face long waits before being eligible for care through Medicaid, which leads either to gaps in treatment or financial hardship for a family trying to pay for needed care. To ease the hardship for families in this situation, we recommend ECHO eligibility be extended for 1 year following separation to provide more time for families to obtain services in their communities or through employer-sponsored insurance.

*We ask Congress to extend eligibility for the Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) for 1 year following separation to provide more time for families to obtain services in their communities or through employer-sponsored insurance.*

#### MILITARY FAMILIES IN CRISIS

Our country is still at war and military families continue to live extraordinarily challenging lives. Reintegration continues to pose challenges for some. Others are anxious about their financial futures. Most military families are resilient and will successfully address whatever challenges come their way. However, some will need help. It is critical military families trust DOD services and programs and feel comfortable turning to them in times of need. These programs and services must be staffed and resourced adequately so when families reach out for help, they can trust it is available. Military families must be assured our Nation will support them in times of family or personal crisis.

#### *Suicide*

In 2014, the Defense Suicide Prevention Office (DSPO) released a report outlining an approach for tracking military family member suicides. The report, Suicide and

<sup>12</sup>Final Report of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission—January, 2015

Military Families: A Report on the Feasibility of Tracking Deaths by Suicide among Military Family Members, was requested by the Senate and House Armed Services Committees.

We appreciate Congress including a provision directing DOD to track military family suicides as well as Reserve component suicides in the fiscal year 2015 NDAA, but are frustrated by DOD's delays in developing a plan to meet this mandate. If we don't have solid information on the extent of the issue, targeting solutions becomes more difficult.

*Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect, and Domestic Violence*

Research commissioned by our Association<sup>13</sup> and others during the past decade documents the toll of multiple deployments on children and families, the difficulties many families face on the servicemember's return, and the added strain a servicemember's physical and invisible wounds can place on a family. These stressors put military families at risk for marital/relationship problems and compromised parenting that must be addressed with preventative programs.

Current research validates families will experience the effects of war long after deployments end. A recent study highlighted parenting challenges fathers face following deployment. The study found that while deployment is a time of great stress for families, the need for support and a strong community continues during the extended period of reintegration after the servicemember returns. This need is particularly pronounced when the returning servicemember is father to a young child, and he faces the core challenge of reconnecting with a child who has undergone significant developmental changes while he was away.<sup>14</sup> A 2013 research brief issued by Child Trends, *Home Front Alert: The Risks Facing Young Children in Military Families*,<sup>15</sup> concluded many children negatively impacted by a parent's repeated combat deployments will continue to have exceptional needs as they grow older.

Those looking for budget cuts may find it tempting to slash family support, family advocacy, and reintegration programs. However, bringing the troops home from war zones does not end our military's mission, family separations, or the necessity to support military families. "Rotations" and "training exercises" of units to Europe and elsewhere must be accompanied by the same high levels of family support as if servicemembers were heading on a combat deployment. To family members, especially young children, "gone is gone."

Recent media coverage indicates the incidence of child abuse and neglect among Army families has increased. We are concerned the extraordinary stress military families face could lead to increased domestic violence as well. Preventative programs focused on effective parenting and rebuilding adult relationships are essential. The government should ensure military families have the tools to remain ready and to support the readiness of their servicemembers.

We are encouraged the Family Advocacy Program, a congressionally mandated DOD program designed to prevent and respond to child abuse/neglect and domestic abuse in military families, has redoubled its focus on prevention programs. Their efforts to repair relationships and strengthen family function will be essential. Programs like New Parent Support focus on helping young parents build strong parenting skills early on.

*We encourage Congress and the Department of Defense to ensure that Family Advocacy programs are funded and resourced appropriately to help families heal and aid in the prevention of child and domestic abuse.*

SUPPORT FOR TRANSITIONING FAMILIES

Transitioning out of the military affects the whole family. In addition to the transition assistance program available to servicemembers, resources relevant to family members need to be identified. Issues such as how to find community resources to replace DOD programs and the military spouse's role in the long-term care of the family as a whole aren't addressed in the transition classes.

In May 2014, our Association conducted a survey of military spouses facing transition. Over half the spouses indicated they were extremely or very concerned about relocation and finding employment. Over three quarters of the spouses were extremely/very concerned about being financially prepared and finding employment for

<sup>13</sup>Anita Chandra, et al., RAND Center for Military Health Policy Research, Views from the Homefront: The Experiences of Youth and Spouses from Military Families, 2011

<sup>14</sup>Tova B. Walsh, et al., "Fathering after Military Deployment: Parenting Challenges and Goals of Fathers of Young Children," *Health & Social Work: A Journal of the National Association of Social Workers*, February, 2014

<sup>15</sup>"Home Front Alert: The Risks Facing Young Children in Military Families", Child Trends, July 22, 2013

their servicemember. Access to the counseling and other services provided by Military OneSource, beyond the 180 days currently provided, would make available resources and information to ease some of the concerns of our transitioning military families.

*Expand the opportunity for spouses to access transition information including face-to-face training and on-line training.*

*Expand family access to Military OneSource to 1 year from a servicemember's separation from the military.*

#### TODAY'S SURVIVING SPOUSES NEED THE DIC OFFSET ELIMINATED

Our Association has long believed the benefit change that would provide the most significant long-term advantage to the financial security of all surviving families would be to end the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) offset to the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP). Although we know there is a significant price tag associated with this change, ending this offset would correct an inequity that has existed for many years. Each payment serves a different purpose. The DIC is a special indemnity (compensation or insurance) payment paid by the VA to the survivor when the servicemember's service causes his or her death. The SBP annuity, paid by the Department of Defense (DOD), reflects the military member's length of service. It is ordinarily calculated at 55 percent of retired pay. Military retirees who elect SBP pay a portion of their retired pay to ensure their family has a guaranteed income should the retiree die. If that retiree dies due to a service-connected disability, their survivor becomes eligible for DIC.

*We ask the DIC offset to SBP be eliminated to recognize the length of commitment and service of the career servicemember and spouse.*

#### *Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance*

In the fiscal year 2008 NDAA, the Military Personnel Subcommittee established the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) as a first step in a longer-term effort to phase out the DIC offset to SBP.

That initial legislation authorized the SSIA for all survivors affected by the SBP-DIC offset in the amount of \$50 per month for fiscal year 2009, with the amount increasing by \$10 monthly for each of the next 5 years, reaching \$100 per month for fiscal year 2014–2016, not to exceed the amount of SBP subject to the offset. The authority to pay the SSIA, under this initial provision, was to expire on March 1, 2016.

In 2009, SSIA payments were extended through the end of fiscal year 2017, and the monthly SSIA amounts were increased:

Fiscal year 2014: \$150

Fiscal year 2015: \$200

Fiscal year 2016: \$275

Fiscal year 2017: \$310, with payment authority expiring as of Sept. 30, 2017.

As of fiscal year 2017, phased SSIA increases will have eliminated roughly 25 percent of the SBP-DIC penalty.

We appreciate the 18-month extension Congress provided in the fiscal year 2017 NDAA, but SSIA must be made permanent so SBP-DIC widows will not see an interruption or elimination of the then-\$310 payment.

*Make SSIA permanent so the modest progress in eliminating the DIC offset to SBP will not be lost.*

#### CAREGIVER AND WOUNDED SERVICEMEMBER SUPPORT

Servicemembers and their families must be assured our nation will provide unwavering support to the wounded, ill, and injured. This support must extend beyond the recovering warrior's medical and vocational rehabilitation. It must also include programs and services that help military caregivers, typically spouses or parents, successfully navigate their new role.

#### *Medicare Eligible Wounded Warriors & TRICARE Coverage*

Medically retired wounded warriors who receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits become eligible for Medicare Part A after 24 months on SSDI. At that point, the wounded warrior must enroll in Medicare Part B in order to keep TRICARE coverage. After the wounded veteran enrolls in Medicare Part B, their TRICARE coverage converts to TRICARE for Life (TFL). This poses a variety of problems for the severely wounded population:

- In the worst case scenario, the wounded warrior or his/her caregiver does not realize or is not appropriately informed they must enroll in Medicare Part B (and pay Part B premiums) in order to avoid losing their TRICARE coverage.
- In other instances, the wounded warrior or caregiver understands and enrolls in Medicare Part B and retains TFL. Although medical coverage is retained, the severely wounded veteran is now paying more for medical coverage than most other working-age TRICARE retirees.
- Finally, some severely wounded veterans receive SSDI for over 24 months and are forced onto Medicare/TFL. Eventually, the wounded veteran returns to work, but they are required to stay on Medicare Part B for 8 years after returning to work. This results in over \$10,000 in Medicare Part B costs to the severely wounded warrior who returns to work.

This is an extremely complex issue facing the most severely wounded servicemembers and their caregivers. These families face emotionally challenging lives and overwhelming responsibilities. Making a mistake about enrollment in Medicare Part B should not result in the life altering consequence of losing health care coverage. Furthermore, our most severely wounded warriors should not be forced to pay more for their health care than others.

This complex problem crosses many jurisdictions including the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, DOD, the Social Security Administration, the Senate Finance Committee, the House Ways and Means Committee, the HASC, and the SASC. Given this problem impacts our most severely wounded veterans and their families, we urge the House and Senate Armed Services Committees to take the lead in creating a solution to this complex issue.

*Supporting an Enduring Wounded Warrior Mission*

The reduction in combat operations and the resulting decline in combat wounded poses a risk that attention and resources for wounded warrior programs and initiatives will shift to competing priorities. Some of this shift is certainly warranted, but it is critical that improvements made over the last 16 years are not lost as we move forward. We support Recovering Warrior Task Force recommendations to formalize and marshal support for the way forward in wounded warrior care and caregiver support for current and future generations of wounded warriors.

MILITARY FAMILIES—CONTINUING TO SERVE

Recent national fiscal challenges have left military families confused and concerned about whether the programs, resources, and benefits contributing to their strength, resilience, and readiness will remain available to support them and be flexible enough to address emerging needs. The Department of Defense must provide the level of programs and resources to meet these needs. Sequestration weakens its ability to do so.

Servicemembers and their families have kept trust with America, through more than 16 years of war, with multiple deployments and separations. We ask the Nation to keep the trust with military families and not try to balance budget shortfalls from the pockets of those who serve.

Evolving world conflicts keep our military servicemembers on call. Our military families continue on call as well, even as they are dealing with the long-term effects of more than a decade at war. The government should ensure military families have the tools to remain ready and to provide for the readiness of their servicemembers. Effective support for military families must involve a broad network of government agencies, community groups, businesses, and concerned citizens.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you, Ms. Raezer.

Ms. Roth-Douquet, I am glad that you brought up childcare again. Obviously, we talked about it in the first panel.

In connection with the Baby Bundles program, I ran across a young military couple who all of a sudden found out that they were going to have triplets. The point about childcare could not be more important because you reach a point with a young family, dependent upon the job market, where they have to make an economic decision if they do not have broadly available, affordable childcare. Is it taking care of the children or taking a job? What is best for the family? It is a very difficult choice.

I appreciate and would like to make sure that we get—I am looking forward to the testimony before the full committee to talk a little bit more about that, what we can do. It seems to me that there are a lot of priorities here, but that is a very important one and I look forward to your testimony.

You mentioned something that was not discussed in the prior committee, but I think is very important. That has to do with the effect on families because of the OPTEMPO that we have experienced for quite some time. You know, on the one hand, we could talk about family support programs that deal with the OPTEMPO. I think the root cause of the problem is we have got to change the OPTEMPO because otherwise we are just addressing the symptoms and not the problem. That is something for the full committee and other subcommittees.

But can you just talk a little bit about practical examples of where this OPTEMPO has just had bad outcomes in terms of our military families or things that we should be concerned with when you see the pace of deployment and redeployment?

Ms. ROTH-DOUQUET. Absolutely. As Joyce and Ms. Barna mentioned, it is not necessarily just the deployment, it is also the training. Sequestration has caused a lot of problems with that too because it is difficult then to schedule some of the training that is necessary. People end up with larger amounts of separation.

What we do see is families having a plan, having that plan be disrupted. I do not have as my backup the person who runs my annual survey because 2 months ago she found out that her husband was going to be reassigned to Italy. In their case, having had him just come back from a 9-month deployment, they decided to opt against family separation. She had to move with less than 2 months' notice, take her children out of school mid school year, which the National Child Education Coalition tells us is the most disruptive thing. She is able to keep her job because she works for a military family organization, but normally she would have lost her job at that point. It is the cumulative effect of the separations they have had in the past that did not allow them to pace this one out that would have been more healthy for their family.

We see this over and over again, families being forced to make decisions about the wellbeing and thriving of their family members because repeated deployments or trainings that are unsynced with family lifestyle have caused this kind of distress. Again, in our survey, nearly three-quarters say it is unhealthy, it is unsustainable. That is a big number. Again, I do not think that Americans have any idea.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you.

Ms. Barna, one of the things we discussed and Ms. Raezer mentioned it in terms of how we can work more closely with the States and other organizations as people make transitions into private sector jobs or re-service for that matter. What work has the Department done to try and harmonize the differences in State jurisdictions and try to come up with a consistent message and approach that we can send to the States to make sure that we are optimizing those opportunities to put men and women in the armed services first and trying to get these jobs filled with great skills that they can bring to the table?

Ms. BARNA. Absolutely, Senator Tillis. We would agree that our servicemembers, even if not necessarily in a more traditional credentialed or licensed occupation like a truck driver, an air traffic controller, that they bring to the table what we call essential skills, things like the leadership training and skills that they have developed over the period of their service, their ability to team build, their ability to problem solve. We have found that these are exactly the skills, no matter the occupation, that employers everywhere continue to crave, and it is why our servicemembers are doing so well in all of the States as they reenter the job market.

We are very pleased with the collaboration that we have received from the individual States, from various associations comprised of States or regions. There are certain organizations in the Northeast, for example, that specialize in energy, in coal, in shale. They are turning their local needs for expertise into calls for servicemember employment. Come our way. Listen to what we have to offer. Resettle in our particular locale. We have received incredible support for our transitioning servicemembers.

Senator TILLIS. I would like to get some specific examples of that so that we can see in other areas where maybe we can do some work.

Ms. Raezer?

Ms. RAEZER. Just to add on to what Ms. Barna said, there is an office within the Department of Defense called the Defense State Liaison Office, that has made tremendous strides on working with States to address issues like unemployment compensation for mobile military spouses, working the licensure issue. There are improvements in licensure transferability, thanks to the work of Mrs. Obama and Dr. Biden and also the National Governors Association and the State liaison office. But as Chief Cody pointed out in the last panel, there are still costs involved with that licensure transferability.

I am an old military spouse. We have seen progress in this area because a lot of people have been working on it, but there is still a lot more to do to help our spouses and our transitioning servicemembers launch or further careers because of some of these State barriers. But luckily we have something to build on.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you.

Ranking Member Gillibrand?

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you.

Ms. Roth-Douquet and Ms. Raezer, I am a cosponsor with a Republican Senator of the Military Family Stability Act. It is a bipartisan bill that is designed to lessen the burden on military families completing permanent changes of station. The legislation allows families to move up to 6 months ahead of or behind servicemembers to allow spouses and children to smooth this transition between academic and employment settings.

Senator Blunt and I introduced this last year. It was included in the NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act], but then it was largely gutted in conference, which was a shame.

But can you describe for Senator Tillis and the record the impact on military children of moving during the school year and how the flexibility to complete the entire semester and move during the summer and winter breaks would affect military families. When

you speak with military spouses worried about a private sector career or progression of furthering higher education opportunities, how do they describe the difficulty of PCS orders dictating the relocations? How could the bill lessen the concerns of military spouses when transitioning between duty stations?

Ms. ROTH-DOUQUET. Senator Gillibrand, thank you for your support of that bill. We are big fans of this legislation in part because it gives dignity to military families. Military families are increasingly millennials, 35 and under, and millennials more than previous generations really value having some control and some say over their lives. This bill does let families choose when it is best for the family to move, and not only when it is convenient for the service from the point of view of the service and national security.

We are very happy to do anything necessary for national security, but moves that take place in October or February do not necessarily help national security and they are proven to hurt military children. When you start in the middle of a school year, it hurts socially and it certainly hurts academically, and it can delay for a year or more a child getting back on track. Likewise, a spouse having the inability to control the end of her employment and planning for new employment can have devastating effects on the ability of the family to maintain fiscal health.

This bill on your part puts that back in the family's lap and gives them the kind of control that can make the necessary challenges bearable because the unnecessary ones have not been forced on them.

Ms. RAEZER. I agree. It really is about giving that family some control of their destiny. I have encountered many spouses who did not have enough lead time to work a licensure issue in order to get a job in a new place. But if you know you are heading to a new place, that is a start to take that class or start working the paperwork to get this through or staying behind to close out a semester. We have a military spouse scholarship program. We have spouses who are trying to finish a degree in one place, and if all you need is one more semester to be able to stay put, that is a tremendous help both financially and in terms of launching a career. So to give that family the control to make these decisions for what is best for the family while also keeping in mind what is best for the military is a great solution for these families.

Ms. ROTH-DOUQUET. May I offer an anecdote?

Senator GILLIBRAND. Yes.

Ms. ROTH-DOUQUET. When my family was stationed in Germany, my husband was reassigned in June. My children's school year finished at the end of July. We paid \$15,000 out of pocket to allow the children to finish the year. My oldest was a 9th grader. She would not have graduated with grades that would have allowed her to go to college if we had taken her out 2 months before the end of the school year. We were able to absorb that although that was painful, but there are many families who do not have that option.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Ms. Barna, when we did this legislation, the Department of Defense was very worried about cost concerns. So we updated the legislation in response to their concerns. So the newer language no longer provides for a second basic allowance for housing or separate pack-outs when moving. Do you think these

changes alleviate the Department's past concerns regarding the legislation? What further changes to the Military Family Stability Act will allow the Department to fully support this legislation, which was written in direct response to the concerns voiced by military families?

Ms. BARNA. Senator Gillibrand, of course, I cannot comment on pending legislation, but I think I can speak to the Department's comments on legislation that was introduced in the past term and speak to some of our concerns about that particular legislation.

The area of military assignments and relocation is not an area in which there is a lot of law. We believe that the absence of law in this arena actually gives the Department, actually gives our commanders, actually gives our families maximum flexibility already.

The review that I alluded to in my opening statement is a review that is designed to get at, are we applying the authorities that we do have, the resources that we do have, the flexibility that we do have in a way that ensures that the types of situations that both Joyce and Kathy have referenced do not need to occur.

We are concerned about a law that says you may move within 180 days in advance or afterward as being overly constraining because we believe that the policies we have in place today would allow moves to take place much further on either side of that line of demarcation. We are concerned about a law that might limit the bases for some family stability or family moving in advance to only childhood education or the spouse's employment. Today a spouse and a family can come forward for any reason and ask for additional flexibility to move on either side of that servicemember's report date.

So those are just a few of the examples. We believe we have the flexibility, and we hope we are not restricting it by policies and the way that we are implementing them.

Senator GILLIBRAND. I would like the two witnesses to respond to that answer because it sounds entirely farcical to me.

Ms. ROTH-DOUQUET. With a lot of respect, I have not seen that happen in real life ever. In my own life and those—we have 150,000 members in Blue Star Families, and that is not the experience of people on the ground.

Ms. RAEZER. I think a lot of times our servicemembers and families do not know what to ask.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Did you ask to change your move date? I want to push back on that response. Did you ask to have accommodation when you had to move?

Ms. ROTH-DOUQUET. Well, there was no—right. We could not. It was not possible to change that date.

Senator GILLIBRAND. I think everyone begs and pleads and gets a no.

Ms. RAEZER. Well, I think there are a lot who just—we tend to salute and move forward with what is best for the military, and so to provide options for families to make choices that are best for themselves is what our families are seeking. We believe that this is important.

These are still tough family decisions, a family decision to separate, to have a servicemember go ahead or a servicemember wait

behind and family go ahead, especially if you have been separated a lot for deployment. Those are still difficult situations, but the legislation would enable families to go in and say this is what is best for the family, and we do not have to fight the military to get what is best for our family. That is the piece that is so important.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you, Senator Gillibrand.

Just going back to this topic, Ms. Barna, I appreciate your feedback on the policy or maybe some concerns. Hearing you all talk reminded me of that scene in that movie "Cool Hand Luke," "What we have is a failure to communicate." A part of what we are talking about is that the military families may make a decision not to push it because they are so accustomed to doing what they have been asked to do, that we have to create a culture where it is okay to say that \$15,000 for my 9th grader to be in school for 2 more months is probably something we should not impose on a man or woman in the military. Creating a culture where that is okay—you will always have abuses where it will become a matter of convenience. That is where the Department has to give us some sense of how we can strike the balance. But I do share Senator Gillibrand's concerns that right now we are not communicating the potentially negative impacts that we are having on families just because of a culture of doing what you have been asked or ordered to do.

Ms. Raezer, I wanted to—first off, I wanted to thank Senator Gillibrand for her work and successfully preserving some of the TRICARE coverages for families with children with autism. I think it is critically important. It is an example of one of those things that a man or woman on the battlefield could be absolutely distracted by putting their life, the lives of their brothers and sisters in danger, and not letting them focus on the task at hand on the battlefield. I am glad that we were able to deal with that. Hopefully, we will not have to deal with that in the future.

I did have a question, though, because you mentioned, I think, briefly the Exceptional Family Member Program. Why do you think a congressional mandate to put together a comprehensive plan—well, maybe you do not agree. It seems to me it is taking a little long to actually get that done. Do you share that opinion, and can you give me any idea why that is?

Ms. RAEZER. Yes, sir. We do think it has taken too long, and that is why we are coming to you. We are working with the Department of Defense Health Affairs on the ECHO program and the recommendation raised by the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission on aligning ECHO with Medicaid State waivers. It has just taken too long. Huge progress made on the autism therapies, but there are many other services that are covered by some of these waiver programs that our families cannot access. So we still have special needs families who are not getting the services they need through the Department of Defense or through a State program that are in limbo. So we need a push to move that through.

Senator TILLIS. Well, thank you. You know, I think that is a classic example. We have a program in North Carolina where we allowed families with special needs after a year in whatever school that they were assigned to of a parent deciding that they were not

getting the treatment that they needed to actually apply for tuition assistance to take them to a specialized school.

I think about your case, Ms. Roth-Douquet. It is very difficult to move a 9th grader. You said it was a daughter. Right? Particularly a 9th grade daughter away from any school, let alone a couple of months before the end. I've got one and did that. But when you have a parent or a family with a child with special needs that may be in the middle of an academic year, it is literally a loss of a year or more if they have gotten to a point of care that is helping the child.

It may very well be—back to the original point about the bill Senator Gillibrand discussed, that we should think first by identifying unique categories that we can look at that really rise to a level to where you can move very quickly into figuring out what sorts of assistance we can provide or accommodation to ultimately allow a successful move. Maybe that is a way that we can start clawing this back and making progress on it. There I think we can do it in a way that would not be at odds with the Department who would have to oversee administration of it.

The other thing, Ms. Barna, I wanted to ask you was as we are working with either men and women who are trying to get education as they are serving, what kind of work has been done to help facilitate the crosswalk of their military experience, mainly dictated by their MOS, and to experiential learning credits for an accredited institution so that you could help accelerate some of their academic progress through getting credit through the institutions? There are many of them today in increasing numbers. What kind of work are we doing to promote that and make that easier so that someone can apply for experiential learning credits to accelerate their time to a degree?

Ms. BARNNA. Yes, Senator. You have to bookend the process, and I think we are doing some things on both ends. The first is to ensure that the classes, the coursework that every servicemember from the most junior grade to the most senior is required to take in the course of both his leadership development and the technical skill in which he or she works to try to find a way to quantify and qualify what those skills are in a way that a civilian institution of learning or credentialing or licensure can understand. We are actually working right now with RAND to come up with a way to translate those military skills into a listing of civilian skills so that the individual can present this is my coursework, these are the learning objectives that I achieved during that coursework, or this is my experiential learning taken from my job on a day-to-day basis. Will you as the institution grant me credit for those particular experiences? So we have to work first with the servicemember to ensure that that translator is in place.

Then we have to work with the institutions, and we are doing that too through our Transition to Veterans Program Office and through the Department of Veterans Affairs trying to work with institutions to help them understand on their side this is exactly what the servicemember is bringing to you and how they might equate to something that is worthy of credit that you would grant. So it really is a bookended process.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you.

Senator Gillibrand?

Senator GILLIBRAND. In 2013, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness directed a top level review of the Department of Defense's Family Advocacy Program to prevent and respond to domestic abuse and child abuse and neglect. Recent press reports indicate that the number of incidents of child abuse in the military is increasing.

Ms. Barna, what changes were made to the Family Advocacy Program as a result of the top level review of the program? What accounts for the increase in child abuse in military families, and how is the Department responding to the increase? Does the Department need any new legislative authority to address incidents of child and spouse abuse for military families?

Ms. BARNA. It is, of course, a very challenging question but a very necessary one. So I appreciate you asking it.

As the result of the top level review that was really a multi-disciplinary review—it involved people from FAP. It involved teachers. It involved medical personnel, personnelists across the entirety of what we do in the Department of Defense. We took a good, hard look at how we were both preventing and responding to child abuse and neglect on our installations and in our military families. We came up with 87 on-the-spot, rapidly generated ideas that turned into 37 actual recommendations that we are implementing. The last meeting of what we call our Coordinated Care Response Unit was on January 17th of this year. We continue to look at how those recommendations are being implemented and whether they are affecting our child abuse and neglect rates.

As you mentioned, there has been a disturbing trend that we see. Certainly one can dicker over the numbers, but there has been a disturbing up-tick for our military families in terms of child abuse and neglect. Most of those cases we see fall into the child neglect realm.

So we have deliberately targeted the prevention of child neglect, again with our youngest and most vulnerable parents, those who perhaps have not had prior experience, targeting them online and helping them to understand what distracted parenting means, what sleeping arrangements mean, what it means for a father who has been deployed for any number of months away from the family, returns to find a new child, how that father goes about actually bonding with that new child in a way that he may or may not have had an opportunity to do so before.

So we have taken some very tactical actions that we hope to improve what is going on, the disturbing trend that we are seeing, and we have taken some overarching programmatic actions through our Coordinated Community Response Initiative.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Do any of those recommendations need legislative authority?

Ms. BARNA. They do not at this time. But we are slated every 6 months to review how the recommendations are being implemented, to identify any impacts. So we certainly will come to you should we identify a need for legislative authority.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Please do.

Ms. Roth-Douquet and Ms. Raezer, what are you hearing from military families about child and spousal abuse, and what is your

assessment of the effectiveness of the FAP program and any other efforts to address child and spousal abuse in the military?

Ms. RAEZER. I think we hear a lot from families who are worn out. Kathy has talked to some of the information that their survey—we are getting the same information. These are families who are stressed. We see this in the family programs we run where we bring families to an outdoor retreat to reconnect after a deployment. It is incredibly uplifting and painful at the same time to see these families try to come together again. There are stressors for the kids. There are stressors for the parents. There are new relationships to redevelop. So there is a lot going on.

Where our concern lies in the DOD program is on the preventive end of the continuum. Programs like new parents support, health prevention programs, peer support, the whole range of services offered either in person by the installation or via Military OneSource. How do we connect families with resources early on when it is not a problem, and how do we maintain a focus and the provision and the resourcing and the capacity for all of these programs in times of tight budgets, when there are all of the continued deployments and trainings and rotations? It is a constant attention. When we get the research on the child abuse, we are too late. We have to do the prevention.

Ms. ROTH-DOUQUET. Thank you for asking this question. I agree. The majority is neglect. I would say it is related to the stress. I think you all can help us not by providing authority to DOD but by helping us connect through our communities. The problem is not something that can necessarily be changed with a law or a regulation. We have families who are moving repeatedly away from family and friends in a society that does not know them. Only 23 percent are living on base.

Millennials prefer not to identify with a lot of official sources. They often do not want to get their information or their resources from official sources. That means they do not want to get it from DOD. Your Baby Bundles program—that is what they want to get it from and not just that one time, but they want to actually know people in their community who can help them.

Blue Star Families has a program called Blue Star Neighbors where we celebrate the neighbors who make a difference in military family lives. Almost all of the stories people tell us are around a neighbor who helped them during a deployment where they felt they were going to fall apart, and this person stepped in and was part of our family. There are not enough Americans who know how to do that. There are not enough places in each of our communities where military people can get to know non-military people. We often just talk to each other. We cannot give each other the kind of support we need. You all can help us with that, not with the DOD but with the communities.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Since I am out of time, I want to ask one question for the record. I described earlier—and you were all here—the fact that in some years more than half the victims of sexual violence are wives and spouses. Then a good number of them, close to half, actually withdraw their complaint in the first year. You have to imagine if you have actually filed a complaint, it means you filled out the paperwork that your husband has beaten

you or sexually assaulted you. You have actually disclosed his name publicly. So it took a lot to do that. For them to withdraw from the investigation within a year, a lot would have had to have happened.

Can you please make recommendations to me about what you would like to do to fix that problem to, number one, address the issue of the high volume, the fact that they are not counted in the survey, unless they report, they are not part of the estimation, and then what we can do to secure justice? If they withdraw their investigation, unlike a civilian prosecutor, the military drops the case. Whereas a DA might go after a serial rapist no matter what, it is not going to happen in the military if the accuser withdraws. Can you please spend some time thoughtful thinking? Because I would like to begin to address this problem more thoughtfully. I am not sure what the solution is, but each of you have a perspective that I think would be invaluable. Thank you.

Senator TILLIS. Well, thank you, Senator Gillibrand.

I want to thank the panelists for being here today. This is the beginning of a dialogue, not just a meeting where we go away, but I hope that you take us up on our offer to get feedback and responses to the questions that we will have for the record, but also reach out to our offices to make sure that we are asking—you know, you are offering up material that we are not thinking about because I think we are all committed to doing the very best we can for men and women in the military and their families.

Anyone who would want to submit any sort of statements for the record or other documents, without objection, we will accept those statements as a part of the committee record.

Again, we appreciate you being here, your service to men and women and their families. I also just want to make sure that I in particular spend a little bit more time understanding what more I can do, as a Senator from North Carolina with one of the larger military presences in the United States, to help get that word out that this is something that we need our need our communities to fully embrace and embrace the men and women that are serving our country and their families. So thank you all for being here.

The meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:11 p.m., the committee adjourned.]

[Questions for the record with answers supplied follow (Panel 1):]

#### QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND

1. Senator GILLIBRAND. Sergeant Cody, Sergeant Dailey, Chief Giordano, and Sergeant Green, for the past few years, I have been requesting sexual assault case files from four of the largest U.S. bases—one per service. One of the issues that my staff and I have found in looking through the files is the high number of military family survivors. Despite being reported as unrestricted, these cases are often withdrawn within the first year of the investigation. Further many cases of spousal abuse are reported separately as part of the Family Advocacy Program and are treated as a counseling rather than military justice issue. Why are spouses not surveyed as part of the biannual prevalence survey? How can we ensure that spousal and child sexual abuse are treated as military justice issues? What measures can we put in place to make it easier for military family members to see through the military justice process to completion?

Sergeant CODY. The Family Advocacy Program (FAP) and military justice process have two very distinct purposes. The FAP aims to strengthen family functioning in a manner that increases the competency and efficacy of military families. The mili-

tary justice process is aimed at holding airmen accountable for criminal misconduct while honoring due process rights. In addition to having different purposes, the standards used to substantiate allegations of interpersonal violence are separate and distinct. With that distinction in mind, we answer your questions below.

There are multiple mechanisms to ensure spousal and child sexual abuse are brought within the military justice process. FAP assesses and tracks allegations of physical or emotional abuse via the Control Registry Board (CRB).

In addition to the CRB, SG [Surgeon General] and JA [Judge Advocate] components liaise on matters of familial interpersonal violence in a number of other contexts, to include the Community Action Information Board (CAIB), the High Risk Response Team (HRRT), and the Combined Sexual Assault Response Team (CSART). All of these bodies include membership from command, law enforcement, medical/mental health services, and installation legal offices. Department of Defense and Air Force instructions currently require the FAP notify Security Forces, the Office of Special Investigations, and the base legal office immediately on every child sexual abuse referral and every unrestricted report of spouse/intimate partner sexual abuse. Additionally, the base legal office assists law enforcement in determining jurisdiction and framing any investigative plan. Judge Advocates partner with law enforcement throughout the course of any criminal investigation. Finally, the Air Force FAP is also required to give the adult sexual abuse victim or non-offending caregiver of a child sexual abuse victim the name and contact information of the Special Victims' Counsel (SVC) for that installation. The SVC advises those eligible victims referred to the SVC program of their rights, and advocates their clients' interests, throughout the military justice process.

In addition to SVCs for eligible dependents, FAP assigns a domestic abuse victim advocate (DAVA) to adult victims of spouse/intimate partner sexual abuse. The non-offending parent of a child sexual abuse victim will also receive a DAVA to assist them in meeting the needs of the child victim. On the military justice side of the equation, Air Force Victim Witness Assistance Program (VWAP) personnel help the victim understand the military justice process and ensure they are aware of their rights and benefits, such as transitional compensation for abused dependents. The VWAP liaison, a JAG [Judge Advocate General] or paralegal from the base legal office with jurisdiction over the offense, provides updates to the victim, either directly or through counsel, and serves as an additional victim resource in answering questions and facilitating victim participation in the military justice process.

Air Force policy and instructions exist as formal guidance to ensure the Air Force Surgeon General functional community deliberately connects and intersects with the Legal and SVC community in cases of spousal or child sexual abuse. While SVCs advocate on behalf of the victim's interests, many times they serve as the link to the military justice system in cases of family abuse. Examples of policy and codified guidance are found in NDAA 2016 and AFI 40-301, Family Advocacy. Excerpts noted below.

NDAA 2016 mandates: "Timely Notification to Victims of Sex-Related Offenses of the Availability of Assistance from Special Victims' Counsel Subject to such exceptions for exigent circumstances as the SecDef may prescribe, notice of the availability of a Special Victims' Counsel under section 1044e of this title shall be provided to a member of the Armed Forces or dependent who is the victim of sexual assault before any military criminal investigator or trial counsel interviews, or requests any statement from, the member or dependent regarding the alleged sexual assault".

*AFI 40-301:*

2.2.4.4. The FAP Providers will inform child sexual assault or other sexually related offense victims and non-offending parents of the availability of a Special Victims Counsel (SVC) as soon as the member or dependent seeks assistance.

2.2.9.3.3. If a potential for ongoing violence exists the SARC and FAP will explain to the victim that this risk requires the case be referred to FAP. The SARC and FAP will also ensure the victim is immediately aware of all services available to help him(her) and understands the concept of informed consent that enables the victim to include anyone (for example, an SVC, friend, family member, co-worker, chaplain) they choose in appointments regarding their assault. Note, however, that only communications with an SVC or chaplain are privileged and protected by law. The SARC and FAP will ensure the victim understands that he/she can adjust/modify his (her) consent to these participants as he/she feels necessary/ comfortable throughout the process without the fear of losing access or support from any supporting entity.

The Department of Defense (DOD) does not support conducting workplace and gender relations surveys of military dependents [or DOD contractors], such as the biannual prevalence survey. To address a provision of the fiscal year 2015 National

Defense Authorization Act, DOD reported on the feasibility of conducting workplace and gender relations surveys of military dependents [and DOD contractors] on issues relating to gender-based assault, harassment, and discrimination. The review, titled Department of Defense (DOD) Report on the Feasibility of Conducting Recurring Workplace and Gender Relations Surveys of Military Dependents and Contractors of the DOD, indicated that conducting a Workplace and Gender Relations survey, similar to that conducted of military personnel, is problematic for both the military dependent and DOD contractor populations for several reasons:

- The definition of a military dependent is extremely broad and diverse. Military dependents may reside with the servicemember or live far removed; they may live on an installation or in a residential neighborhood; or they may be within the United States or living abroad, all of which complicate the identification of, and access to, the population for purpose of survey.
- Reaching and surveying minor dependents, or those with major medical issues (e.g., intellectual disabilities) may be viewed as an unnecessary burden on the dependent, as well as the military sponsor or legal guardian.
- Issues relating to how the survey would be administered and what action DOD could take to address perceived problems in private, non-DOD workplaces, over which DOD has no control, would need to be resolved.
- The logistics and methodology of conducting a survey of DOD contractors would be very costly to the Department. There is no reasonable way to identify how many people, at any given time, are included in the contractor employee population.

The Department did survey military spouses as part of the 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) Military Report, conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Results of that survey were released in 2013. Overall, the prevalence of intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and stalking were similar among women in the U.S. population, Active Duty women, and wives of Active Duty men.

DOD is currently participating once again in the 2017 NISVS. Participation in the NISVS allows the Department to assess the prevalence of both intimate partner violence and sexual assault rates within the Active force and their family members, and also understand how these problems differ with respect to the general civilian population. Historically, NISVS survey results are released about 3 years after survey completion.

Additional Measures the Air Force is exploring:

- 1) Education and Awareness program for at-risk families
- 2) Use of standardized assessment “intake cues” to inform patients of the SVC program
- 3) Standardized workflow or encounter documentation that includes OSI and JA notification
- 4) Mechanisms to confidentially capture data to
  - a) measure family members’ acceptance or declination of SVC support
  - b) number of confirmed abuse cases that entered justice system
  - c) survey to discern reasons why military justice process not completed

Within the new Interpersonal Self-Directed Violence (ISDV) strategy, the capability will exist to identify barriers and develop guidance to improve medical and legal processes for victims in an integrated manner without sacrificing functional-specific authority. The strategy also includes a new requirement for an Informatics Specialist whose expertise will be utilized to identify information management requirements, barriers and data mining methodologies necessary to produce relevant and comprehensive reports that reflect information from diverse response sources involved in family violence.

Sergeant DAILEY. The Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty members is administered by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), Defense Manpower Data Center. This is the survey used by the Department of Defense (DOD) to estimate the prevalence of “unwanted sexual contact.” Questions regarding the feasibility of including military dependent spouses in that survey should be directed to OSD. Independent, external, and comprehensive studies have measured the prevalence of sexual violence against military spouses. In 2013, a study published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence, Stalking, and Sexual Violence Among Active Duty Women and Wives of Active Duty Men—Comparisons with Women in the U.S. General Population” concluded that wives of Active Duty servicemembers were less likely to have experienced physical violence, rape, or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime and less likely to have experienced lifetime contact sexual violence from any perpetrator than women in the general civilian population. The CDC iden-

tified factors that have resulted in reduced risk of violence for servicemembers and spouses, such as access to health care, stable housing, family support services (e.g., Family Advocacy Programs), and having at least one fully employed family member. The Department is again participating in the CDC's 2017 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) to determine the prevalence of intimate partner among the military and the general population for comparison purposes. Participation in the NISVS allows the Department to assess the prevalence of both intimate partner violence and sexual assault rates within the Active force and their family members, and understand how these problems differ with respect to the general civilian population. Allegations of child sexual abuse and unrestricted reports of sexual assault within an intimate partner relationship committed by soldiers are reported to law enforcement and addressed in the military justice system. Any referrals, counseling, or intervention services offered to families after reports of sexual assault or abuse are separate from independent law enforcement investigations conducted by the felony-level, specially trained sexual assault investigators within the Army Criminal Investigation Command, who work closely with special victim prosecutors. Completed investigations are forwarded to commanders for disposition based on the advice of special victim prosecutors and trial counsel. The Army provides comprehensive, compassionate support to victims of child abuse and sexual assault within an intimate partner relationship. In addition to medical care and behavioral health services, all dependent victims are offered victim advocacy services by personnel required to possess a Bachelor's Degree in one of the social sciences and a minimum of 2 years of experience in domestic violence, sexual assault, or family violence. Victim advocates provide 24/7 support and assist victims with safety planning, information and referral, and support as long as the victim requests these services. In addition, all dependent victims of sexual assault are entitled to be represented by a special victim counsel throughout the investigative and judicial proceedings. For any victim who is a DOD dependent, the Army provides a civilian GS-11 level Special Victim Witness Liaisons (SVWL), who works directly for the prosecutors. SVWLs are paralegals with extensive social work experience and educational backgrounds. SVWLs assist all victims, regardless of status, through military justice proceedings, including accompanying victims to interviews and proceedings, educating victims on the military justice system, and providing referrals for counseling services. Finally, in the event that a soldier is involuntary separated from Active Duty as a result of a court-martial or an administrative separation due to a dependent abuse offense, the Army provides family members Transitional Compensation under 10 United States Code, Section 1059. Transitional Compensation consists of a monthly monetary stipend, continued entitlement to military health care and behavioral health services, and commissary privileges for 3 years after separation. It is an incentive for families of domestic violence and child abuse to report abuse and cooperate with military justice prosecutions without fear of lost family income and an opportunity to "transition" from a military to civilian lifestyle. Since 1995, the Army has processed more than 2,700 Transitional Compensation cases and awarded over \$100 million in financial benefits to eligible beneficiaries.

Chief GIORDANO. Why are spouses not surveyed as part of the biannual prevalence survey? The biannual DOD Workplace and Gender Relations Survey (prevalence survey) is designed to solicit information on gender issues—including issues relating to gender-based assault, harassment, and discrimination—and the climate within DOD for forming professional relationships between male and female employees of the Department. The focus is specifically on the workplace environment and thus does not survey spouses of military members. As an alternative, the Department surveyed military spouses as part of the 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Overall, the prevalence of intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and stalking, were similar among women in the U.S. population, active duty women, and wives of active duty men. Notably, women in both military samples showed a decreased risk of intimate partner violence, contact sexual violence by an intimate partner, and stalking than women in the general population. The Department is currently participating in the 2016 NISVS, the results of which we expect to report next fiscal year. Participation in this national survey allows the Department to assess the occurrence of both intimate partner violence and sexual assault rates within the active force and their family members, and to understand how these problems compare with respect to the US population in general.

Spousal and child sexual abuse cases are treated as military justice issues, and are subjected to the same investigative rigor, review, and disposition as sexual assault cases falling under the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program. For example: Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 6400.01 requires all suspected cases of child abuse and neglect, and unrestricted reports of spouse abuse,

to be reported to law enforcement and civilian child protective services. Restricted reports of spouse abuse must be reported if required by Federal or State statute, or applicable U.S. international agreement, or when disclosure is necessary to prevent or reduce a serious and imminent threat to the health or safety of the victim or another person. All unrestricted reports and restricted reports filed as stated above are investigated by the Military Criminal Investigative Organizations (MCIO). DODI 5505.18 requires MCIOs – for the Navy, that means the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS)—to investigate all allegations of adult sexual assault (chargeable under Art 120 UCMJ), including those perpetrated by a spouse or intimate partner, of which they become aware. These cases are handled by Special Victim Investigators and Prosecutors (SVIP). SVIP capability is governed by DODI 5505.19. Dependent victims and intimate partner victims may be eligible for representation by a Victims' Legal Counsel throughout their case. The Family Advocacy Program (FAP) is designed to provide clinical assessment, treatment and services for military members and their families involved in allegations of domestic abuse and child abuse. The goals of victim safety and well-being and offender accountability form the basis of the clinical provider's work in responding to allegations of domestic abuse and child abuse. The distinction between FAP cases and SAPR cases lies in the type of care provided. For instance, FAP might provide child sexual abuse victims specialized care, beyond that which SAPR Victim Advocates (VA) or Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARC) may be trained to provide. Similarly, FAP provides care and treatment to a larger family unit, recognizing that a child may be affected by a spousal abuse case, or that spousal abuse, particularly long-term abuse, may require a different type of clinical care than other types of abuse falling under the SAPR program. FAP focuses on clinical services, while ensuring the case is referred to NCIS and the appropriate disposition authority for potential prosecution, as would any SAPR case. The overwhelming majority of cases of domestic abuse and child abuse involving a military offender fall under the jurisdiction of local authorities and that of the military. In those cases convened by the military convening authority, in accordance with FY15 NDAA Sec. 534, the convening authority will consider any victim preference that the case be tried by civilian authorities who have concurrent jurisdiction with the military over an offense. What measures can we put in place to make it easier for military family members to see through the military justice process to completion? It is important to acknowledge that there are many measures currently in place that assist military family members through the military justice process and beyond. Commanding Officers can issue Military Protective Orders against abusive active duty members, which are reported to civilian law enforcement authorities as well. These orders preclude all unauthorized contact with the victims. If an active duty military member is abused by a civilian dependent, the installation Commanding Officer can limit or bar the civilian dependent's access to the installation. Dependent spouses may seek legal assistance for advice on matters such as powers of attorney, wills, divorce, child custody, and landlord-tenant issues. Eligibility for Victims' Legal Counsel (VLC) services extends to victims of sexual offenses who would otherwise be eligible for legal assistance services from a military attorney. This includes Navy active-duty and reserve personnel, other service personnel and retirees when assaulted by an active-duty Navy perpetrator, adult and minor dependents of active-duty Navy members when assaulted by an active-duty member, and Department of Defense civilians. VLC began providing services to minor dependents assaulted by active duty perpetrators on June 24, 2014 as directed by the FY14 NDAA. VLC services are available to victims filing Restricted Reports, Unrestricted Reports, or declining to file an official report of sexual assault. Under certain circumstances, dependents (i.e., children and spouses) and former spouses, who are victims of abuse by retirement-eligible active duty members who lose their entitlement to retired pay, are protected under the Uniform Services Former Spouses Protection Act (USFSPA). USFSPA will allow the spouse, if there is a court order dividing military retired pay as marital property, to receive a portion of the monthly retirement pay to which the member or former member, otherwise, would have been entitled. To qualify, the spouse must have been married to the active duty member for at least 10 years, and the member must have been on active duty for at least 10 years of their marriage. While receiving payments, the former spouse is also entitled to receive medical and dental care, use commissaries and exchanges, and to receive any other benefits to which they would have been entitled had the couple remained married and the active duty member retired. If a Navy dependent is not eligible for USFSPA protections, they may be eligible for up to 36 months of Transitional Compensation for the abuse. Transitional Compensation benefits extend to dependent children, including children born alive who were in utero at the time of the abuse. To be eligible for Transitional Compensation payments, the service member must have been on active duty for at

least 30 days, and: have been convicted of a dependent-abuse offense that resulted in separation pursuant to a court-martial sentence or forfeiture of all pay and allowances, have been administratively separated on the basis of a dependent-abuse offense, or have committed a dependent-abuse offense, but was separated from the Navy for other reasons (depending on the reason).

Sergeant GREEN. How can we ensure that spousal and child sexual abuse are treated as military justice issues? Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) personnel are available to provide immediate crisis response and advocacy to all victims of sexual assault as well as conduct a warm-hand off to the appropriate resource, civilian or military. Spouses and adult military dependents who are eligible for SAPR services receive the same SAPR advocacy and referral support as our military members. The Workplace and Gender Relations Survey (WGRA) is a congressionally-mandated survey conducted by the Office of People Analytics (formerly Defense Manpower Data Center). It measures the prevalence of sexual assault for military members, but does not include spouses. The Marine Corps does not determine the eligibility requirements for the WGRA. Data on the prevalence of sexual assault for military spouses is available. Spouses are surveyed in the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS). This survey is conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in collaboration with the Department of Defense (DOD). DOD participated in the 2016 NISVS and expects to have results to report during fiscal year (FY) 2017. Last conducted in 2010, the CDC found that overall, the prevalence of intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and stalking were similar among women in the United States population, Active Duty women, and wives of Active Duty men. Cases of spousal abuse are reported to the Family Advocacy Program (FAP) and cases involving non-domestic adult sexual assault fall under the SAPR Program. Non-domestic sexual assault occurs outside of the marriage, home, or involves someone other than a spouse or intimate partner. FAP and SAPR work collaboratively to ensure that all victims of sexual abuse/assault receive advocacy and supportive services. SAPR's mission is to eliminate the occurrence of sexual assault by strengthening a culture of prevention through risk reduction; education and training; response capability; victim support; reporting procedures, and offender accountability, as appropriate; which in turn enhances the safety and well-being of all. FAP aims to prevent and reduce family violence and ensure a community-coordinated response to child abuse and intimate partner abuse. FAP provides services to eligible beneficiaries of Military Treatment Facilities (MTF). Victims who are not eligible for services at an MTF are provided crisis intervention, safety planning services, and referrals to civilian agencies for assistance. Unrestricted reporting of domestic abuse is for adult victims of domestic abuse who wish to pursue an official investigation of the alleged incident(s) of abuse with USMC command and/or law enforcement involvement. Restricted reporting affords adult victims access to medical care, victim advocacy, and counseling services without USMC command or law enforcement involvement. All reports of child abuse are unrestricted reports. FAP reports all incidents of child abuse to the local child protective service agency and to the Provost Marshal's Office (PMO). In cases of sexual abuse, a FAP Victim Advocate or a FAP clinical counselor facilitates a warm handoff to the Victim Witness Assistance Program for adult victims and non-offending parents who are military beneficiaries to provide information on the military justice process. FAP or the Behavioral Health Community Counseling Program is available to provide counseling services to all military beneficiary victims of abuse. Offender treatment is also available to eligible beneficiaries. Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 6400.01, Volume 1, Enclosure 3 requires all suspected cases of child abuse and neglect to be reported to law enforcement and civilian child protective services. Law enforcement (in either the civilian or military community, dependent on jurisdiction) and civilian child protective services investigate cases. The appropriate legal entity determines which cases to prosecute. All unrestricted reports of domestic abuse and all reports of child abuse are treated as military justice issues. Each reported violation of Article 120, Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) (Rape and sexual assault) or Article 120b, UCMJ (Rape and sexual assault of a child) requires involvement of the installation's Special Victim Capability (or Special Victim Investigation and Prosecution (SVIP) capability), which includes Special Victim Trial Counsel, specially trained Military Criminal Investigative Organization (MCIO) investigators, and the O-6 or higher commander entrusted to act as Sexual Assault-Initial Disposition Authorities (SA-IDA). Each allegation of sexual assault or abuse is thoroughly investigated by the MCIO and reported to the SA-IDA, who reviews the investigation and determines the appropriate command action to take. Reported instances of spousal and child sexual abuse require commanders to consider various factors that do not exist in cases of non-intimate partner adult sexual assault. As with victims of adult sexual assault, victims of spousal abuse have to balance some-

times competing interests involving their privacy, time, community/social dynamics, mental health, and pursuit of criminal accountability for the offender. Additionally, victims of spousal abuse make these decisions in the context of a marriage and family. A victim may determine that going through the military justice process is not in his or her best interest or in the best interest of the child or children involved. Similar considerations apply to some child sexual abuse cases where a parent or close family member is the offender; however, in those cases the factors supporting military justice action tend to be stronger, both for victim(s) and the commander who is the SA-IDA. When determining whether to court-martial a servicemember accused of assault or abuse of a family member, commanders are required to consider the views of the victim(s) and are encouraged to honor those victim preferences. In some cases, however, the spouse and/or child victim of the sexual abuse or assault does not want the situation to be treated as a military justice issue. In recent years Congress, DOD, and the Marine Corps made changes to ease the burden on victims seeing the military justice process to completion. These include significant changes to procedures and policies, new programs, and additional resources to support crime victims, especially victims of sexual offenses. These changes limit the scope/purpose of the Article 32 Pretrial Hearing, allow the victim to decline to testify at the Article 32, and create Special Victims' Counsel ("Victims' Legal Counsel" in the Marine Corps) to assist eligible victims. These and other changes increased the information, protections, and rights afforded to victims while empowering them to choose whether and how to participate in the military justice process. In some situations, victim empowerment increases the victim's willingness to participate in the military justice process. In other situations, victim empowerment—including more information, procedural choices, legal counsel, command interest/support, and other supportive resources—increases the victim's willingness to exercise options other than the military justice process. Given the many recent changes to victim support, services, and rights and to the military justice process, the Marine Corps recommends allowing time to analyze the impact of changes before moving forward with implementing additional measures or changing existing policies, programs, or procedures. From both a legal and policy perspective, the Marine Corps' focus remains on supporting and assisting victims of sexual assault and abuse, regardless of whether they initially or ultimately choose to participate in the military justice process.

2. Senator GILLIBRAND. Sergeant Cody, Sergeant Dailey, Chief Giordano and Sergeant GREEN., in 2015, FAP counted 5,378 child abuse and neglect victims in military families but claim they only receive reports on approximately 25 percent of the cases. How can we raise the number of reports filed? Is there a problem with the process that requires attention?

Sergeant CODY. The reference to Family Advocacy Program (FAP) only receiving reports in 25 percent of child abuse cases comes from an Army official regarding the Children's Hospital of Pennsylvania Army-specific study that involved only Army cases at Military Treatment Facilities from 2004–2007. There are plans for a future Army study. The Air Force has no data that would suggest a 25 percent estimate is consistent across the Air Force or the DOD.\*

Section 1787 of title 10 states, "The Secretary of Defense shall request each state to provide for the reporting to the Secretary of any report the state receives of known or suspected instances of child abuse and neglect in which the person having care of the child is a member of the Armed Forces (or the spouse of the member)."

While the Department is required to notify civilian authorities of all allegations, civilian child welfare staff is not required by law to notify the appropriate military authorities if they receive reports involving military families; and therefore, some incidents may be unknown to the Services.

To address this gap, the DOD State Liaison Office is working to educate states about the need for state legislation to require civilian child welfare agencies to notify appropriate military authorities when they receive reports of child abuse and neglect involving military families. To date, ten states (ID, IL, IN, MT, NJ, OK, SC, VA, WA, WY) have passed legislation or revised state policy to require state child welfare agencies to identify and report cases involving military families to appropriate local military authorities. An additional eight states (AL, AR, CO, CT, GA, MD, OR, TX) have proposed bills currently being considered by their legislatures.

Additionally, the fiscal year 2014 NDAA included child sexual assault victims as an eligible category of victims to receive Special Victims' Counsel (SVC) services. Since that time, the Air Force's SVC program has represented over 80 child victims.

\* <http://policylab.chop.edu/article/under-ascertainment-healthcare-settings-child-abuse-events-among-children-soldiers-us-army>

SVCs will continue to support these victims through the military justice process and associated legal assistance issues as the cases are referred to the SVC program from Family Advocacy.

Sergeant DAILEY. Army Regulation 608–18 (The Army Family Advocacy Program (FAP)) requires military and civilian professionals to report suspicions of child abuse/neglect to include violations of applicable child protection laws (for example, school attendance laws) or wanton disregard or malicious intent on the part of the parent to FAP child protective services (CPS) and law enforcement commanders are required to report suspected child abuse to the FAP reporting point of contact and provide relevant information to those investigating the report, including law enforcement agencies and CPS. Personnel in education, health care, and childcare are also required to report to FAP. We anticipate increased child abuse reporting as a result of the fiscal year 2017 NDAA, Section 575 (Reporting on Allegations of Child Abuse in Military Families and Homes), which requires members of the chain of command to report child abuse/neglect to the local CPS or state social service agencies, in addition to FAP. The Army has directed their Family Advocacy Program Managers to incorporate the new mandate in command and stakeholder training to ensure Army-wide compliance. DOD and the Army require mandatory reporting of child abuse/neglect to community-based CPS and FAP, and child abuse/ involving violations of applicable child protection laws (for example, school attendance laws) or wanton disregard or malicious intent on the part of the parent to law enforcement. However, a gap in reporting exists and requires further attention because our civilian CPS counterparts are not required to reciprocally report suspicions or founded child abuse and neglect cases to the military. To attempt to close this gap, DOD is working to educate states about the need for state legislation to require civilian child welfare agencies to notify the military authorities when they receive reports of child abuse and neglect involving military families. So far, ten states have passed legislation or modified state child welfare policy requiring state child welfare agencies to identify when they are working with military families and to report it to appropriate local military authorities. Additional states are considering revising existing legislation to require reporting to the military when appropriate.

Chief GIORDANO. How can we raise the number of reports filed? Existing programs and tools already serve to encourage reporting, but must be re-emphasized, publicized, and rigorously employed. Victims must be assured that the benefits of reporting clearly outweigh the potential costs. They must know that they will not suffer further abuse or financial hardship as a result of reporting. The objective of protecting victims from further abuse as result of reporting are accomplished by the issuance of military protective orders and orders barring civilian perpetrators from access to victims. Access by victims to Victims Legal Counsel, legal assistance officers, and the Family Advocacy Program (FAP) likewise afford avenues for protection and redress for the immediate effects of domestic abuse. The risk of financial hardship can be avoided or mitigated through the Uniform Services Former Spouses Protection Act (USFSPA) and/or the Transitional Compensation Program for victims of domestic abuse. Effective utilization of these existing programs serves to remove barriers and disincentives to reporting. Some barriers to DOD receiving reports of domestic abuse, however, currently exist. Specifically, domestic abuse that occurs outside of a DOD installation and is reported to civilian authorities is often not reported to DOD. While DOD employees are required to notify civilian authorities of all allegations of child abuse and neglect, their civilian, non-DOD affiliated counterparts are not all legally required to notify DOD authorities of reports of child abuse or neglect involving military families that are filed with civil authorities. Consequently, FAP is unable to determine the number of reports made directly to civilian authorities. Title 10, United States Code, Section 1787 provides that, “The Secretary of Defense shall request each state to provide for the reporting to the Secretary of any report the state receives of known or suspected instances of child abuse and neglect in which the person having care of the child is a member of the Armed Forces (or the spouse of the member).” If federal law were amended to require States to disclose to DOD, civil reports of child abuse involving military families, it would likely increase the number of reports DOD receives, and to which it could respond by protecting victims from further abuse and ensuring that investigative and, if appropriate, prosecutorial steps are taken.

Is there a problem with the process that requires attention? DOD continuously strives to improve efforts to reduce instances of child and spouse abuse. Once reported, the Manual for Courts-Martial requires commanders to investigate all cases, and felony cases must be referred to NCIS, the Military Criminal Investigation Organization (MCIO) for the Navy, for investigation. The programs and services available to assist victims once an incident of domestic violence is reported are comprehensive, and the military justice system that works concurrently with civilian ju-

risdictions in holding offenders accountable is robust. As for the problem of domestic cases reported to civilian authorities, unknown to the military, the Department of Defense State Liaison Office is working to educate the States about the need for enactment of State legislation that would require civilian child welfare agencies to notify appropriate military authorities when they receive reports of child abuse and neglect involving military families. To date, seven States have enacted legislation requiring State child welfare agencies to identify when they are working with military families and report it to appropriate local military authorities. Other States are incorporating this requirement into their State welfare policy and are considering introducing proposals to amend current State laws to require notification to local military authorities.

Sergeant GREEN. One potential gap is Child Protective Services (CPS) fails to report all incidents involving Marine Corps servicemembers and DOD-affiliated personnel. FAP is required to report all incidents of child abuse and neglect to CPS and the PMO; however, CPS is not required to report incidents of child abuse to FAP and/or CPS staff may not be aware that the family referred for a child abuse incident is military-affiliated. USMC installation FAPs establish Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with CPS and other authorities in the civilian jurisdiction(s) adjoining the Marine Corps installation to include law enforcement agencies, courts, shelters, and other agencies. This ensures a community coordinated response to child abuse and domestic violence reports. FAP educates CPS on the importance of asking families referred for child abuse and neglect if they are in the military service so that CPS can notify FAP of the child abuse incident. Not all CPS agencies cooperate with reciprocal reporting of incidents. Section 1787 of title 10 states, "The Secretary of Defense shall request each state to provide for the reporting to the Secretary of any report the state receives of known or suspected instances of child abuse and neglect in which the person having care of the child is a member of the Armed Forces (or the spouse of the member)." To address this challenge, the OSD Defense State Liaison Office is working to pass state legislation and establish MOUs related to child abuse and neglect information-sharing with FAP. As of 31 January 2017, nine States have made statutory, policy changes or passed statewide MOUs, with seven more working toward change. Another potential gap in reporting incidents of child abuse and neglect to FAP may be attributed to child deaths that are ruled accidental by a competent medical provider even though the fatality may be related to factors such as unsafe sleep practices or a lack of supervision by the caregiver. To address this potential gap, installation FAP staff develops relationships with the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) to ensure that all military and DOD civilian child abuse and neglect incidents, including child fatalities, are reported to FAP. Department of Navy (DON) FAP provides training to NCIS agents on child abuse and neglect, the importance of thoroughly investigating child deaths, and reporting all deaths involving young children to FAP. NCIS training by DON FAP was updated in fiscal year 2016 to address investigation of risk factors involving child deaths. This includes if the caregiver was distracted by electronics, i.e. gaming, using their cell phone, involved in online social media at the time of the child's death; the sleep environment of the child, i.e. parent and child were bed-sharing, child may have suffocated due to an unsafe sleep setting; and using substances, i.e. alcohol, prescription, or over the counter medication at the time of the child's death. Another factor contributing to underreporting of child abuse and neglect incidents involves families seeking medical treatment for child abuse outside of the military healthcare system. Civilian medical providers are required to report child abuse to the local CPS agency but civilian medical providers are not required to report child abuse incidents to military FAP. Military families may also decline to take children for medical care following a child abuse incident and therefore FAP would not have knowledge of the incident. Headquarters Marine Corps is working with installation FAPs to ensure that cases involving a Servicemember or certain affiliated personnel are taken to the Incident Determination Committee for review in accordance with DODI 6400.06, "Domestic Abuse Involving DOD Military and Certain Affiliated Personnel," 21 August 2007, as amended. The USMC is committed to addressing issues related to gaps in reporting all incidents of child abuse and neglect as these problems are identified.

PANEL 2:

3. Senator GILLIBRAND. Ms. Barna and Ms. Raezer, for the past few years, I have been requesting sexual assault case files from four of the largest U.S. bases—one per service. One of the issues that my staff and I have found in looking through the files is the high number of military family survivors. Despite being reported as unrestricted, these cases are often withdrawn within the first year of the investiga-

tion. Filing an unrestricted complaint requires completing paperwork and publicly disclosing sexual or physical abuse from a spouse—a courageous and difficult decision. I am concerned by the withdrawals of these serious complaints.

From the perspective of our military families, how do you recommend addressing the high volume of cases withdrawn by survivors?

Should the Department of Defense include family members in surveys reporting incidents of sexual assault?

Ms. BARNA. The volume of cases withdrawn by military-related survivors (spouses or intimate partners) is consistent with the private sector. Research and studies demonstrate that victims of violence in intimate partner relationships often withdraw formal complaints and/or return to their partner seven times prior to leaving that relationship, on average. A survivor may want to remain in the relationship (and may have children); they may want their spouse to receive treatment (the Family Advocacy Program provides treatment for both victims and offenders); they may be concerned about the potential financial impact on the family should they leave the relationship; and overall they may still love their spouse or partner, and feel committed to seeking help and staying together. This is part of an overall pattern in the cycle of violence, often accompanied by the alleged offender's promises to change and the survivor or victim's belief that the alleged offender can and will change. Ultimately, it is a victim's choice whether or not to participate in criminal proceedings against the offender. Attempting to compel testimony from the victimized partner in these cases is often counterproductive, and ultimately does not help the family, the community, or military readiness. Solutions for many of these families cannot be found in the justice system. Rather, the only sustainable solutions are derived by working with these families in a therapeutic setting to identify and address those factors that give rise to domestic violence in their relationships. Military spouses were surveyed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to collect information in 2010 for the National Intimate Partners and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) report. The CDC report, released in 2013, was the first time DOD has been able to compare the prevalence of intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and stalking with the general population. Overall, the estimated prevalence of intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and stalking were similar among women in the U.S. population, Active Duty women, and the wives of Active Duty men. A 2017 update to this NISVS, also sponsored by the CDC, will assess the estimated prevalence of sexual assault and intimate partner violence in the Active force and their family members. The Department will use the information released by the CDC to compare the prevalence of these adverse events in the military-related population to the general population.

Ms. RAEZER. Military family survivors withdraw from domestic violence/sexual assault investigations for many reasons—they want to save the marriage; they want to stay together for the children; they want their spouse to receive treatment; or, they're concerned about the financial impact to the family should the servicemember be forced to leave the military. Military families are no different from their civilian counterparts—victims hope that their spouse will change and the violence will end.

Additionally, many military domestic abuse cases are tried within civilian courts because the offense occurred in the civilian community and local law enforcement is involved. Many times, the military does not receive jurisdiction even when requested. Alleged offenders are often ordered to attend court-mandated offender treatment programs. Service Family Advocacy Programs (FAP) work closely with the civilian court systems so that the offenders may receive their treatment through FAP, and their case is continually monitored. For the cases that are referred for courts martial, FAP monitors and provides necessary treatment services. In addition, if the servicemember is separated from the military due to domestic violence, the family may receive transitional compensation benefits. For more information on the Transitional Compensation Benefits for survivors of domestic violence visit [www.militaryonesource.mil/health-and-wellness/family-violence?content—id=282312](http://www.militaryonesource.mil/health-and-wellness/family-violence?content—id=282312).

This issue must be addressed by the Department of Defense and its civilian enforcement and support partners. Our Association encourages members of the Personnel Subcommittee to meet with the Department of Defense Family Advocacy Program and the Special Victims Counsel to better understand the process from reporting an incident to treatment or prosecution.

No, we do not recommend including family members in surveys reporting incidents of sexual assault. Sexual assault in the military is a workplace violence issue and spouse/intimate partner sexual assault is a domestic violence issue. The two issues should be surveyed separately with supports and resources available to assist the survivors.

## QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ELIZABETH WARREN

## CONSUMER PROTECTIONS FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL AND FAMILIES

4. Senator WARREN. Ms. Raezer, Congress created the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) after the financial crisis so there would be a government agency that had the tools and the authority to protect consumers from being cheated on their mortgages, credit cards, checking accounts, student loans, and other financial products, and to hold financial institutions and other companies accountable. In just 5-1/2 years, the CFPB has forced companies to return \$12 billion dollars directly to consumers they cheated. It also has a special unit to look after the unique needs of servicemembers, the Office of Servicemember Affairs.

While the Military Lending Act did a lot to stop lenders from exploiting servicemembers through payday loans and unfair terms on other loans, some lenders used loopholes in the law to continue to offer predatory terms for other financial products—in effect charging servicemembers and their families sometimes 100 percent interest, 200 percent, 400 percent. At the urging of the CFPB, the Department of Defense closed these loopholes in 2015. Do you believe that those protections are worth keeping, and if so, why?

Ms. RAEZER. We believe many of the protections included in the DOD rule-making are worth keeping. We understand the impetus for the addition of fees paid “for credit-related ancillary products sold in connection with the credit transaction.” While the addition of fees charged provides greater visibility on the full cost of a loan, we are concerned that the inclusion of the fees in the calculation may have the unintended consequence of diminishing servicemembers and their families’ access to small-dollar loans.

We also thought the timing of written disclosures was a positive change for servicemembers and military families who have attempted to obtain credit for emergencies or other reasons by telephone and been denied due to the need to provide the necessary MLA disclosures in writing, at the time of the transaction.

We have some concerns about the oral disclosures. Creditors can provide a model statement to ensure borrowers understand their payment obligations. This means service and family members need to keep reading the fine print before they sign. This statement is not required to describe all of the details of the payments to which the borrower is agreeing.

We are also particularly concerned about the potential impacts of the “safe harbor” from liability for lenders who verify the MLA status of a consumer. Under the new DOD rule, lenders will have to check each credit applicant to confirm that they are not a servicemember, spouse, or the dependent of a servicemember, through a nationwide consumer reporting agency or DMDC. We are concerned that if the verification process is too cumbersome lenders will not offer services to servicemembers and their families.

Practices such as the “safe harbor” and addition of fees provide servicemembers with more protections than their civilian counterparts. We are concerned that we’re moving toward two sets of financial protections and financial institutions will no longer offer certain services and products to servicemembers and their families because it is too difficult. We ask DOD and Congress to monitor the implementation of all provisions under the MLA to ensure military families’ access to credit products is not diminished and that the provisions are providing the necessary protections.

5. Senator WARREN. Ms. Raezer, several years ago, Congress decided that servicemembers who were deployed on Active Duty could not be charged more than 6 percent interest on their student loans. But for nearly a decade, Sallie Mae—now called Navient—deceived servicemembers trying to get an education and charged them more. The DOJ and FDIC sued Sallie Mae after receiving evidence from the CFPB that the company was cheating servicemembers. As a result, the company had to pay \$60 million to almost 78,000 servicemember students who were cheated. And just last month, the CFPB sued Navient again for another student loan scam—this time involving disabled veterans. Do you believe that the CFPB should continue to look out for the best interests of servicemembers to make sure they’re not overcharged by banks or student loan companies that break the law, and if so, why?

Yes, CFPB should continue to look out for the best interests of servicemembers and their families to make sure they’re not overcharged by banks or student loan companies that break the law.

The consumer agency’s military protection unit has an impressive record. It has worked to secure \$120 million in refunds for military families harmed by financial companies. The agency has also handled more than 70,000 complaints from military families and visited 145 military installations and units. The unit has also launched

financial education initiatives to assist military families and veterans with making financial choices, forming education partnerships with other federal and state agencies.

One of the most important functions of the CFPB's dedicated military protection unit is to coordinate consumer protection efforts across government. Recently, law enforcement activity by CFPB and other agencies to address misconduct against military families has accelerated and must continue.

6. Senator WARREN. Ms. Raezer, overall, do you believe that the CFPB's Office of Servicemember Affairs has benefited military servicemembers and their families, and if so, why?

Ms. RAEZER. Financial readiness is a crucial part of family readiness and force readiness. There is a clear and compelling public interest that Congress continue to support vigorous enforcement of laws that protect military families from wrongful financial practices, including the Military Lending Act and the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act. Adequate enforcement not only protects these consumers and their families, but also the law-abiding companies that are disadvantaged by having to compete with bad actors. Importantly, the strong record of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and its Office of Servicemember Affairs underscores the need for Congress to resist efforts that seek to hamstring this work. Tampering with the agency's authorities, structure, and independence would be harmful to military families and honest companies across the country. We must work to ensure that federal agencies, such as the Department of Defense, and industry continue to support the CFPB and its dedicated military protection unit.

