



# NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE FAMILY FORUM

AFTER ACTION REPORT



## National Guard and Reserve Family Forum After Action Report

The needs and solutions presented in this paper are a result of discussions produced at the MOAA and ROA National Guard and Reserve Family Forum. These issues and recommendations were curated by subject matter experts specializing in military family issues and the National Guard and Reserve population.



**The National Guard and Reserve Family Forum** at the Reserve Officers Association in Washington, D.C., June 26, 2019, brought together subject matter experts who made key recommendations on how to best support the National Guard and Reserve population.

Photos by Jennifer Milbrett for MOAA

## Children's Education and Wellbeing

**NEED: Expand resources and programming to support guard and reserve connected children through key points of contact such as schools, parents, and medical providers.**

### **SOLUTION:**

- Establish curriculum, standards, and requirements at the local and federal level, where appropriate, to ensure military cultural competency among educators, counselors, and medical providers.
- Dedicate funding to study the children of National Guard and Reserve (NG&R) members further with the goal of implementing evidence-based training programs aimed at promoting resiliency, stability, and improved wellbeing.
- Encourage local school districts to track NG&R students with the military student identifier and leverage this data to learn more and provide adequate support for their military-connected kids.

### **BEST PRACTICES:**

#### ***Children's Issues***

- Purple Star Designation Program: an award military-friendly schools can earn if they demonstrate commitment to military families through certain qualifications set by the state department of education.
- ADAPT: an evidenced-based parenting program tailored to fit the needs of military families to effectively communicate with children about deployments.
- I Serve 2 Campaign: an initiative to encourage medical providers to ask patients if they are military connected and to furnish providers with a pocket guide detailing common mental health issues to look for in military-connected children.

## Community Support

**NEED: Implement new and leverage existing military and nonmilitary community resources to bolster support for NG&R families living in nonmilitary communities.**

### **SOLUTION:**

- Reimagine existing resources such as family readiness groups to fit the modern military family and their needs, designating a point of contact to actively reach out to NG&R families, especially during high-stress times such as deployment.
- Dedicate a section on Military OneSource for NG&R families to easily learn of and access all of the DoD and community resources available tailored to them, such as the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program.
- Educate employers on the demands of NG&R members and spouses, particularly during times of pre- and post-deployment, to facilitate better support and understanding on the part of employers.
- Focus on improving the timeliness of sending official, individual deploy-



***'We cannot look at servicemembers in isolation; we must include their families in the conversation.'***

- Susan Lukas, ROA

ment orders for NG&R members, allowing for more timely notification to employers, decreasing the amount of vacation days NG&R members must use in order to attend pre-deployment trainings.

- Implement Virginia's National Guard crisis plan requirement across all National Guard components in order to decrease servicemember stress during times of natural disasters in their own communities.

## Transition Support

**NEED: Keep servicemembers and their families informed on the appropriate benefit or entitlement for each duty status.**

**SOLUTION:**

- Develop a comprehensive web-based tool that informs servicemembers and their families about earned entitlements or benefits when on either state or federal duty status.
- Provide navigators that help individuals get through each process that enables access to benefits and entitlements.

**NEED: Improve pay systems and educate employers to accommodate servicemembers and reduce disruptions as they transition through all duty statuses.**

**SOLUTION:**

- Direct a report that compiles all 54 state status policies, appoint a group to look at whether the policies are still effective in today's use of the National Guard, and provide recommendations on policies if required.

***Pay Systems***

- Establish a contiguous pay platform that registers servicemembers full time but adjusts pay and status in real time (status-state, status-federal, status-leave, status-O, pay, partial, none, etcetera).
- Establish policies that mandate electronic processing to support timely transactions with case-management-system accounting and metrics.
- Pass legislation for the reserve components ensuring servicemembers can continue scheduled duty during lapses to the budget when either a delay of a continuing resolution occurs over a weekend or the government is shut down.

***Civilian Employment Transition***

- Create an educational guide for military-friendly employers highlighting the business case for hiring NG&R members, key employment issues specifically covering transitioning duty status, and best practices and employee policies that support their servicemember employees.
- Evaluate what the biggest burdens are for small- and middle-size businesses employing NG&R members and develop mechanisms to support these companies when their servicemember employee is activated.
- Pass legislation for the work opportunity tax credit including NG&R members as a target group.
- Encourage employers to establish policies that consider additional days off for servicemembers and spouses during predeployment and rede-



*'You should not have to fight so hard for the privilege to serve your country.'*

- Lt. Col. Aniela Szymanski, USMC, on the difficulties of transitioning between duty statuses

ployment to attend to military matters and transition requirements.

#### **Family Resources**

- Military OneSource: DoD resources available to all military families including assistance with access to childcare, counseling, and education.
- Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program: a program that assists in connecting National Guard families to resources and support in their local communities before and after deployments.

## **Health Care and Servicemember Wellbeing**

**NEED: Ensure continuity of health care during times of Reserve/Guard duty transition.**

#### **SOLUTION:**

- TRICARE must consider the unique needs of servicemembers and their families resulting from the extraordinary challenges of military service. The military health system must be designed to facilitate the transfer of care for a mobile population and allow coverage options for geographically separated families such as NG&R members. It must continue to address health problems caused or exacerbated by stress associated with deployments.
- Any TRICARE reform must be a total force solution and must be flexible to encompass all. This would include a robust system for those serving in rural areas such as the NG&R. Any program addressing the unique aspects of this population, should be a simplified program of choice, with sustained and fair beneficiary contributions, which supports continuity of care.
- Determine how or if health care providers can be retained even if the servicemember and their family move from one plan (TRICARE Reserve Select) to another plan (TRICARE Prime).
- Implement material that can be used by TRICARE support staff that will ensure a consistent response is given to questions for reserve component servicemembers and their families as they move back and forth between plans.
- Improve the process or establish a process for getting health records from civilian plans to military providers.

#### **SUPPORT LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS THAT WILL:**

- Allow currently serving NG&R members to enroll in TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS) at no cost to the member, but require payment for any dependent coverage.
- Eliminate TRICARE Retired Reserve (TRR) and allow retention of gray area retirees from the Guard and Reserve in TRS at the subsidized rate until they reach age 60.
- Amend Title 10 of the United States Code to authorize secretaries of the military departments to provide annual medical exams, behavioral health exams, and annual dental exams to members of reserve components to meet readiness and fitness standards pre- and post-deployment.
- Provide military technicians and National Guard and Reserve Federal Health Benefit Plan (FEHBP) beneficiaries the option of TRS.



***‘We have to change the culture. They are not weekend warriors anymore. They’re deploying all over the world. They have now become a critical piece of our national defense. They were a rainy day force, but now we need them every day. Everything that affects active duty, affects them.’***

- Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret),  
MOAA president and CEO

- Permit members of the IRR to enroll in TRS as they are a mobilization resource and need to maintain medical standards for deployment.
- Seek improvements to the pre- and post-activation health assessment and corrective programs.
  - Secure funds for government treatment of reserve component members to correct any medical, dental, or behavioral health readiness deficiencies during periodic health assessment screenings.
  - Expand funded dental care to cover 180 days post-activation.
  - Fund and provide care and services for NG&R members, including mental/behavioral health issues such as substance abuse and suicide.
  - Provide for an FEHBP pilot program to Reserve Component members with the goal of providing this population with continuity of care.
- Subsidize premiums paid by private employer to allow continuation of private employer family coverage during periods of activation as an option.

**NEED: Reduce the high suicide rate in the NG&R population, which is amplified by geographic separation from military community support and mental health resources.**

**SOLUTION:**

- Increase capacity to provide mental health care to NG&R members suffering from traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress. Do this by expanding the use of tele-mental health experts and behavioral scientists. In addition to clinical care, provide training, outreach, and education to reduce stigma and support families.
- Increase time between transition to (notification) and from the operational theatre to allow for NG&R personnel and their families extended periods of reintegration and adjustment. Provide detailed and better designed support programs for families.
- TRICARE should provide more emphasis and oversight on the implementation of significant improvements in its mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) benefits, which are intended to provide beneficiaries greater access to the full range of available mental health and SUD treatments. Part of this needs to be a reduction in cost-shares and copayments for mental health services.
- Increase understanding and cultural competency of civilian health care providers (primary care and mental health therapists) who provide care to military members and their families. Extra emphasis should be directed towards providers in more rural areas where NG&R members and their families live.
- Invest in increased research on the hazards of military service and its impact on the families, to include children, of the NG&R population.

**Call to Action!**

- Share this issue paper with your state and federal lawmakers, military friendly employers, and community leaders.
- Write or call your members of Congress urging them to cosponsor current legislation vital to supporting NG&R servicemembers and their families:

**S. 1360, Reserve Component DD-214 Act of 2019**

- This bill ensures that, upon discharge or release of a reserve member of the armed forces, the final pay and certificate of discharge or release (DD214) is ready, providing the deserved credit of service for all current and former servicemembers.

**H.R. 613 and S. 164, TRICARE Reserve Improvement Act**

- This legislation would remove restrictions preventing NG&R members from participating in the TRICARE Reserve Select program.

**H.R. 3304 and S. 2128, National Guard and Reservists Debt Relief Extension Act of 2019**

- This bill reauthorizes the National Guard and Reservists Debt Relief Act of 2009 for an additional four years. The act ensures NG&R members who file for bankruptcy are not placed in a higher pay bracket due to active duty pay.

**Capitol switchboard: (866) 272-6622**

- For future calls to action visit [takeaction.moaa.org](http://takeaction.moaa.org) and [roa.org/page/calltoaction](http://roa.org/page/calltoaction)
- Be a community leader and see how you can implement best practices listed here.
- If you meet a Guard or Reserve family, ask how you can support them.



The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) is the nation's leading membership organization for military officers. We promote and protect a strong national defense and lead our nation to honor its commitments to all who serve.

Our members are as diverse as they are passionate, hailing from all branches of the seven uniformed services and committed to looking out for one another. Our duty as an association of more than 90 years lies at the forefront of these efforts, as we protect the interests of the military community on Capitol Hill and fight to uphold the earned benefits of our nation's servicemembers of all ranks.

In addition to our tireless advocacy efforts, MOAA supports members and their families through local chapters, scholarships, career development and transition services, health insurance, financial and travel services, and much more. Our promise to our members is simple. In fact, it's the same promise they made to their country: **Never Stop Serving®.**



#### **One Voice, One Fight**

As reserve duty has changed, so has ROA. Founded in 1922 by Gen. Blackjack Pershing to support a U.S. military policy that would provide adequate national security, today's ROA is more dynamic than ever. We're providing the tools, resources, support, and education reservists and their families need to succeed in and out of uniform. We're an organization on the move, serving more reservists than ever. ROA is proud to welcome noncommissioned officers from all branches of service. Because service isn't about just rank.

#### **Reserve Strength. Reserve Life.**

America's reserve components are one of the most unique, adaptable and operational forces in the world. At ROA, our mission is simple: Support these brave men and women and their mission through a commitment to strong reserve components. Our focus is the resourcing, education, training, use, and care of the Reserve and Guard, their families, and veterans of the Reserves. We call that Reserve Strength. Reserve Life.

#### **Military Officers Association of America**

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