



STRENGTHENING OUR MILITARY FAMILIES

Meeting America's Commitment

JANUARY 2011



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

January 14, 2011

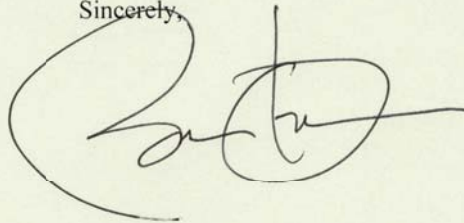
As President of the United States, I have no greater responsibility than keeping the American people secure. I could not meet that responsibility, and we could not enjoy the blessings of our liberty, without the extraordinary service of our Armed Forces. As Commander in Chief, I am determined to do whatever it takes to make sure that our service members have the resources, leadership, and support necessary to accomplish their mission and return home safely. I will always remember the request of a brave service member whom I met overseas: "Please take care of our families back home." I told him I would.

On December 8, 2010, I approved the attached report, *Strengthening our Military Families: Meeting America's Commitment*. I am pleased to recognize the commitment and creativity of the leaders within my Administration who developed the document. This effort combines the work of the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Homeland Security in support of our service members and their families with the innovations of the Departments of Agriculture, Health and Human Services, Labor, Education, and the many other contributing agencies. Each Cabinet Secretary has given his or her personal commitment to contribute to this vitally important effort to provide better services for our military families.

The First Lady and I committed long ago to this effort. We have teamed with the Bidens – themselves a military family – to ensure that our active duty personnel, reservists, guardsmen, veterans, caregivers, and their families, including those who have lost a loved one, have the resources they need to be their best. We will continue together to explore new possibilities and better ways to meet those needs.

Let me be clear, stronger military families will strengthen the fabric of America. By spotlighting their devotion to service, internal resilience, and patriotism, all Americans will have examples to emulate. I will ensure that the commitments, partnerships, and resources endure well after the guns are silenced and our service members come home.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be Barack Obama's signature, written over the word "Sincerely,".



Strengthening Our Military Families: Meeting America's Commitment

“This government-wide review will bring together the resources of the Federal Government, identify new opportunities across the public and private sectors, and lay the foundation for a coordinated approach to supporting and engaging military families for years to come.”

—Michelle Obama, First Lady of the United States, May 12, 2010

The President has made the care and support of military families a top national security policy priority. We recognize that military families come from the active duty Armed Forces, the National Guard, and the Reserves. They support and sustain troops fighting to defend the Nation, they care for our wounded warriors, and they survive our fallen heroes. The well-being of military families is an important indicator of the well-being of the overall force. At a time when America is at war and placing considerable, sustained demands on its troops and their families, it is especially important to address the family, home, and community challenges facing our all-volunteer force. For years to come, military families and Veterans will continue to face unique challenges, and at the same time will also have great potential to continue contributing to our communities and country.

Less than 1 percent of Americans serve in uniform today, but they bear 100 percent of the burden of defending our Nation. Currently, more than 2.2 million service members make up America's all-volunteer force in the active, National Guard, and Reserve components. Since September 11, 2001, more than two million troops have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Fifty five percent of the force is married and 40 percent have two children.¹ Only 37 percent of our families live on military installations; the remaining 63 percent live in over 4,000 communities nationwide. Multiple deployments, combat injuries, and the challenges of reintegration can have far-reaching effects on not only the troops and their families, but also upon America's communities as well. These challenges should be at the forefront of our national discourse.

In May 2010, the President directed the National Security Staff (NSS) to develop a coordinated Federal Government-wide approach to supporting military families. By harnessing resources and expertise across the Federal Government, the Obama Administration is improving the quality of military family life, helping communities more effectively support military families, and thereby improving the long-term effectiveness of U.S. military forces. Our vision is to ensure that:

- the U.S. military recruits and retains the highest-caliber volunteers to contribute to the Nation's defense and security;
- Service members can have strong family lives while maintaining the highest state of readiness;

1. Flake EM, Davis BE, Johnson PL, Middleton LS. The psychosocial effects of deployment on military children. *J Dev Behav Pediatr.* 2009;30:271-278

STRENGTHENING OUR MILITARY FAMILIES

- civilian family members can live fulfilling lives while supporting their service member(s); and
- the United States better understands and appreciates the experience, strength, and commitment to service of our military families.

This report was prepared by an Interagency Policy Committee (IPC) involving representatives from the staffs of all Cabinet Secretaries, with oversight from the NSS and Domestic Policy Council (DPC), and in response to Presidential Study Directive/PSD-9.

With the involvement of the National Economic Council, Office of the First Lady, and the Office of Dr. Biden, the IPC has identified four priority areas to address the concerns and challenges of the families of Active Duty and Reserve Component Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard members; Veterans; and those who have fallen. While the Coast Guard is a component with the Department of Homeland Security, for the purposes of this report, it should be assumed to be included in the initiatives supporting all military families, as applicable. This government-wide effort will:

- 1.** Enhance the well-being and psychological health of the military family,
 - 1.1.** By increasing behavioral health care services through prevention-based alternatives and integrating community-based services;
 - 1.2.** By building awareness among military families and communities that psychological fitness is as important as physical fitness;
 - 1.3.** By protecting military members and families from unfair financial practices and helping families enhance their financial readiness;
 - 1.4.** By eliminating homelessness and promoting home security among Veterans and military families;
 - 1.5.** By ensuring availability of critical substance abuse prevention, treatment, and recovery services for Veterans and military families; and
 - 1.6.** By making our court systems more responsive to the unique needs of Veterans and families.
- 2.** Ensure excellence in military children's education and their development,
 - 2.1.** By improving the quality of the educational experience;
 - 2.2.** By reducing negative impacts of frequent relocations and absences; and
 - 2.3.** By encouraging the healthy development of military children.
- 3.** Develop career and educational opportunities for military spouses,
 - 3.1.** By increasing opportunities for Federal careers;
 - 3.2.** By increasing opportunities for private-sector careers;
 - 3.3.** By increasing access to educational advancement;
 - 3.4.** By reducing barriers to employment and services due to different State policies and standards; and
 - 3.5.** By protecting the rights of service members and families.

4. Increase child care availability and quality for the Armed Forces,

4.1. By enhancing child care resources within the Department of Defense and the Coast Guard.

This is an enduring effort. Each Cabinet secretary has pledged his or her individual commitment to this important task. Together as a team, we are committed to implementing our plans, assessing our results on a recurring basis with continued transparency, seeking constant feedback, and ensuring the Federal Government has the capacity to support and engage military families throughout their lives.



STATEMENT OF SUPPORT

We recognize the tremendous service to our Nation made by the men and women of the Armed Services, our Veterans, and their families.

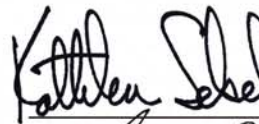
We commit to making the well-being of our military families one of our highest priorities and to improving their access to services and support.

We will ensure that this priority is communicated aggressively across our organizations, receives the necessary resources, and is assessed and strengthened going forward.

Our commitment is enduring; not just for today's military families, but for future generations.


Department of State

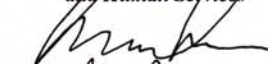

Department of the Interior


Department of Health
and Human Services


Department of Education


Department of Treasury

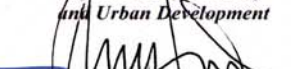

Department of Agriculture

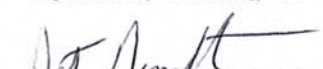

Department of Housing
and Urban Development



Department of Veterans Affairs


Department of Defense

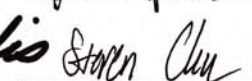

Department of Commerce



Department of Transportation


Department of Homeland Security


Department of Justice


Department of Labor


Department of Energy


Environmental Protection Agency

Priority #1: Enhance the overall well-being and psychological health of the military family.

The Challenge: Since September 11, 2001, more than two million service members have deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. The duration and the frequency of deployments are unprecedented since the establishment of America's all-volunteer force in 1973. With this increased exposure to combat stress, there has been a growing number of service members with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI). The September 2010 Medical Surveillance Report cites service members have self-reported PTSD symptoms 9 percent of the time and depression symptoms more than 27 percent when asked 90-180 days post-deployment. Additionally, more than 19 percent of service members returning from combat reported potentially experiencing TBI during deployment.²

Military families are not immune to the stresses of deployment. There is a growing body of research on the impact of prolonged deployment and trauma-related stress on military families, particularly spouses and children.^{3,4} There are approximately 700,000 military spouses and an additional 400,000 spouses of Reserve members. More than 700,000 children have experienced one or more parental deployment. Currently, about 220,000 children have a parent deployed. The cumulative impact of multiple deployments is associated with more emotional difficulties among military children and more mental health diagnoses among spouses.⁵ A 2010 study reports an 11 percent increase in outpatient visits for behavioral health issues among a group of 3- to 8-year-old children of military parents and an increase of 18 percent in behavioral disorders and 19 percent in stress disorders when a parent was deployed.⁶ Reducing these negative effects requires a robust psychological health plan, including better data collection, reducing stigma-related barriers, and stronger involvement from the chain of command.

While many military families are thriving, common stressors can further erode their resilience. However, many of these stressful situations are preventable. In addition to the compounding effects of deployments, occasional financial stress, especially with regards to housing and home ownership, substance abuse, and incarceration, has caused excessive stress for certain military families. For instance, in surveys conducted by the Department of Defense (DOD), military families have listed personal financial management as number two in their list of biggest sources of stress. Furthermore, homelessness and home foreclosure can be realities in some Veteran families although this is not widespread. In the most dire situations, families must cope with incarceration. According the Department of Justice's (DOJ) most recent survey of incarcerated Veterans, it was found that an estimated 60 percent of the 140,000 Veterans in Federal and State prisons were struggling with substance use disorders, while approximately

2. Tanielian, T. L. and RAND Corporation and Center for Military Health Policy Research, 2008. *Invisible Wounds of War: Summary and recommendations for addressing psychological and cognitive injuries*. RAND, Santa Monica: 2008.

3. Mansfield, Alyssa J., Ph.D., M.P.H., Jay S. Kaufman, Ph.D., Stephen W. Marshall, Ph.D., Bradley N. Gaynes, M.D., M.P.H., Joseph P. Morrissey, Ph.D., and Charles C. Engel, M.D., M.P.H., *N Engl J Med* 2010; 362:101-109. January 14, 2010.

4. Flake EM, Davis BE, Johnson PL, Middleton LS. The psychosocial effects of deployment on military children. *J Dev Behav Pediatr.* 2009;30:271-278.

5. Lesser P, Peterson K, Reeves J, et al. The long war and parental combat deployment: effects on military children and at-home spouses. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*, 2010; 49(4):310-320 and Mansfield, AJ, Kaufman, JS, Marshall, SW et al. Deployment and the use of mental health services among U.S. Army wives. *N Engl J Med*, 2010; 362:101-9.

6. Gregory H. Gorman, Matilda Eide, and Elizabeth Hisle-Gorman. (2010). *Wartime Military Deployment and Increased Pediatric Mental and Behavioral Health Complaints* Pediatrics. peds.2009 2856v1-peds.2009-2856.

25 percent reported being under the influence of drugs at the time of their offense.⁷ Substance abuse, incarceration, and the other stressors aforementioned can be viewed as the result of missed opportunities for preventive actions. Early recognition and treatment-seeking is a sign of new strength for our military families.

Need 1.1. Increase behavioral health care services through prevention-based alternatives and integration of community-based services.

Our Commitments:

1.1.1. DOD and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will implement a multi-year Integrated Mental Health Strategy to promote early recognition of mental health conditions. The Strategy will deliver effective, evidence-based treatments and implement and expand preventive services for Active Duty and Reserve Component members, Veterans, and their families. Specific actions will include education and coaching of family members to help identify service members and Veterans' mental health needs; integration of mental health services into primary care; and expanding VA's Readjustment Counseling Service to service members and their families.

1.1.2. By conducting policy workshops for the states and leveraging the resources of the Mental Health Block Grants and the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grants, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will help Governors to develop strategic plans to strengthen behavioral health care systems for returning service members, Veterans, and their families. HHS has conducted two policy workshops which brought together representatives from various state agencies, DOD and VA, National Guard and Reserves, and other behavioral health stakeholders to develop a joint strategic plan and share state-level best practices. As a result of these workshops, strategic plans for 18 of the 59 states and territories have been developed. Additionally, there have been positive reviews from states that successfully created a single place to handle state-wide military family issues using DOD's Inter-Service Family Assistance Committee model.

1.1.3 DOD is working to improve the Military Health System and to enhance the availability of mental health providers to increase the quality of care available to service members and their families. As of October 2010, the TRICARE Reserve Select option acquired enough participating providers to ensure that Guard or Reserve service members seeking care under this form of TRICARE coverage will find viable options in most communities. DOD and HHS have implemented a pilot to assess the onsite TRICARE Technical Assistance Credentialing Teams to enable even more providers to become part of the TRICARE network. HHS will also improve and increase efforts to educate and assist behavioral health care providers about the appropriate referral process to the VA Health Care System and DOD Military Treatment Facilities (DMTF). Additionally, DOD will conduct an extensive evaluation of options and possible improvements in the design of future TRICARE contracts to ensure our service members and their families are getting the best care possible. The TRICARE workgroup was announced on September 20, 2010, and is undertaking a year-long project to provide the best possible health care for more than 9.6 million Military Health System beneficiaries beyond 2015. Lessons will be drawn from VA's success as they have increased capacity to more than 20,000 mental health professionals that are now available to serve the growing combat Veteran population and Veterans of other eras.

7. Office of Justice Programs/Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Veterans in State and Federal Prison, 2004*. U.S. Department of Justice. [May 2007]. Available: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/vsfp04.pdf>

1.1.4 HHS, through its Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), is using innovative approaches to improve the capacity of hospitals in rural areas to deliver mental health and other health services. The agency is expanding existing networks to provide access to mental health and other services to rural Veterans via partnerships and coalitions with other healthcare entities. This community approach will involve critical access hospitals, Federally qualified health centers, rural health clinics, home health agencies, community mental health clinics, and other providers of mental health services, pharmacists, local government, private practice physicians and other providers deemed necessary to provide access to services and meet the needs of rural Veterans. HRSA will draw on VA's experience using information and telecommunication technologies to augment care provided by its mental health clinicians to Veteran families who live in rural areas. Through its Traumatic Brain Injury Program Implementation Partnership grantees, HRSA is also educating providers on the needs of military families and helping military families gain access to available and appropriate services in their state.

1.1.5. DOD will further implement counseling options that are free, convenient, and confidential to encourage self-initiated treatment and improve military families' quality of life. Preventive approaches often reduce the need for complex forms of treatment involving intervention and drug therapy. DOD will continue to enhance confidential non-medical counseling via Military OneSource Counselors and Military Family Life Consultants. Additionally, the Web-based TRICARE Assistance Program and tele-mental health programs are fielding telecommunication technologies to bring counseling assistance and behavioral health care to those who need it most. The "Virtual Behavioral Health Program for Redeploying Soldiers" is an example of this type of counseling. It was established to maximize behavioral health assets and modern communications technology to provide uniform contact with all those redeploying. The goal is to identify care requirements early but also help reduce stigma by encouraging and normalizing psychological health. This capability has been deployed at Schofield Barracks, Fort Richardson, Fort Carson, Joint Base Lewis McChord, and Fort Stewart. DOD will also improve awareness of and further enhance its web-based service member and family outreach resources such as www.SuicideOutreach.org and www.afterdeployment.org. The VA will offer lessons from their implementation of over 300 Vet Centers across the United States and surrounding territories where Veterans and their families can find readjustment counseling and outreach services. Seventy percent of all widows of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom Service members have received counseling support at Vet Centers.

1.1.6. The VA will develop new and expand existing family caregiver support programs for family caregivers of seriously ill or injured service members and Veterans. At each VA medical center, Caregiver Support Coordinators have been designated to provide support and assistance to family caregivers, serve as an expert on caregiving issues, and assure caregiver support is implemented in all clinical areas. In addition, VA is expanding the availability of family counseling and evidence-based caregiver support and training programs. The VA is also developing a comprehensive caregiver Web site and establishing a 1-800 Caregiver helpline.

Need 1.2. Build awareness among military families and communities that psychological fitness is as important as physical fitness.

Our Commitments:

1.2.1. The Secretary of HHS and the Secretary of Defense are jointly accelerating efforts that prevent and address suicide. The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention co-chaired by the Secretary of the Army and supported by the Secretaries of Defense and HHS will address high risk populations and will update and advance the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. Additionally, this alliance will develop effective public awareness and social marketing campaigns, including targeted messages for specific segments of the population that can change attitudes and norms and reduce suicidal behaviors. Simultaneously, VA's National Suicide Call Center is expanding and enhancing services to battle this trend in the Veteran population. Lessons will inform the National Action Alliance considering VA's Call Center has taken over 300,000 calls and has been credited with over 11,000 lives saved.

1.2.2. HHS, DOD, and VA will leverage partnerships with professional associations and academic institutions to ensure military culture is included in core curricula and published standards. Examples include the American Psychological Association and the Council on Social Work Education, which have implemented standards of practice for their members who work with military and Veteran families.

1.2.3. HHS and DOD will leverage the reach of the popular media industry to reduce misleading and inaccurate depictions of behavioral health conditions and people who seek psychological treatment, particularly Veterans and military families. In order to encourage responsible portrayals of mental health disorders, HHS' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration aligned their 2010 Voice Awards program to highlight the mental health challenges associated with combat and military life; the first year dedicated to honoring service members and families. Similarly, DOD will host the Entertainment Industry Summit in 2011 to further these goals.

1.2.4. The Department of the Interior (DOI) will work with DOD to provide expanded opportunities for military families to use Interior lands and recreational facilities for recovery. DOI, through use of its 500 million acres of public land and its recreational and educational programs will modify ongoing programs and services to accommodate military families, especially wounded warriors, in their efforts to regain psychological health, reintegrate with family, and rehabilitate. This will entail staff training on military culture and building stronger partnerships with existing private organizations that serve military families.

Need 1.3. Protect military members and families from unfair financial practices and help families enhance their financial readiness.

Our Commitments:

1.3.1 To strengthen protections for military families against abusive financial practices in the provision of consumer financial products and services, the Administration's new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) will have an Office of Service Member Affairs to ensure that the CFPB addresses the financial challenges that confront military families. In partnership with DOD,

this new office will be responsible for addressing three key areas: military family education on financial readiness, complaint monitoring and response, and coordination among Federal and state agencies of consumer protection measures for military families.

1.3.2. The Department of the Treasury's (Treasury's) Office of Financial Education and Financial Access will continue to help military families identify predatory lending practices. Treasury will continue to distribute educational materials at schools on military bases. Treasury will also continue encouraging high school students at schools located on military installations to enroll in the National Financial Capability Challenge, an awards program designed to increase the financial knowledge.

1.3.3. DOD is evaluating compensation levels for service in a combat zone, Reserve and National Guard compensation and benefits, benefits for caregivers and surviving families, and incentive pay for critical career fields such as mental and behavioral health professionals. At the direction of the President, the 11th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation will review benefits provided to key populations within the military family community. This review will be complete in May 2011 and will first compare military pay levels with civilian counterparts.

Need 1.4. Eliminate homelessness and promote housing security among Veterans and military families.

Our Commitments:

1.4.1. The Federal Government will continue to mobilize resources to achieve VA's goal of ending Veteran's homelessness by 2015. In partnership with the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and VA will continue working together to reduce the number of homeless Veterans to 59,000 by June 2012 and toward ending Veteran's homelessness completely. In addition, VA will continue to use every opportunity to reach out to homeless Veterans through a National Registry for Homeless Veterans and a National Homeless Hotline (1-877-4AID VET).

1.4.2 As part of its 3-year Veterans Homelessness Prevention Demonstration project, the HUD, Department of Labor (DOL), and VA with cooperation from HHS will provide early intervention and test strategies to help prevent Veterans from becoming homeless. This effort will pay particular attention to female Veterans, families, and National Guard and reservists who have recently returned from Iraq and Afghanistan. Selected sites for the project include Camp Pendleton (San Diego, CA), Fort Hood (Killeen, TX), Fort Drum (Watertown, NY), Joint Base Lewis-McChord (Tacoma, WA) and MacDill Air Force Base (Tampa, FL). Additionally, the Supportive Services for Veterans Families program (SSVF) is another new program under VA and HUD. It will provide enhanced services to low income Veterans and their families who are at risk of being homeless by providing grants to private nonprofit organizations and consumer cooperatives.

1.4.3. DOL is committed to supporting the VA's vision of ending homelessness for Veterans. DOL's Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program provides services to help homeless Veterans obtain meaningful employment and to stimulate the development of effective services. The program serves over 21,000 homeless Veterans, and includes separate programs for the homeless female Veterans, homeless Veterans with families, and incarcerated Veterans.

1.4.4. DOL, through the Women’s Bureau, has made women Veterans experiencing homelessness one of its four priorities. The Women’s Bureau has commissioned a guide for service providers titled Trauma-Informed Care for Women Veterans Experiencing Homelessness. This program will create a deeper understanding of the unique experiences and needs of female Veterans while offering a tool-kit for providers on how to recognize the military trauma that impacts the reintegration process. It will also provide a comprehensive approach to help organizations create effective trauma informed care environments.

Need 1.5. Ensure availability of critical substance abuse prevention, treatment, and recovery services for Veterans and military families.

Our Commitment:

1.5.1. The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) will incorporate issues specific to military families in the President’s annual *National Drug Control Strategy*. This strategy is a plan for Federal, state, and local stakeholders to implement effective drug prevention, intervention, treatment, recovery, and enforcement in the United States and abroad. This action step will help substance abuse service providers and stakeholders reduce drug use and further ensure that our service members and their families live in safe and healthy communities.

Need 1.6. Make court systems more responsive to the unique needs of Veterans and Families.

Our Commitment:

1.6.1. In order to address the root causes of criminal behavior and reduce involvement with the criminal justice system, DOJ, and HHS will partner to further develop the Veterans Treatment Court concept. In response to the growing need for Veterans courts, a program that is endorsed by the VA, the National Drug Court Institute is developing a curriculum for “Veterans only” Drug Courts that addresses crimes related to a Veteran’s substance abuse or dependence. Training and technical assistance dollars have been reallocated to address this growing need. The next Veterans Drug Court Planning Initiative will be held in 2011 to train 10 teams from various cities in the country, in order to best coordinate services for Veterans with PTSD, TBI, and substance abuse problems. Currently, there are 41 courts in operation. VA has a staff member at each Veteran Drug Court proceeding to help enroll the Veteran into the VA’s health care system for the important health care and services the Veteran may need.

Priority #2: Ensure excellence in military children's education and their development.

The Challenge: There are 1.9 million children with a parent serving in the military. 220,000 of these children have a parent currently deployed. There are 153,669 single parents serving in the military. The demands of extended conflict add to the challenges faced by military families. Research suggests that children of deployed parents experience more stress than their peers. While they are often described as a resilient group, the cumulative effects of multiple moves and significant parental absences can erode this resilience. Too many of our military children

Data on Military-Connected Children	
(Figures are approximate as of November 2010)	
Total military-connected, 0-18	1.9 million
• of which, school-aged	1.2 million
• of which, children of active duty	765,000
• of which, attend a DOD school	85,000
Children of a currently-deployed parent	220,000
• of which, school-aged	116,000
• of which, deployed multiple times	75,000
Percent of service members with children	
(Active duty and Reserve Component)	43%
Active duty single parents	75,000
Active duty dual-military families	40,000

in public schools feel like their classmates and teachers do not understand what they are going through. Between frequent moves and service member time away from home, many parents worry about their children getting a good education. A recent survey found 34 percent are "less or not confident" that their children's school is responsive to the unique aspects of military family life.⁸

The quality of education available to military children can affect overall recruitment, retention, and morale. Military families frequently say that the quality of their children's education is one of most important criteria when selecting a place to live. Military children face added stressors due to frequent relocations. The differences between State standards and requirements for academic and athletic participation, when coupled to frequent relocations, can negatively impact achievement and participation for military children.

Need 2.1. Improve the quality of the educational experience.

Our Commitments:

2.1.1. The Department of Education (Education) will make supporting military families one of its supplemental priorities for its discretionary grant programs. This priority, when applied, will, for the first time ever, favor grant applications to meet the needs of military-connected students. Additionally, Education will seek new means of collecting and reporting data to promote transparency around the performance of military-connected children as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Data collection is critical to directing education and counseling resources to those areas most impacted by deployments and other stressors. Finally, Education is working to improve its Impact Aid funding of school districts serving military children. This includes seeking authority that would allow school districts that experience high growth due to military base realignment to apply for funds using current year rather than previous year student counts.

8. Blue Star Families, *2010 Military Family Lifestyle Survey*. [May 2010]
Available: <http://www.bluestarfam.org/system/storage/42/58/2/301/2010bsfsurveyexecsummary.pdf>

2.1.2 DOD will ensure that military children have school facilities that are safe, secure, in good repair, and provide an optimal learning environment that supports current and future educational requirements. DOD established an interagency task force to survey military installation education facilities and is committed to funding priorities for school reconstruction and expansion.

2.1.3 The President’s Educate to Innovate Campaign will mobilize its efforts to support military children’s math and science achievement. As a key step, the National Math and Science Initiative, in partnership with the White House Office of Science and Technology, DOD, and leading nonprofits and companies, will lead efforts to expand access for military-connected children to attend advanced placement classes in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics to public high schools that serve a large number of military families. The initiative starts this year with four schools serving Fort Campbell and Fort Hood, and additional support for another three schools in September 2011.

2.1.4. DOD commits to making DOD Education Activity (DODEA) schools a leader in the use of advanced learning technologies that have the potential to significantly improve student performance. DOD will invest in research, development, and demonstration projects that involve DODEA schools, building on relevant research by agencies such as the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency and the Office of Naval Research. Examples of advanced learning technologies include software that is as effective as a personal tutor, engaging and compelling “games for learning,” student-authored and sharable simulations, and online courses that improve the more students use them.

Need 2.2. Reduce negative impacts of frequent relocations and absences.

Our Commitments:

2.2.1. DOD in coordination with the Council of State Governments will pursue the complete development of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. The Interstate Compact addresses mobility-related challenges by harmonizing and adapting state laws to include transfer of records, course placement, graduation requirements, exclusion from extra-curricular activities, redundant or missed entrance or exit testing, kindergarten and first grade entrance age variations, and power of custodial parents while parents are deployed. As of November 24, 2010, 35 states have enacted the Compact and 4 other states and the District of Columbia have pending legislation.

2.2.2. DOD will accelerate professional development programs to inform school staff of the academic challenges facing military children. These include training modules and sessions on special education, and an interactive educational resource for military families, military leaders, and school leaders, titled “Students at the Center.”

2.2.3. In order to encourage quality reintegration time, Education and DOD will provide guidance to school districts based on best practices for approving “block leave.” This concept seeks to permit students to take time to be with a recently-returned parent while minimizing the impact on their course of study or attendance record.

2.2.4. Education will continue the Specialized Training of Military Parents (STOMP) project, dedicated to serving military parents of children with special needs. This project provides workshops focusing on accessing special education resources and enabling families to navigate a variety of educational and medical systems and programs.

Need 2.3. Encourage the healthy development of military children.

Our Commitments:

2.3.1. The Department of Agriculture's 4-H National Headquarters will enhance their enduring partnership with active, National Guard and Reserve military service branches to support 4-H clubs and activities for military children and youth. These 4-H Military Partnerships bring the resources of the Land Grant University and Cooperative Extension System – youth development professionals, research based curricula, and high quality training and technical assistance – to the child and youth programs of the military.

2.3.2. DOI, one of the largest Federal employers of youth ages 15-25 in conservation, will partner with DOD to identify military youth for employment opportunities. These opportunities reside in a wide range of educational, recreation and conservation, and cultural programs, including First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move Outside Initiative, the National Park Service's Junior Ranger Program and Parks as Classrooms, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Let's Go Outside and Nature Rocks, and the Bureau of Land Management's Take it Outside program.

Priority #3: Developing career and educational opportunities for military spouses.

The Challenge: The military spouse is part of an adaptable, resilient, educated, and dedicated work force. The average age of active duty military spouses is 31.9. Of the 711,375 active duty spouses, 66 percent are already in the workforce. A DOD survey in September 2008 identified that 84 percent of all military spouses have at least some college education; 25 percent hold a bachelor's degree; and 10 percent hold advanced degrees. The majority of military spouses work outside of the home to supplement their family income and wish to stay in their current career of choice regardless of relocation. Seventy-seven percent of military spouses surveyed report they want or need to work.⁹ Ninety three percent of the military spouse population is female and recent studies reveal the extent of the disparity in pay. The overall wage gap between civilian and military wives is 42 percent. This gap represents both lower labor force participation by military wives, and lower earnings for employment. Among households that moved the year prior to the survey, a common situation in the military, the wage gap rises to over 47 percent.¹⁰

The challenge is to reduce the barriers that currently prevent military spouses from maintaining a career or employment on a normal progression path regardless of relocation. The lack of broad-based reciprocity among the states to recognize professional licenses or certificates held by military spouses creates a significant barrier to employment. Additionally, frequent moves result in military spouses incurring high costs for recertification and increased delays before they are able to work due to state licensing requirements in fields such as teaching and medical services. Finally, employers may need more exposure to the benefits of hiring military spouses.

Need 3.1. Increase opportunities for Federal careers.

Our Commitment:

3.1.1. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) will continue to promote, educate and assess Federal employment mechanisms for improving hiring trends for military spouses. There are currently two specific means to gain Federal employment as a military spouse; the Noncompetitive Appointing Authority under Executive Order 13473 and the Derived Veterans Preference. The Derived Veterans' Preference may also be applied to widows, widowers, or mothers of Veterans. Additionally, OPM will ensure the interests of military spouses are part of the Veteran Employment Initiative. Executive Order 13518 established a Federal Interagency Council on Veterans Employment, a Veterans Employment Program Office in 24 Federal agencies, and a requirement for a government-wide Veterans Recruitment and Employment Strategic Plan. All Federal Government Veterans employment Program Managers are authorized, trained, and committed to assisting military spouses.

9. Defense Manpower Data Center, 2008 DMDC Survey of Active Duty Spouses. Available: <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/index.jsp>

10. Kniskern, Mary K. & David R. Segal, Ph.D. *Mean Wage Differences between Civilian and Military Wives*. Center for Research on Military Organization, University of Maryland. November 15, 2010. Data used from the American Community Survey 2006-2008.

3.1.2. The Department of State will continue to employ military spouses in a range of positions in our Consulates and Embassies, using a hiring mechanism known as the Family Member Appointment. This appointment accrues credit for Federal service time, and benefits including the Thrift Savings Plan. This mechanism also entitles military spouses to non-competitive hiring eligibility once the spouse has worked for 52 weeks. Approximately 17 percent of the Department's Community Liaison Office staff are military spouses hired through this mechanism.

3.1.3. DOL, VA, and DOD will reform the Employment Workshop portion of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) for the first time in 19 years to include a special outreach initiative for military spouses. The current TAP course curriculum covers 2 1/2 days of classroom instruction and has provided over 1.7 million separating and retiring military members and their spouses with employment and job training assistance and other transition services. However, DOL, through the Veterans' Employment and Training Services (VETS), is working to redesign the DOL TAP Employment Workshop that will include an aggressive, hands-on tailored workforce readiness program for service members and their spouses to include employment assistance during relocations and permanent changes of station.

Need 3.2. Increase opportunities for private-sector careers.

Our Commitments:

3.2.1. DOL will promote the ability of its public workforce system to provide priority of service to eligible military spouses and Veterans. Military spouses can access information about job opportunities and services provided by these programs through a nationwide network of about 3,000 local One-Stop Career Centers. One-Stop Career Centers address the employment needs of both job seekers and businesses in every community and draw from an array of community partners to make available a broad range of services and resources to support military spouses. Services that are available to military spouses include: employment services such as job search, matching, and placement assistance; career counseling; and assistance with job interviewing skills. Depending on eligibility criteria and funding constraints, military spouses may also access no-cost training services; assistance with Pell Grants and student loans; referral to other programs and services in the community; and supportive services through the One-Stop Career Centers; or they can visit the Career One-Stop Pathways to Career Success Website: <http://www.careeronestop.org/MilitaryTransition>.

3.2.2. DOD will leverage the successful partnerships created under the Army Spouse Employment Partnership and expand this program to the Navy, Marines, and Air Force spouses. The Army Partnership has a signed Statement of Support with 42 Fortune 500/100 companies that have a national employment footprint. Since 2003, these companies have hired over 84,000 Army spouses. In 2010, the Army expanded the program into Korea and has signed on eight new partners in South Korea. DOD will also modify this program to improve employment counseling, education, and readiness along with placement assistance.

3.2.3. DOL and the Department of Commerce will educate corporate America on the benefits of hiring from the military and encourage them to hire more military spouses. DOL and Commerce will conduct business outreach and employment efforts for Veterans and military spouses to include an assessment of unique initiatives, best practices, and employment data across America. The Departments will also seek to involve various business networks and organizations such as the Small Business Administration (SBA) and the Chambers of Commerce network.

3.2.4. To further complement the outreach efforts of VA’s Office of Service Disabled Veterans Business Utilization, the SBA has partnered with Syracuse University to institute two new small business-oriented programs for Veterans and their families, Women Veterans Igniting the Spirit of Entrepreneurship (V-WISE) and Operation Endure & Grow. According to the SBA, nearly one quarter of Veterans indicate they are interested in starting a business or they own a small business, and that percentage is even higher among women Veterans. V-WISE provides training, networking and mentorship to women Veterans through a 3-day, off-site training program, online training, and network support structures. V-WISE will be delivered in several locations around the Nation, and anticipates serving up to 1,200 female Veterans over the next 36-month period. Operation Endure & Grow targets National Guard and Reserve members, their families and business partners. The goal of the program is to mitigate the economic hardship of deployed members and their families. The 8-week online course will focus on the fundamentals of launching and growing a small business for those who will sustain the business when the service member is deployed, injured, or killed. In total, V-WISE and Operation Endure & Grow will serve over 1,700 individuals.

Need 3.3. Increase access to educational advancement.

Our Commitments:

3.3.1. DOD will assist spouse education counseling for all ranks and provide stipends for those pursuing portable career opportunities for entry-level ranks usually 6 years or less of service.

Specifically, the Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts program will be focused on E1-E5, W1-W2, and O1-O2 ranks for financial assistance to encourage spouses working on 2-year degrees, licenses, and certifications. The Departments of Education and Veterans Affairs will work with Defense to assist Military Spouse Career Advancement Account education counselors to help military spouses maximize Federal financial aid options, to include assistance with GI-Bill and Pell Grants.

3.3.2. The VA will continue to ease the Post-September 11 GI Bill application process, including transferability to spouses or children for service members with over 6 years of service.

This benefit offers transferability to a family member once the service member has been in longer than 6 years and agrees to serve 4 additional years. As of December 1, 2010, VA has issued over \$6.6 billion in tuition, housing, and stipends for 413,313 student Veterans or eligible family members pursuing higher education. Early in the program’s implementation, VA took unprecedented steps to expedite over \$350 million in advance payments and is in the process of automating application processing and payment functions. To further encourage more Veterans to use this historic program, in February 2010, VA launched a nationwide Post-September 11 GI Bill advertising campaign through college newspapers, radio ads, outdoor posters and information handouts at 60 schools with large Veteran-student populations. The VA also administers the *Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship* for children of service members who die in the line of duty after September 10, 2001. Eligible children may receive up to the highest public, in-state undergraduate tuition and fees, plus a monthly living stipend and allowance under this program.

3.3.3. Education has greatly simplified the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

As part of an overall strategy to increase access to postsecondary education and meet President Obama’s goal of having “the best educated, most competitive workforce in the world” by 2020, this process has been overhauled, eliminating an administrative barrier to financial aid for military spouses. Beginning

in January 2010, applicants (both students and parents) now have the ability to retrieve their tax information online directly from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and pre-populate that data directly into their application. This not only makes it easier for families to complete the application, but also increases the accuracy of submitted applications. In an effort to better inform students and families as they make decisions about college, Education also provides Federal Pell Grant award and student loan eligibility estimates to the applicant immediately upon completion of the FAFSA, rather than requiring applicants to wait several weeks. In addition, Education provides graduation and retention rates for schools the student is interested in attending. Education commits to sending guidance out to all financial aid officers highlighting the need for sensitivity to military personnel and families, including Guard and Reserve personnel and emphasizing flexibility in cases where a military family may lose financial aid due to temporary spikes in pay from activation and deployments.

Need 3.4. Reduce barriers to employment and services due to different state policies and standards.

Our Commitments:

3.4.1. DOD State Liaison Office will engage and educate State policymakers, not-for-profit associations, concerned business interests, and other State leaders about the needs of military members and their families through the USA4 Military Families Initiative. So far, the initiative has brought unemployment compensation benefits to military spouses in 38 states.

3.4.2. Treasury, in collaboration with DOD, will release a report on licensing and credentialing practices faced by military spouses subjected to multiple relocations across state jurisdictions. Treasury and DOD will also work with DOL, Department of Transportation, and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to identify lessons and experiences that inform the study's recommendations. The report will examine the effects of occupational licensing on military spouses by: (1) documenting the rate of interstate mobility of military spouses compared with others; (2) documenting the extent which military spouses work in state licensed occupations; and (3) examining licensing requirements in the states with large military family populations. This report will also highlight best practices for overcoming occupational licensing hurdles.

Need 3.5. Protect the rights of service members and families.

Our Commitments:

3.5.1. DOJ, in partnership with other Federal agencies, is committed to enforcing the Federal laws that protect the civil rights of service members. DOJ will coordinate with DOD and other appropriate agencies to ensure military families are aware of their rights under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act ("USERRA"), The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act ("UOCAVA"), the Service Members Civil Relief Act ("SCRA"), and of course the Americans with Disabilities Act, which so often applies to service members or Veterans with disabilities.

3.5.2 DOL is committed to assisting military families by enforcing the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). These provisions allow the military spouse, son, daughter, or parent of the military member to take unpaid FMLA leave from their employment under certain conditions. In general, it

STRENGTHENING OUR MILITARY FAMILIES

allows unpaid FMLA leave to take care of matters, such as the need to make financial arrangements or attend military briefings, arising when the family member is deployed to a foreign country. Additionally, a military spouse, son, daughter, parent, or other next of kin may take unpaid FMLA leave to care for a service member or certain Veterans with a serious injury or illness incurred or aggravated in the line of duty. These provisions apply to the family of members of both active duty and reserve components. Additionally, a former member of the military who has returned to employment may take leave for his or her own serious health condition under the FMLA.

Priority #4: Increasing child care availability and quality within the Armed Forces.

The Challenge: Access to quality child care remains a focus of leadership and families across the Armed Forces. Military families face challenges that are not found in other work environments. Shifting work schedules that are often longer than the typical 8-hour day, as well as the ever-present possibility of being deployed anywhere in the world on a moment's notice, require a child care system that is flexible and maintains high quality standards.

Child care programs are needed that support Reserve Component families and geographically dispersed active duty military families while the service member is deployed. Guard and Reserve families are experiencing significantly increased mobilization rates and families who previously had limited exposure to the military now must deal with the likelihood of multiple or longer deployments.

Programs are also needed to meet the child care needs of families living in areas in the continental United States where on-installation military child care is unavailable or waiting lists for care are excessive. In addition, programs such as respite child care can provide a temporary relief or a short break to the parent or guardian. DOD currently supports deployed families by offering respite child care during and immediately following deployment, providing up to 16 hours of free child care per month, per child, for children up to age 12.

Child care during deployment must be provided in community child care centers and family child care homes that are state-licensed or regulated with annual oversight inspections that protect the health, safety, and well-being of children in care. Longer-term child care services should be delivered through local child care centers that are both state-licensed or regulated and nationally accredited programs. Another option is to use family child care providers in the local community who have, at a minimum, Child Development Associate credentials. In all cases, the level of program oversight must meet the existing minimum standard of an annual inspection by the state regulating body.

Need 4.1. Enhance child care resources within DOD and the Coast Guard.

Our Commitments:

4.1.1. DOD, HHS, Education, and Agriculture have committed to increasing the availability of quality child care options thereby reducing the estimated shortfall of 37,000 child care spaces based on available demographic data. These efforts support the President's Early Childhood Platform goal to "Improve Child Care Quality" using State and local resources and have far reaching implications for increasing quality child care throughout the Nation. By January 2011, new Child Care Liaison positions will be established with pilot programs in 13 states representing the spectrum of military and Veteran populations that require child care: Alaska, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, North Carolina, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington. Initial efforts will result in an increase of approximately 8,300 child care spaces available throughout the country. These child care spaces are not static and can be utilized where needed to support the ever changing needs of Guard and Reserve families. Analysis is ongoing to compare state child care licensing standards with DoD child care standards, with a goal of pursuing strategies to bring more alignment between the two oversight systems. Finally, HHS will also encourage states and territories to consult with military child care programs as part of their two-year Child Care and Development Fund Plans, starting in 2011.

4.1.2. DHS' Coast Guard and DOD have partnered to increase access to child care for the families of the Coast Guard. Currently, there are approximately 28,000 dependents under the age of 12 and only 1,486 (5.3 percent) of those eligible dependents are enrolled in Coast Guard-sponsored child care services.

4.1.3. DOD will leverage partnerships outside the Federal Government. The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, the Council on Accreditation, and ZERO TO THREE will be leveraged for assistance in executing training and technical assistance for community child care providers. Plans to include professional organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National After School Association, and the National Association of Family Child Care will expand partnership efforts into the community and encourage a sustainable effort.

4.1.4. DOD will continue to plan for construction projects to meet the demand for increased child care capacity and to replace aging facilities. These actions support the families who access child care on military installations.



Conclusion

This study captures the unprecedented steps taken by the Federal Government to improve care and support to our military families. This enduring effort looks to address immediate needs and then to develop long-term, sustainable programs. Our commitments will be enhanced along the way by the creativity and the drive of all involved. Each commitment has associated metrics and will undergo recurring assessments. Feedback from spouses, children, employers, nongovernmental organizations, and communities will continue to be solicited to ensure our efforts are taking root not only within the Federal Government but also at the state, tribal, and local levels. Undoubtedly, readiness and resilience are matters of national security and this government-wide effort provides a stronger foundation both for our current force and for our next generation of volunteers.

“We can do this. In every community, every day, we can find concrete ways to show our military families the respect and gratitude that each of us holds for them in our hearts. They deserve our support long after the welcome home ceremonies are over. You don’t have to come from a military family, have a base in your community, or be an expert in military issues to make a difference. Every American can do something.”

—Michelle Obama and Jill Biden
USA Today, September 3, 2010

This document is posted at www.whitehouse.gov; keywords: military families.

