

Military Family Readiness Council Meeting Minutes

The Pentagon Library & Conference Center, Room B4
Wednesday, September 14, 2016

1:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Members Attending:

Office of the Secretary of Defense:

Ms. Stephanie Barna, Performing the Duties of Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense
(Personnel & Readiness)

Ms. Barbara Thompson, Director, Office of Family Readiness Policy and Office of
Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs

Army:

LTG Gwen Bingham, Assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management

SMA Daniel Dailey, Sergeant Major of the Army

Ms. Laura Conley, U.S. Army National Guard Spouse

Marine Corps:

Ms. Andrea Smith Green, Spouse of Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Ronald Green (By Phone)

Navy:

Rear Admiral (Lower Half) Ann Burkhardt, USN, Director, Twenty-First Century Sailor Office (N17)

Ms. Chaun (Candy) Young, Navy Reserve Component Spouse

Air Force:

CMSAF James Cody, Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force

Ms. Michelle Padgett, Air Force Active Component Spouse

Military Family Organizations:

Dr. Mary Keller, Military Child Education Coalition (By Phone)

Dr. David Rubin, Children's Hospital Association

Ms. Karen Ruedisueli, National Military Family Association (By Phone)

Representatives of Members Attending:

Marine Corps:

Ms. Marie Balocki, Representing MGEN Burke Whitman, Director of Marine and Family

Air Force:

Mr. H.L. Larry, Representing Director, Air Force Services

Also present:

Dr. Terry Adirim, DASD, Defense Health Services Policy and Oversight
Ms. Diana Banks, DASD, Force Education and Training
Ms. Heidi Boyd, ODASD Reserve Integration
Ms. Stephanie Bryant, Director, Psychological Health Reserve Forces, ODASD Reserve Integration
Ms. Jeri Busch, ODASD, Military Personnel Policy
CMSgt (Ret) Athena Cody, Spouse of Command Master Sergeant of the Air Force James Cody
Ms. Holly Dailey, Spouse of Sergeant Major of the Army Daniel Dailey
Mr. David Fortson, J1 Personnel Readiness Division
Ms. Dee Geise, Army Installation Management
Ms. Dawn Goldfein, Spouse of Air Force Chief of Staff General David Goldfein
Mr. Ronald Keohane, DASD, Military Community & Family Policy
Mr. Charles Milam, Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower & Reserve Affairs)
Dr. Paul Rosenfeld, Defense Manpower Data Center Research
LtCol Esther Sablan, Chief, Family Programs, National Guard Bureau
Mr. Brett Stevens, ODASD, Warrior Care Policy
Dr. Ed Tyner, Associate Director, Community Support for Families with Special Needs

Designated Federal Officer:

Ms. Elizabeth (Betsy) Graham

MFRC Support Staff:

Ms. Melody McDonald
Mr. Frank Emery
Dr. Randy Eltringham

Public Submissions:

Public submissions received in advance of the September 14, 2016 meeting are contained in Enclosure 1

- Tricare for Kids Coalition
- Military Special Needs Network
- Jeremy Hilton, Navy Veteran and Air Force Spouse

Proceedings of the Meeting:

On Wednesday, September 14, 2016, the Military Family Readiness Council meeting was held in Room B4 of the Pentagon Library & Conference Center, with overflow room B7 open with audio/video connections to Room B4 to accommodate additional members of the public, subject matter experts and staff from DoD and the Military Services. The purpose of this meeting was to review public submissions and information papers on issues brought before the

Council during FY2016; deliberate and draft 2016 Recommendations for the Secretary of Defense; and propose focus areas for the Council during FY2017.

Betsy Graham, the Designated Federal Officer, opened the meeting by welcoming members, advisers and guests. She reviewed the rules and regulations that must be followed while conducting Council business as defined by the Federal Advisory Committee Act and Department of Defense Instruction 5105.04. Next, she advised that the Military Family Readiness Council can be reached via email at osd.pentagon.ousd-p-r-mbx.family-readiness-council@mail.mil, via the web at www.militaryonesource.mil/those-who-support-mfrc, and via mail at Office of Family Readiness Policy, Attention: Military Family Readiness Council, 4800 Mark Center Drive, Suite 03G15, Alexandria, VA 22350-2300. Following a review of the meeting's agenda, Ms. Graham concluded administrative remarks, noted the attendance had reached a quorum, and introduced Ms. Stephanie Barna, Performing the Duties of Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, who chaired the meeting.

Ms. Barna welcomed everyone to the Military Family Readiness Council and thanked them for their attendance. She emphasized the importance of Council activities which include continued Council deliberations on military family readiness issues brought before the Council and drafting of 2016 recommendations for consideration by the Secretary of Defense. She pointed out that since the establishment of the Council in 2009, the Secretary of Defense has taken the Council's recommendations very seriously, and has adopted and acted upon the majority of them.

After concluding her opening remarks, Ms. Barna led discussions regarding specific military family readiness issues brought before the Council through written submissions from the public and by request of Council members. Deliberations resulted in the drafting and MFRC approval of the following 2016 MFRC Recommendations for the Secretary of Defense as well as recommended FY2017 MFRC Focus Areas.

Betsy Graham reminded Council members that three MFRC members were participating in the meeting through an audio bridge. Ms. Barna included them in Council deliberations and voting.

Recommendation #1: Approved

Continue the standardization of the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) across all Military Services and strengthen related service delivery components of healthcare for family members with special needs.

Discussion/Results: After a lengthy discussion of the challenges and barriers faced by special needs family members, the Council recommends that MFRC continue to oversee and review programs and services that support military families with special needs as a high priority issue. Special emphasis shall continue to be on health and educational services needed by both children and adults with special needs.

The Council specifically requests the Department of Defense to:

- a. Take necessary actions to break down barriers which limit availability and access to needed services and support, especially specialty healthcare, so continuity of service can be provided as families move to new duty locations. Council members highlighted exceptional family member needs for:
 - 1) Clarification regarding the interplay between Medicaid, TRICARE and ECHO services.
 - 2) More choices in terms of healthcare options and providers.
 - 3) Qualified specialty care providers (including Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA)) therapists and others) who are readily available at or near their duty locations.
- b. Allow use of prior authorizations for support services once the family member reaches the determination for EFMP/ECHO. Such authorizations can become a time critical healthcare and cost savings issue during military reassignments and relocations across state lines.
- c. Address the recommendations in the TRICARE for Kids Coalition Report in a timely fashion.

Recommendation #2: Approved

Explore use of community collaboratives to gain greater access to a broad range of military family readiness resources, services and expertise needed by Service and family members.

Discussion/Results: The Council discussed the fact that for many years, the Department of Defense has successfully used public-private partnerships to fill gaps in family support and service delivery needed by military families. Examples include: better healthcare access, tuition assistance, and professional credentialing. Members of the MFRC feel strongly that such community capacity building should continue and expand across the spectrum of military family support, especially with regard to issues impacted by military relocations.

The Council specifically requests the Department of Defense to:

- a. Address mobility and portability areas of concern that support relocating military Servicemembers and families, especially specialty healthcare and educational needs for EFMP families; education portability for children and adults; and employment opportunities, professional licensing and credentials needed to work in different state.
- b. Take advantage of the good work that states and other direct service organizations are doing.

Recommendation #3: Approved

Consider opening the aperture of Tuition Assistance (TA) for use by both Service members AND spouses who want to pursue professional licensing and technical certifications.

Discussion/Results: Recognizing that the Military Services recruit the member and retain the family, Council members feel it is important for the Department of Defense to further examine educational benefits and gain a deeper understanding of how such benefits affect the Servicemember, spouse, family as a whole, as well as the readiness of the Force.

Army representatives on the Council reported that over the past six years, the Army has found that by providing educational benefits that can be used to pursue technical certification opportunities, they can reduce unemployment compensation by millions of dollars when Servicemembers separate from military service – a significant cost savings for the Army and an attractive incentive for new recruits.

By reducing barriers to eligibility for TA and allowing it to be used for technical certifications by both Servicemembers and spouses, the Department of Defense could show the priority it places on recruiting and retaining quality personnel and strong families.

The Council feels the educational benefits issue should remain a high priority for the MFRC in FY2017.

Additionally, the Council specifically requests the Department of Defense to:

- a. Ensure all DoD Components work together to better adjust and improve educational benefits for the entire military family, with consistency across DoD.
- b. Assess the cost and benefit of expanding educational opportunities by applying the principle of transferability between eligible Service members and their family members.
- c. Monitor Defense State Liaison Office (DSLO) progress on licensure portability issues.

Recommendation #4: Approved

Promote state policy to support the identification and reporting of child abuse and neglect by civilian authorities to the military while continuing to pursue greater child abuse and neglect prevention efforts.

Discussion/Results: For many years, the Department of Defense has worked hard to reduce the rate of child abuse and neglect. In recent years, child abuse rates have remained stable but the rate of child neglect has increased. Prevention initiatives are key to reducing incident rates and keeping them low. Those that focus on preserving families and developing parenting skills, coping skills, and resiliency are showing the most positive impacts.

In order to continue making progress, the Department of Defense knows that it must continue to work on the issue of reporting. DoD acknowledges that there are still significant barriers that prevent civilian authorities from reporting military child abuse and neglect cases to military authorities. While much progress has been made, military officials know that many more cases go unreported. Thus, more work needs to be done to strengthen working relationships and communications between these two sectors.

The Council specifically requests the Department of Defense to:

- a. Track progress on the FY2017 NDAA proposal with regard to the requirement for child welfare agencies in the states to also report abuse and neglect cases involving Service members and their families to the military.

- b. Track progress on the development of a universal DoD parenting plan to prevent child abuse and neglect.
- c. Focus on preservation of the force and family, prevention vs. response, and the life skills needed to cope, and resiliency.

Recommendation #5: Approved

Support the Veterans Online Shopping Benefit (VOSB).

Discussion/Results: Over the past decade, the Military Services have used resale profits from their Military Exchanges to fund installation services such as community pools, child and youth centers, and other family support services not covered by appropriated funds. As the Military Services have reduced in size, patronage at the Exchanges has also scaled down. This has resulted in budgeting shortfalls to pay for a wide range of nonappropriated fund base services.

One strategy for providing needed funds to continue base services for military personnel and families is a current proposal to establish a Veterans Online Shopping Benefit, which would be open to all veterans with honorable discharges, thus increasing the population that is eligible to make purchases from Military Exchanges.

Ms. Barna cautioned that this is a complex issue that both the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs are addressing it in. It is unclear if a legislative change would be required to allow the VOSB concept to be enacted and if all resale profits from VOSB sales would funnel back to base level personnel and family support programs. Council members do not want to see services to families cut on base.

The Council specifically requests the Department of Defense to:

- a. Support the Veterans Online Shopping Benefit.
- b. Ensure that Morale, Welfare and Recreation and family support services maintain their funding levels.

Recommendation #6: Approved

Continue efforts to make Military OneSource (including its integrated social media channels) our central information dissemination point through which we focus and funnel information to those in need and to our youngest members of the force and their families.

Discussion/Results: Military OneSource was designed to be the primary source for channeling accurate, trustworthy, timely information to Service members and their families on resources that are available to support their current and evolving needs. It is especially important that Millennials and other targeted audiences have awareness and access to this information from an accurate and reliable source so they can apply it and further share it with their networks.

The Council specifically requests the Department of Defense to:

- a. Take necessary steps to expand the use of Military OneSource to ensure that it is the first link that appears in search engines, with the goal being to:
 - a. Maximize community outreach, Servicemember and family engagement, and sharing of information and referrals to DoD and Military Services programs, services and community partnerships designed to strengthen and support military families.
 - b. Increase engagement with family support professionals from all Military Services to help post and promote their programs, services, and community partnerships within the Military OneSource enclave, maximizing the accuracy and reliability of information provided and enhancing on-going connections to Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and their families.

2017 Recommended MFRC Focus Areas

Members of the MFRC Council recommended the following focus areas for 2017.

- 1. EFMP, healthcare and special education components of services which support special needs families**
 - a. With regard to Medicaid Waiver Services provided by TRICARE and ECHO
 - 1) Brief the Council on the synergies between these programs, including registration processes and transitions between military- and state-provided programs and services.
 - 2) Promote the availability of accurate and reliable information through Military OneSource, so that all users can be better educated and kept informed.
 - b. Identify and share promising practices (e.g., special education, specialty healthcare, respite care, STOMP).
 - c. Update the Council on progress made with regard to short-term EFMP and related healthcare and special education program objectives, initiatives, and pilots, which feed into the more comprehensive system-wide improvement process, including target start- and end-dates.
- 2. Educational Benefits for Service and Family Members**
 - a. Determine how educational benefits impact the entire military family and force readiness.
 - b. Explore eligibility requirements for the TA, MGIB, and MyCAA programs and resources. Consider integrating a transferability clause in all such programs to ensure the ability to share educational benefits between Service members and their family members to maximize their recruitment, readiness, and retention.
- 3. Defense State Liaison Office (DSLO) Update Briefing on DoD's Top Ten Mobile Military Lifestyle Issues and Veterans Employment Protections**
 - a. Request a DSLO briefing on the DoD Top Ten Mobile Military Lifestyle Issues and progress made on each.
 - b. Focus on issues that affect families.

- c. Request a briefing on employment protections for veterans and national guardsmen who are on state-only activations.

4. Veterans Online Shopping Benefit (VOSB) Update Briefing, including other viable resourcing options that can provide needed support for military family support programs and services.

- a. Keep the Council informed about the status of VOSB.
- b. Since the Defense Resale System is much larger than VOSB, explore additional modernization efforts that potentially can provide funding to military family support programs.

Closing Remarks:

Ms. Barna thanked everyone for their contributions this year and especially during this very challenging meeting. She also recognized and thanked Ms. Candy Young as this was her last meeting with the MFRC Council.

Next Meeting: A date for the next MFRC Council meeting was not set, but is expected to be in early 2017.

Submitted by:



Randy N. Eltringham
Designated Federal Officer
Military Family Readiness Council

Certified by:



Peter Levine
Acting Under Secretary of Defense
(Personnel & Readiness)

These minutes will be formally considered by the Council at its next meeting, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes of that meeting.