




OUR VOICES ARE STRONGER AND BRIGHTER WHEN
COMBINED. JUST LIKE STARS, WHEN CONNECTED,
THEY GUIDE US.

ADVOCACY FOR MILITARY SPOUSES
USAWC CLASS OF 2021 SPOUSES' PROJECT

Disclaimer:

The opinions expressed in this magazine are those of the authors and the volunteer military spouses who provided material and resources to share their experience while at Carlisle Barracks. They do not reflect the official policy, endorsement, or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the United States Government.

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The AY21 Spouse Project Committee extends our gratitude and thanks to the Army War College command team spouses for their support and encouragement. They shared their vision and inspiration for this project because they believe in the value of advocacy among military spouses. We appreciate their perspectives and hope that we continue their example with this magazine. We're also grateful to the spouses who responded to the survey because their answers gave us the basis for our discussions and guided our search for resources. Finally, we appreciate the staff at the Army War College for their assistance and dedicated efforts.

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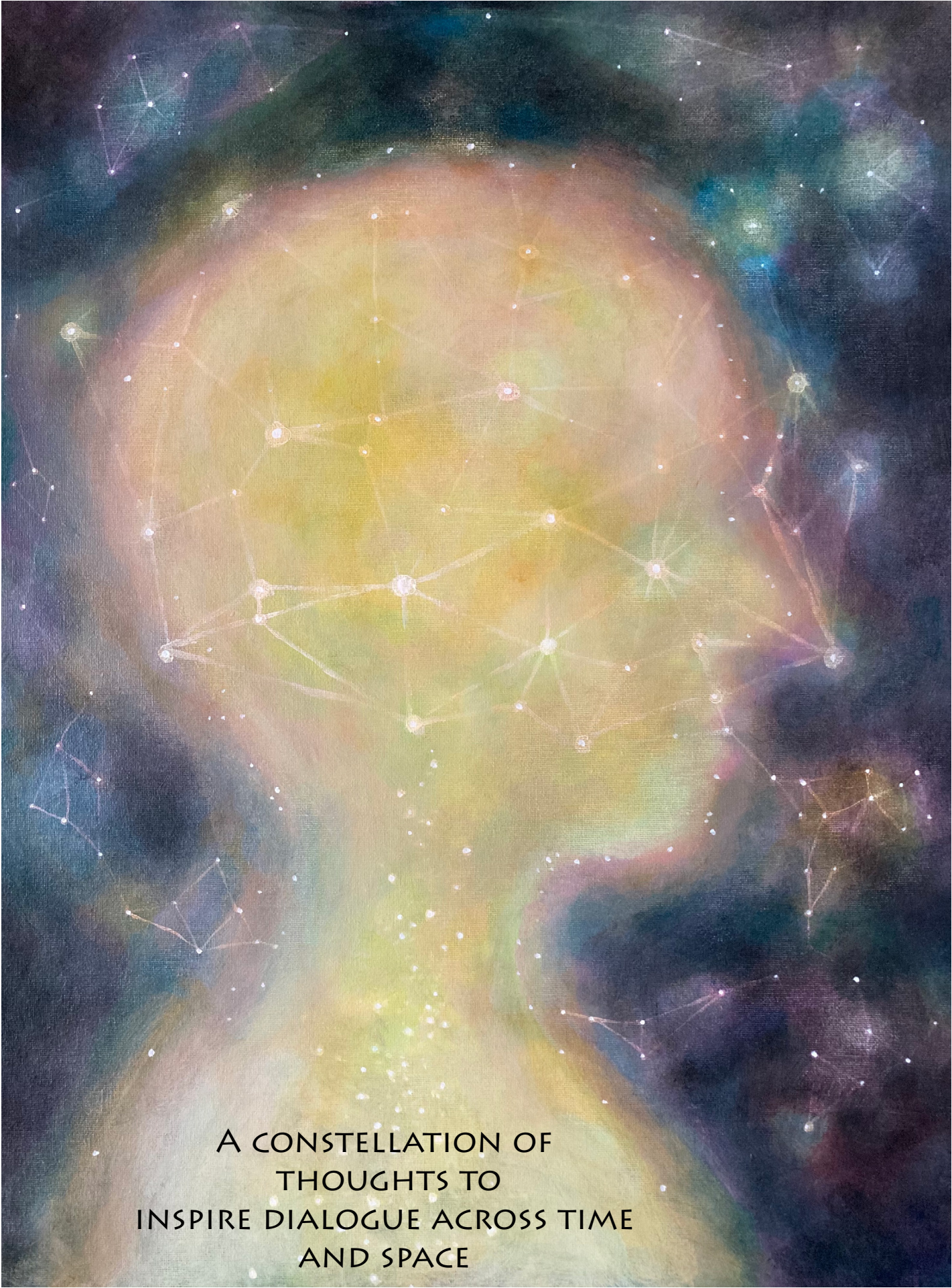
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A CONSTELLATION OF
THOUGHTS TO
INSPIRE DIALOGUE ACROSS TIME
AND SPACE

COMMAND MESSAGE

The AY21 Spouse Project Committee established a goal to create an inspiring project for all military spouses. "Raise Our Voice" celebrates advocacy among military families and encourages spouses to go even further in building their communities. In a year where social gathering and collaboration were limited, the AY21 Spouse Project Committee overcame those challenges to produce an online magazine by incorporating the resources of our student spouses at Carlisle Barracks and the knowledge of many of their worldwide connections. The heart of this project is the celebration and continuity of the lifestyle they have loved for decades. Over many years, they shared their perspectives and skills in mentorship and family readiness programs wherever they called home. This project is dedicated to their mentors and role models along the way. "Raise Our Voice" is the product of their united efforts across all military branches to improve the lives of military families.



DAVID C. HILL
Major General, USA
Acting Commandant



nce upon a time, there was a
military spouse who wanted to
help others. She needed a plan.
Her friends also wanted
to help...

TABLE OF CONTENTS

COMMAND MESSAGE	5
TABLE OF CONTENTS	7
PROJECT PURPOSE.....	9
ADVOCACY SKILLS	13
SPOUSE SUCCESS.....	19
MILITARY LIFE'S TRANSITIONS.....	27
EDUCATION	33
HEALTHCARE.....	39
INSTALLATION LIFE	45
GLOSSARY.....	49
APPENDIX	51



LIGHTING THE WAY FOR OUR FUTURE MILITARY FAMILIES

PROJECT PURPOSE



military spouses EVOLVE. We adapt. Often during hardships, and occasionally in the worst of situations, we overcome while building our lives and strong families. We create communities and opportunities. No form of measurement can completely capture the value of our efforts. Military life offers chances and challenges. Military spouses make the most of them all.

The AY21 Spouse Project Committee recognizes the significance of this year. The 2020-21 term of our spouses' participation in the Army War College occurs during a global pandemic and political turbulence. Our year at Carlisle Barracks, PA looks a lot different than what we'd anticipated. In true military spouse fashion, though, we are powering through and making the most of our time here. We'll be prepared for the next phase of our military lives.

2021 is also the twentieth year since the 9-11-2001 terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, DC. As we leave here this summer, we will organize and participate in memorials and events to observe this significant milestone. It changed us and our lives forever. We will reflect on our families' place in the history that was the Global War on Terror and decide where we belong in its current and future iterations.

Many of us have spent two decades as wartime military spouses. Just seeing that in print is jarring, right? A generation at war. It's unprecedented in American history. We know many of you are well-aware and have the memories, scars, and closet of military swag to show for it. We'll leave the analysis to the historians, psychiatrists, and sociologists who write about its impact on service members, their spouses, and children. To us, though, it's simply the life we've lived.

We also understand that the youngest spouses in our communities were born after 9-11. Our 'milspouse club' includes Boomers, Gen Xers, Millennials, and Zoomers! How can we build strong communities and support the mission of the military, in spite of the significant differences among our members? Quite simply, we do what military spouses always have done in the past. We continue to adapt and overcome. We capitalize on our strengths and unite based on our common goals.

AY21 SPOUSE PROJECT IDEA



With those goals in mind, and the amazing examples from our mentors, we chose to create a community-building tool for military spouses everywhere. Regardless of your years of experience or level of participation in military life, this tool can help you personally by providing useful dialogue and resources for solving many quality-of-life problems. Further, it can help you to help someone else. This magazine can be used to bridge the gap between the youngest or newest spouse and the most seasoned spouses. As you meet spouses and share information, this magazine can start conversations and provide topics of discussion for meetings and programs both in person and virtually.

At Carlisle Barracks this year we came together as senior spouses from diverse backgrounds and all military branches. We met each other and were amazed at the talent and potential of our group. We're proud of our past achievements and look forward to making a positive impact. Many of us will continue leadership roles and many will take the lead for the first time. We encourage senior spouses to embrace and enjoy their new roles and make the most of their own unique talents.

We chose to title the project "Raise Our Voice" after a lot of discussion of our experiences. The truth is that as military spouses, we've felt shushed. Sometimes, it happened overtly when our service members asked us not to get involved and covertly when our ideas were ignored by senior spouses. Over the years, we learned to 'stay in our lane' and not 'rock the boat'. We didn't want to create problems for our spouses at work and we definitely didn't want to be THAT spouse. Perhaps the time has come for us to speak up without feeling shushed.

Fortunately, because of the challenges of military life, we have learned to be problem-solvers. We know how to handle emergencies, build our networks, and gather our resources. We don't need to stay in our lanes now because we built a completely new course! We know the shortcuts, roads less traveled, paths of least resistance, and much more. We have our own maps now. It's time to share our skills and knowledge and not worry (as much) about being discouraged. As senior spouses, we can raise our voices to improve our lives, our family's experiences, and our milspouse community. We can raise our voices to inspire future leaders among us to make the most of military life's opportunities. We can raise our voices to mentor problem-solving, goal-oriented, and resilient spouses. Let's all raise our voice!

CREATING THE PROJECT

If you've paid attention over the last few years, you've seen that quality-of-life issues for military families have gotten a lot of attention in the media. Whether you tuned in as a parent of an EFMP child or a resident in substandard military housing, you had plenty to follow. Military spouses have taken advantage of a variety of ways to share our stories. Many members of the Spouse Project Committee follow the advocacy of spouses across social media, websites, and podcasts. We are amazed at the dedication of spouses speaking out, solving problems, and shaping policies. So we want to talk about advocacy in our communities. What does it look like? Where is it happening? Where is it not happening? And why?

When we started the discussion of advocacy, plenty of ideas came up about what it means. Advocacy seems to be one of those words with many connotations. In our group, depending on personal experiences, the word conjured up both positive and some really negative feelings. We even thought about deleting the word completely and copying all the synonyms from the thesaurus that meant standing up for ourselves and speaking out for others. The survey results reflected the same conflicted interpretations of its meaning.

Finally, we decided to use the word **ADVOCACY** and provide our own definition. Our working definition of advocacy includes all that we do to solve our problems, the processes we use to improve our lives and the lives of our families, and also sharing those experiences with others to help them make the same improvements in their own lives. Helping ourselves, loving our families, and building our community. It's speaking out, but much more. It's all the preparation that goes into applying those skills. It's overcoming doubts and fears. It's improving another person's situation. It's meeting someone at their lowest point and picking up their burden for a while. Advocacy is so many things. So, what does it look like for military spouses?

"That is a very broad term that means different things to different people. Some people think it is giving info, others think it means an advocate will take up someone's case, other people think it is a euphemism for complaining for Military Families..."

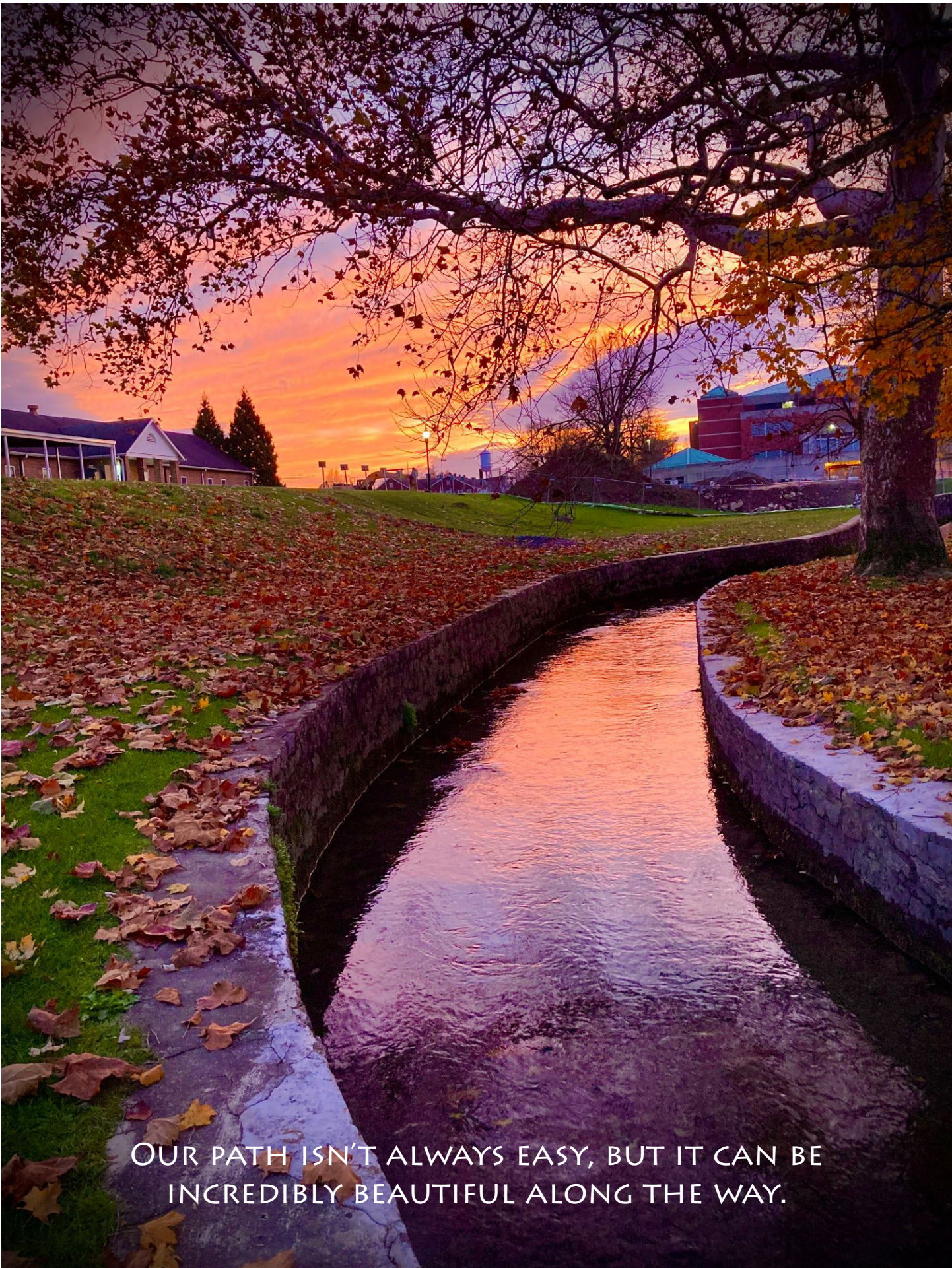
--Army Spouse survey comment

The Survey

We created the AY21 Spouse Project survey to find out what spouses think about advocacy among us and what areas of our lives most often need attention and advocacy. We shared it among current and past Army War College student spouses, our friends, and spouse connections. At its closing date on January 22, 2021, we had 263 responses to guide our advocacy discussion. Our thanks go to all who replied, especially those who responded with comments that enlightened us and sometimes broke our hearts. Your candor helped guide our research and reinforced our appreciation of the diversity within our military spouse world.

[Link to survey demographics](#)





OUR PATH ISN'T ALWAYS EASY, BUT IT CAN BE
INCREDIBLY BEAUTIFUL ALONG THE WAY.



THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT: EVEN SMALL EFFORTS CAN HAVE BIG IMPACTS ON OTHERS.

ADVOCACY SKILLS

We received inspiring, thought-provoking responses to our questions about advocacy skills. We wanted to know if spouses feel they have the skills necessary to be effective advocates as well as how spouses describe those skills. Because most of our responding spouses have decades of experience, most feel like they have acquired many advocacy skills over the years from life lessons and professional growth. Most clearly stated that they became military spouses with very few basic skills to navigate military life. The consensus was also that without other spouses helping them along the way, most would still be struggling.

FOR MILITARY FAMILIES, ADVOCACY IS...

"Key and crucial!" -- Army spouse

"Pointless." --Army veteran and Army spouse

Spouses have differing opinions about the value of advocacy among military families. Many of us have experienced success in speaking up and solving our own problems. And most of us have had friends intervene on our hard days to relieve us of part of our struggle. For some though, this is not the situation. Whether it's a chronic problem over many years like our career advancement, or an acute situation such as losing your shipment during a PCS, some problems are not solved. They're remediated to some degree. And we become cynical. We understand the frustration that is apparent in some comments about the importance of advocacy and we want to try to address it.

In this unique lifestyle, no one understands the struggle like another spouse. It's why we feel comfortable asking our brand-new neighbor to be our ICE, in case of emergency contact. We make connections quickly in our small world and enjoy the way our friends keep showing up at our next destinations. Some spouses live completely immersed in military life and it's all they know. At Carlisle Barracks this year, a few National Guard and IA spouses commented about how living on a military installation and being involved in the family activities is very different than living off post most of their spouse's career. Many spouses feel less connected to the military way of life so when they experience those military life problems, they lack the support system many of us take for granted. It reminds us that while some spouses purposely choose not to participate in all that military life offers, some do not have the choice. As senior spouses, we respect the choices other spouses make about involvement in the military lifestyle. We'll continue to keep reaching out to provide as much support as we can to all spouses, regardless of where they are in our orbit.

"I feel we have an amazing cadre of milspouses that could run a small country... No one advocates for milspouses better than milspouses"

-- Army spouse

"...Unless we all advocate for positive changes from the inside, we (the true experts on military family life) will never achieve the kinds of supports and systems that are vital to retaining service members, ensuring that our military children have the same opportunities as their peers, and that spouses are able to utilize their considerable skills, talents, training, and education in ways that best support our community. Advocacy can be supported in many ways, from leadership truly listening to their command, to making space for family members to be heard and considered as well." --Navy spouse

"Advocacy is an important aspect of military life. As a military spouse, especially one married to a military leader, I consider it a privilege to often have the chance to advocate on behalf of other military spouses and families. I fear these days, however, that military family advocacy is losing some of its impact and honesty. I see outside organizations "advocating" for service members, military spouses, and military families based on commercialism or attaining grants. These outside organizations are shaping a narrative that I do not recognize as a 30+ year military spouse. I see them using their platforms to exploit military families and divert resources for military family programs away from our Soldiers and Families. I think military family advocacy is on the brink of becoming an exploited and commercial endeavor. I worry about how we can take it back and employ advocacy to better serve Army families."
-- Army spouse

Senior military leaders say that recruitment and retention of the best possible service members is vital to mission success. As a logical conclusion, the strength of military families, which is directly correlated to military retention, is vital to the military mission. Military leaders should endorse and invest in adding better options and improving existing programs that directly involve spouses and children of service members.

Authentic advocacy is vital in our communities. We saw repeatedly that spouses want to speak for ourselves and use our own experiences to shape changes in military family policies. When decisions are made, we need seats at the tables where important discussions happen. We don't want the filter of corporations, the media, agencies, or other organizations. When the story of military family is told, we should be telling it. As busy as this life is, we can still take the time to answer the surveys, send the ICE comments, write emails, call, and attend the Town Hall meetings. Take turns! We can't attend everything,



so organize and alternate the schedule. Our voices must be the ones that reach the upper atmosphere where policies are made.

"I feel like it depends heavily on what job your spouse holds in the Army. If he is a commander, as a spouse I feel like I'm invited to the discussion table. When he is not in command roles then I am viewed as a nobody. I find this frustrating and sad. Frustrating because when my hubby is in command I am busy directly serving families in his unit. When he's not in command I feel like I have the time to focus on bigger issues to advocate for. It's sad to me because again my value is placed on my husband and his job. It's 2020, I have been a spouse, mother, volunteer, entrepreneur through countless moves and deployments. I have massive experience and the ability to see the bigger picture. My experience is my own and my value should not involve my husband at all."
-- Army spouse

ADVOCACY MOTIVATION

"It's lacking - but not for the fault of those who advocate. It's because people don't want to get involved and think someone else will take care of it." -- Army spouse

"It's very important but needs to be done carefully with a true vision towards helping others not for self glorification." -- Army spouse

Motivated young spouses encounter roadblocks to connecting and supporting other military spouses and families. SFRG leaders understand the struggle of keeping the roster updated. With the constant turnover in the units and occasional reluctance of service members to share their spouses' contact information, simply welcoming new families to the organization can be a challenge. Authentically caring for military families and being a servant leader will attract and encourage reluctant spouses and service members. Senior spouses who show sincere interest in those families will improve participation in unit family activities, foster trust in the Command Team, and help achieve the military mission.

"There needs to be more. Many are struggling with issues yet say nothing in fear of hurting their spouses' career. There needs to be a safe place for military spouses to report issues or receive help without feeling like they will get "in trouble"."

-- Army spouse

"People are afraid to speak out because of repercussions." -- Army spouse

"Did you ever consider your spouse's rank and/or career when deciding how or whether to take reasonable steps to solve your military life situations? Why or why not?" -- Advocacy survey question

Talking about our spouse's career is a sensitive topic in our survey, to say the least. It's one of the aspects of military life we've learned to navigate: the rules, spoken and unspoken, about what we should do and say. Let's be honest, the rules also change based on where our service members are in their career paths. While spouses certainly have no rank, senior spouses feel a little less inhibited towards the end of the military highway. For lots of reasons!

The question about rank received some strong comments. They were split between about half who said "ABSOLUTELY" and the rest who said "NEVER" depending on their interpretation of the question. Some thought it meant to USE a service member's rank/career to solve their problems. While that was not what we intended it to mean, we are thankful for the discussion that followed. Our unclear question was to find out whether or not spouses think about harming the careers of their service members when solving problems. The word 'rank' still seems to trigger some strong feelings in our spouse community. Even though we enjoy all-ranks spouse clubs and SFRGs, some people still assign some level of power to rank. Eliminating this in spouse circles will take some more time and effort on our part. Strong and effective advocacy can occur when we focus on each person's situation individually.

"Absolutely. We are regularly reminded that what we say and do can reflect negatively on our husbands." -- Army veteran and Army spouse

"No, I dislike spouses who think that their spouse's military rank gives them a right take a stand. Treat all members with respect equally. Stop offering high ranking people an easy way out of a difficult process. If the high ranking people don't have to go through difficult processes then they will never become more efficient." -- Army spouse

Spouses stated in the survey that they were most comfortable assisting others in situations where they either had professional training or life experience. Part of being effective advocates is harnessing our knowledge and researching to gather information. As we experience our own challenges, we're building our sharing library of contacts, checklists, and strategies. We were encouraged by the number of committed and giving spouses in the survey who described intervening in some dire situations for other spouses. Our military spouse community is full of servant leaders who share information and encouragement freely.

In describing situations where they chose not to intervene, spouses repeated one word many, many times. DRAMA. Most specified that this was the one reason they chose to stay out of a situation. Senior spouses also believe that we should not be a person's first phone call when they have a problem. We expect a level of problem solving before a person reaches out for assistance. Also, spouses were careful about any situations that could negatively affect their spouse's work situation. They offered resources and referrals, but did not become involved on a personal level.

"Some people just want to vent and not put in the hard work to solve the problem." – Army spouse

"I think at times it is okay to politely distance yourself from situations that you may not have the skill set to assist or if the individual constantly rejects assistance. At that point I think giving referrals and contact information for professionals or experts would be appropriate." – Army spouse

"After 20 years, you learn to identify those that really are seeking help and those that are just complaining. I'm all about helping people that are willing to also put in the effort and time for themselves, Also sometimes people just need a direction to go in and they realize they can handle to themselves so there is no need to get involved!" -- Army spouse

ADVOCACY SKILLS

"I'm not sure that spouses are given enough resources to be able to be advocates. But I also don't know that everyone wants that role." – Army spouse

"I feel like most advocacy is done with poor presentation. I feel like the leaders responsible for receiving the messages are really more interested in appearing like they care than actually solving the concerns. The lack of solutions is then dismissed citing not understanding or having a clear picture of the concern because of poor presentation. It's a vicious cycle of leaders appearing concerned and advocates feeling dismissed." --Army spouse

"I don't think anyone truly knows what they are getting in to when they first start their journey as a military spouse. Because issues pertaining to the military lifestyle can be so different from those encountered in the civilian world, no matter how strong your advocacy skills are, you sometimes don't know where you need to speak up in order to get the results you desire." -- Navy spouse

Knowing how to navigate life as a new military spouse involves learning how things operate ideally --and in reality. That kind of knowledge is acquired over time with new experiences. Most survey commenters say that the ability to advocate is a combination of the knowledge of

how things work in military life and the personal skills necessary to solve problems. Many responses point out that there is a big difference between solving military life problems and professional and civilian problems. The skills can overlap, but military life issues are complicated by difficulties such as command hierarchy, politics among spouses, and fear of repercussions, all of which can impact a service member's career. A few spouses believe the military makes life much more complicated than it should be. Imagine that!

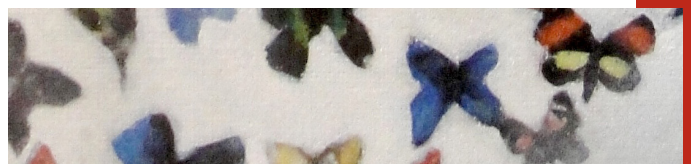
"Spouses think going to Facebook and social media is the correct way to "advocate" for themselves. They need to be informed of where to go and how to do it." -- Army spouse

Along with advocacy skills, many responders noted that knowing where to advocate is as important as knowing how. Generally, most believe negative venting on social media can be counter-productive to solving problems. Going viral has its limitations. We have many opportunities to join advocacy groups and programs online where solution-oriented discussions take place.

"...There should be more leadership training and education for spouses. Not just during times when our Soldiers go to school. Our leader spouses provide incredible leadership, yet they do not view themselves as leaders. This is a huge injustice to these spouses who lead spouse club boards, advise battalions and brigades and then when their Soldier retires, they take entry level jobs because they feel like they don't have any skills when in fact they could lead successful businesses and organizations and continue substantial advocacy work in the civilian world and our government." --Army spouse

"If we want leaders to stay in the Army and lead we need to make it worth it for spouses. We need to legitimize spouses as community leaders alongside their husbands and empower them to advocate. Each generation of military spouses makes their mark

"I think spouses should be advocates for the areas in their life they are passionate about. Get involved. Find ways to make your voice heard. Get to know the leaders in your community and attend meetings where you can speak up. Venting on social media is not being an advocate, that is being a complainer. Find the person(s) that can help you solve the problem. Problems will never get fixed if the leadership doesn't know about them. Be persistent--the squeaky wheel gets the grease. But always advocate in a professional manner and be armed with facts that support your cause." --Army spouse



on the lives for future generations. I see more and more young spouses not contributing at all. This trend will create a gap in growth for our future military families. The Army has an opportunity to set the leadership standard by creating true servant leader teams where spouse leadership is truly valued and equates to real skills and experience in the civilian world to prime them for larger public service roles post Army career. When spouses don't feel effective in advocacy efforts in the Army, they give up." – Army spouse

Effective advocacy helps both the advocate and the recipient grow and become better problem solvers. When we advocate for ourselves, we're modeling behavior for others to see. Our children learn to speak up for themselves by watching us. As senior spouses, when we use our voices to help younger and newer spouses, we show how being servant leaders can build communities and enrich the lives of others. Senior spouses and Family Programs across all military branches design mentorship and leadership programs to help spouses learn personal skills and enhance their leadership qualities. Check with your SFRG, Family Programs office, Chaplain, and MWR for more information. If you don't find a program, start one!

Skills and personal qualities included in the survey comments:

- Adaptability, assertiveness, ability to find services, creativity, flexibility
- Friendliness, Time management, financial planning, emotional wellness, tact
- Being well informed is the best skill
- Asking more experienced and knowledgeable military spouses for advice
- Most importantly, 'staying in your lane' is important
- Be a bridge for others by sharing knowledge
- Following up when process stalls, knowing your rights
- Willingness to learn and be corrected
- Persistence, mental toughness, finding the positives in difficult situations
- Confidence, and interpersonal skills, public speaking
- Willingness to not take no for an answer and to go over someone's head if and when necessary.
- Patience, tenacity, organizational capabilities, politeness, diligence
- Mental fortitude, emotional intelligence, exceptional communication skills, research and analysis skills
- A love of learning, interpersonal skills, teamwork, facilitation, negotiation and influence, resiliency, and empathy, attention to detail, financial literacy
- Knowing how to create the document/paper trail
- Working in partnership with the people who might solve my problems rather than making it oppositional
- Project management skills, critical thinking, being proactive
- Ability to understand systems/hierarchies to effectively and creatively problem solve
- Self motivation, self reliance, networking skills
- Connections to the right people
- Ability to develop rational expectation management
- Ability to mentor other spouses and socially understand what's expected of a spouse
- Being able to have difficult discussions with people
- Understanding that not everyone wants to help you even if it's their job
- Problem solving skills (clearly identifying the problem, generating possible solutions, weighing the pros/cons of the options, deciding on the best course of action, implementing the action and evaluating the outcome
- Willingness to include spouses of all ranks as leaders
- Being involved in your spouse's career, Good relationship with spouse
- Knowing God is bigger than any of my challenges
- A pinch of sweet talking

DEALING WITH FRUSTRATION

"I believe focusing on skills actually contributes to difficulty when problems arise and families face hard times--lacking the skills can trigger feelings of failure or a reluctance to ask for help. Access to mental health resources and regular therapy for all members of the military and their families would be more valuable than any single skill in coping with military life."
– Army spouse

Finally, facing any problem can lead to levels of frustration that compound the original situation. As some spouses mentioned, military problems usually occur in clusters. They usually involve a PCS, too. Military life has seasons and cycles. Being an advocate for younger spouses can include things like PCS Prep sessions and Back to School events. As senior spouses, we have learned to roll with some of the cycles, building notebooks and supply closets as we went along. Share

those. Look out for the lost expressions in the Spring and the frazzled looks in the late Summer. Advocating for each other can be simply anticipating problems and proactively addressing them.

When we reach the limit of our energy, we need each other more than ever. A favorite military spouse blogger talks about finding and being a 2 a.m. friend. All military spouses need that kind of friend on the days our frustration overwhelms us. Even though we frequently offer to help others, senior spouses admit that we are reluctant to ask for help. In reality, reaching out for help shows other spouses that it's acceptable, positive, and healthy. If junior spouses see us only offer help and never seek it ourselves, they don't see us being vulnerable. Many of us believe we should model perfection because that's how we interpreted the lives of senior spouses we respect. However, it's more meaningful and authentic to show others our strength and our vulnerability.

“Commands do not truly listen to spouses who advocate for change. Spouses and family members are the best resources for information, but they are often left out of any real conversation about how to make family life better even though family dissatisfaction is often a reason for service members leaving active duty.”
-- Navy Veteran and Army Spouse

NEXT STEPS

Sometimes the recommended methods to solve our problems do not work and we need to consult experts and/or higher authorities. If you exhaust your usual channels, such as the garrison commander's office, local patient advocates, school liaisons, military housing representatives, or your spouse's chain of command, you might need to take additional steps for help. Many military units have a legal staff with a JAG officer. The JAG staff can sometimes provide general information about some of the military life questions we have. Your garrison may also have JAG offices where you can meet with an expert to ask questions about your issue. They will not provide legal representation, but you can receive helpful information from them.

When you have exhausted all other options or you don't feel any other recourse, contacting your government representatives might be necessary. Many of our magazine sections include contact information for US Congressional Committees that govern that issue. Some helpful strategies could be to contact all Congressional Representatives for your installation and for where you and your spouse are registered to vote. It's also a good idea to reach out to their local offices first. The staff there can provide you contact information for the military liaison in their staff. Usually, one staffer deals with military service members and families. You can also reach out to state and local officials, depending on the situation. If you contact any staff by phone, follow up with emails summarizing your conversations and important information. When providing them with information, remember that everything will become public record, so be factual and professional.

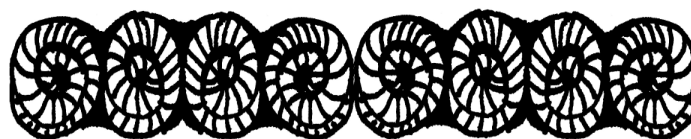
[Click here for Congressional Committee Information](#)

RESOURCES

TedxTalk- “Your power determines your range.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEDgtjpycYg> How to speak up for yourself by Adam Galinsky. Learn about the Mama Bear Effect in advocating for others!

TedxTalk- The power of vulnerability by Brené Brown. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzIF7o> The 9:00 mark is definitely for military spouses and being authentically and imperfectly courageous.

Self-Advocacy skills interview- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5bRRGsaO5E> The examples are a little strange, but the skills are on point.



WE METAMORPHOSE AND
GROW ROOTS NO MATTER
WHAT OR WHERE.



SPOUSE SUCCESS

MILITARY SPOUSE SUCCESS



Choosing to love a military service member does not wholly define us. Military spouses are a unique and diverse group of individuals, spanning multiple ages, races, genders, religions, etc. It is an incredibly broad group of individuals brought together by our desire to support the military through love. And from this love, we bring a multitude of hopes, dreams, and desires.

The Spouse Success section of our survey was one of the most popular and most emotionally driven. For 59% of responses, it was either the most significant life issue or the runner-up. As we built this year's spouse project and worked to select the most appropriate name, the voices of the military spouses and their continual desire for success spoke out to us – and LOUDLY!

For this magazine, we defined Spouse Success as individual success that a military spouse desires to achieve while supporting the service member. Additionally, after receiving the survey feedback, we decided to break down this section into three subsections: Career, Education, and Entrepreneurship.

CAREERS



The ability for many military spouses to maintain a stable career with growth potential has been difficult. Survey responses that range from lack of spouse support, PCS moves, additional volunteer duties, and employment discrimination show the frustration of many military spouses as they desire to advance their own career alongside the service member's career.

The Data



A study by Hiring Our Heroes and the Department of Defense surveyed over 1,200 military spouses and found that 71 percent of respondents had more formal education than needed for their current position, 69 percent had more work experience than required, and spouses with higher degrees were even more likely to be unemployed or underemployed.¹ These stark statistics imply that the military spouse community is educated and experienced, but troubled to find and keep gainful employment.

Further, the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF at Syracuse University) created a case study to specifically understand the needs and problems of the military spouse community. The study explains that military spouses are more likely to be unemployed than their civilian counterparts (at a rate of 23-26% over the last five years).²

IVMF also provides numerous resources not only for military spouses, but also for employers to better understand the military spouse community and the benefits of hiring from this talented, untapped pool of potential employees. Much of the solution will have to stem from employers understanding the commitment, resilience, engagement, and diversity of the military spouse community.

Open Your Eyes and Ears

In an interview with Eryn Wagon, who supports military family issues as the Director of Government Relations for Military Family Policy and Spouse Programs, she gave us some insight for military spouses wishing to navigate the career waters. She illustrates how military spouses can turn our passion for advocacy into a rewarding



career. Although challenging, Wagon suggested spouses should keep their options broad. "Initially, I had a very narrow view of where I wanted my career to go, and I didn't want to veer off that course. The military forced me to be more flexible in that vision which was more of a blessing than a curse. Opening up my career options made me realize I have a lot more professional interests I can explore and the skills I have built in my experience can be transferable while still having upward mobility," says Wagon.

Widening your options of career choices can help you to open doors to careers you never knew existed. One way to explore career options is to try the Occupational Outlook Handbook produced and updated by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>). This resource provides a wealth of information about career fields, future outlooks, and necessary skills and experiences to succeed in each.



Network, Network, Network

Professional growth cannot be accomplished without the help of other people, so networking is very important in building a career. Getting to know people in your desired career field, in potential companies you'd like to work for, or in positions you may like to hold can be a great way to learn more and get your foot in the door.

According to Wagnon, "networking is vital to professional development for anyone and everyone. It is even more important when you're in a highly mobile lifestyle like the military. This will help you learn about new career fields, stay relevant in your current field, find new opportunities, and it'll be easy to find a support system of other military spouses facing the same challenges."

LICENSING & CERTIFICATION



An additional concern of military spouses found from the USAWC survey is the ability to obtain and transfer professional licensing when moving from state to state. Two of the most popular professions, healthcare and teaching, require professional licensing that differs among states. This causes a strain due to the studying and financial requirements each time a spouse moves to a new location. Additionally, this causes difficulty due to loss of income during the delayed employment after arrival in a new state.

According to the Blue Star Families 2020 Survey, nearly 23 percent of respondents claimed they were living separately from their spouse, and 41 percent stated their reason was for the military spouse to maintain a career.³ Professional licensing is one of the barriers that would increase the possibility of a spouse not moving with the service member to a new state.

As such, many states have agreed to allow reciprocity for professional licensing across borders. The chart found here https://www.veterans.gov/milspouses/military_spouse_txt.htm lists the laws established in each state with links to more detailed information. Additionally, military branches have established a reimbursement policy of up to \$1,000 to help military spouses pay for fees associated with transferring professional licensure between states (<https://myseco.militaryonesource.mil/portal/content/view/8576>).

EDUCATION



Although many military spouses have already completed their educational journey and are looking for careers, many haven't started a degree or are still working on completing their degree, and they are looking for support and resources to assist their endeavors. The access to and ability to complete a degree program was another difficulty discovered in the USAWC survey. Respondents discussed troubles with transferring educational credits, using the GI Bill, and student loan debt.

Resources exist for military spouses to assist with exploring career and educational fields, workforce development, and budgeting for educational expenses. MySECO (<https://myseco.militaryonesource.mil/portal/content/general/47>) offers numerous articles, webinars, coaching sessions, and tests to assess the military spouse's educational desires.

Now, more than ever, military spouses have the opportunity to attend classes online and fulfill their dream of obtaining a college degree. When selecting an online university, we should always ensure that the school is regionally accredited and has a good reputation before applying and paying for school.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

"We always move before I can become vested in my retirement plan." – Army veteran and Army spouse

Many military spouses choose entrepreneurship to overcome career and other military life challenges. Sometimes, operating our own business offers more flexibility and allows us to adapt to PCS routines and deployments. While entrepreneurship has become more common in our community, it's not without its own difficulties. Securing approval from installations or housing companies can take months. Paying business licenses and transporting inventory are also expensive with frequent relocations. In the past, spouses could be denied the ability to operate businesses on installations if similar products were sold at the Exchange. Now, through a new initiative, qualified veterans and military spouses can sell their products through AAFES.

While the freedom and flexibility of entrepreneurship are attractive, the risks of starting and operating a business are real. Many successful military spouse entrepreneurs use the power of networking and mentorship. They also harness social media and military family loyalty to succeed. Several influential spouse entrepreneur organizations advocate for improvements from Congress and the Department of Defense, and corporations. Perhaps one day, business inventories and equipment will be counted as spouse professional gear and business licenses will be reimbursed by the Department of Defense.

“My husband’s swing shift has been a challenge. It has meant that if I were to work outside of the home, ALL of the childcare and logistics would fall on me and me alone because of his changing schedule. I found ways to work from home.”

--Air Force Spouse

THE FUTURE OF MILITARY SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT

Military spouse unemployment and underemployment issues continue to become more visible at the national level. Some support resources stem from veteran-based services, and others are growing from military spouses themselves! No one knows exactly what the future will hold, but with the level of talent within the community, congressional-level discussions and support, and employers starting to take notice, we think the future will only get brighter.

“Military leaders and members of Congress are constantly assessing new opportunities and initiatives to support military spouses in keeping a career on the move. Whether its expansion to current programs, new licensure compacts, or scholarship opportunities, it is hard to stay up to date on all these things,” says Wagnon. She suggests military spouses should subscribe to military-related organizations’ newsletters to stay up to date on the latest information, resources, and opportunities available. We’re grateful to Eryn for her work at MOAA and wish her well in her new position with the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Work proactively to take control over your own personal and professional development. You deserve to achieve your dreams and career ambitions just as much as the military service member that you love. We have included numerous resources with links below and wish you well in your journey!

Sources

1. <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Military%20Spouses%20in%20the%20Workplace.pdf>
2. <https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/article/a-business-case-for-leveraging-military-spouse-employment>
3. https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BSF_MFLS_CompReport_FULL.pdf

Advocating for Spouse Success

- **Organize learning sessions during spouse and unit functions. Invite guest speakers and highlight success stories.**
- **Build your network and share resources with other spouses.**
- **Shop at veteran and spouse businesses and other companies who support military communities.**
- **Volunteer to speak at local schools for career days and business/economics classes**
- **Invite spouses to share their businesses in social media groups**
- **Speak up through surveys, ICE comments, and meetings to improve policies on installations**
- **Contact policy makers to encourage improvement for spouse opportunities**

CAREER

[Blue Star Families](#)

Founded in 2009 by military spouses with you in mind, Blue Star Families empowers military families to thrive by connecting them with their civilian neighbors

[FourBlock - Military Spouse Career Readiness Program](#)

has joined forces with national learning company Prepare To Launch U to create a comprehensive, instructional career transition program for military spouses looking to return to work or pivot into new careers.

[Hire Heroes USA Free Services - Military Spouse Employment](#)

Hire Heroes USA has been helping veterans, military and spouses for 10+ years. They are fighting veteran and military spouse unemployment and underemployment.

[Hiring our Heroes](#)

Hiring our Heroes offers resources for your career journey. HOH recognizes that military spouses' careers are impacted by their service members' military service. That's why every HOH event and program is open to military and veteran spouses as well as military caregivers.

[IVMF](#)

The Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF), as part of its broader employment research efforts, and with the generous financial support and collaboration of Prudential Financial, Inc., is exploring the topic of military spouse employment. This "Force Behind the Force" series includes a collection of complimentary products geared toward educating employers, hiring managers, and human resource professionals interested in hiring and retaining military spouses.

[Occupational Outlook Handbook](#)

Research hundreds of occupations to learn about job descriptions, work environments, educational and licensing requirements and salaries.

[Military Spouse Employment Partnership](#)

The Department of Defense Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP) connects military spouses with hundreds of partner employers who have committed to recruit, hire, promote and retain military spouses.

[Military.com - Military Spouse Employment](#)

Find military spouse employment resources and tips from experts. Get tips on building a resume and standing out in an interview.

[MOAA – \(Military Officers Association of America\)](#)

The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) is the country's leading organization protecting the rights of military servicemembers and their families.

[MySECO](#)

The Department of Defense Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program provides education and career guidance to military spouses worldwide and offers comprehensive resources and tools for all stages of your career progression.

[USAJOBS - Military Spouses](#)

USAJOBS lists jobs in the federal government. If you're a military spouse, you may be eligible to apply using a non-competitive process designed to help you get a job in the federal government.

[USO Pathfinder Transition Program](#)

The USO Pathfinder® Transition Program extends the USO experience to active duty, Reserve, National Guard and military spouses by offering professional development services throughout the duration of the service member or military spouse's career, as well as when they transition out of the military and settle into their new communities.

[Vets2Industry](#)

The FREE resource library for active, guard, reserve, veteran, military-spouse, dependent children, Blue-Star & Gold-Star Families, and caregivers. Providing knowledge, connections, opportunities

and, more importantly, hope.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Military Spouse Chamber of Commerce <https://milspousechamber.org>

MilitaryOneSource portal- <https://myseco.militaryonesource.mil/portal/content/general/318>

Small Business Administration - <https://www.sba.gov/>

SCORE network for small business mentorship - <https://www.score.org/>

Rosie Network – <https://therosienetwork.org/service2ceo>

NVBDC marketplace <https://nvbdc.org/uncategorized/nvbdc-emarketplace/>

Association of Military Spouse Entrepreneurs- AMSE- <https://amse.co>

AMSE 2020 Impact Report <https://www.amse.co/2020impactreport>

TedxTalk with Cameron Cruse <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40TM657xq3I>

LICENSURE

License Finder

<https://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Training/find-licenses.aspx>

Use the CareerOneStop License Finder tool to research your state's rules and regulations, and identify the requirements, contact information and next steps for your current or future occupation.

Military Spouse Interstate License Recognition Options

<https://www.veterans.gov/milspouses/>

Because of the delays and expense involved in re-licensure, many states have implemented or are in the process of implementing license portability measures for military spouses that may include temporary licenses, expedited licenses or obtainable endorsement. The Military Spouse Interstate License Recognition Options provides up-to-date legislation and licensure information for your specific state.

Spouse Licensure Reimbursement Policies

<https://myseco.militaryonesource.mil/portal/content/view/8576>

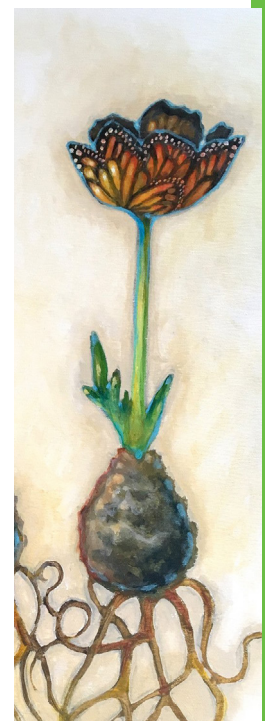
If your career requires a professional license or certification, your service branch can help reimburse costs that come up when you PCS. The specific policy and reimbursement procedures vary by service branch. Each service branch may offer up to \$1,000 in reimbursement per move for spouses who move within the United States or OCONUS to stateside due to a PCS and want to hold the same license or certification in their new location.

EDUCATION

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

<https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>

Military spouses seeking higher education should fill out and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) when applying to colleges.



GI Bill Transfer

<https://www.va.gov/education/transfer-post-9-11-gi-bill-benefits/>

Spouses may be eligible to receive the GI Bill benefits from the service member. Read more about how to transfer GI Bill transfer eligibility.

Identify an Education Path

<https://myseco.militaryonesource.mil/portal/content/general/289>

Prepare for a successful job search by using tools, tips, resources and counseling options. Learn about resumes, networking and interviewing. Find the information and support you need to address any challenges you might face in achieving your employment goals.

MyCAA

<https://mycaa.militaryonesource.mil/mycaa>

The My Career Advancement Account Scholarship Program is a workforce development program that provides up to \$4,000 of financial assistance for licenses, certifications, or Associate's degrees to pursue an occupation or career field.

NMFA Military Spouse Scholarships - National Military Family

<https://scholarships.militaryfamily.org/offers/nmfa-spouse-scholarship/>

NMFA awards can be used for a variety of educational and employment pursuits. Scholarship funds on average are \$1,000 and can be used towards degrees, certifications, licensure, clinical supervision for mental health licensure, CEUs, business expenses and more!

Scholarship Finder

<https://myseco.militaryonesource.mil/portal/spouseprofile/spousefundingsources/search>

The SECO Scholarship Finder makes searching for education funding and career development opportunities fast and easy. Search for financial assistance resources and professional development opportunities offered specifically to military spouses and family members. Populate the fields below for your results.





OUR COLLECTIVE PAST BECOMES OUR LEGACY LEFT BEHIND
TO HELP FUTURE SPOUSES NAVIGATE THE UNKNOWN.



HOME IS WHERE WE MAKE IT; WE FIND NEW DOORS
AND CLOSE OLD ONES.

MILITARY LIFE'S TRANSITIONS

PERMANENT CHANGE OF STATION- (PCS)



Sometimes, we have to leave our friends. Sometimes, they leave us behind. That's the way military spouse friendships go. Thanks to the PCS, though, we all have friends scattered over the world and places to stay wherever we travel. As much as we try to focus on the benefits of frequent relocations, they are a major stressor for military families.

"The most common and significant problem that repeatedly shows up for our family is the inadequate amount of time to plan and prepare for a transition." – Army spouse

"Unpredictability about the future of my spouse's next position, i.e. not knowing where we will move to and having to quickly research new living areas, schools, and potential jobs" – Army spouse

According to the Spouse Project survey results, 37% of respondents say PCSing is either the most difficult area of military life or the runner-up. 19% reported that it was a problem, but easy to solve. 41% identified PCSing most significant area for creating financial hardships. All these results are understandable after experiencing a few moves back and forth across the country or around the world. And moving during the COVID shutdown? A real nightmare. It's also easy to see how PCSing causes ripple effects in our lives and creates other problems for our careers, educating our children, and maintaining financial stability for our families. It's like the center of a wheel where all other major problems connect. Relocating every two years on average compounds all other life difficulties for military families.

"...the unknowns... Not enough time for families especially when we have to find schools, housing, drs, etc... The constant unknowns and less time between knowing is the hardest thing."

– Army spouse

"I often volunteer my time to assist with issues related to overseas PCS with pets—the poor animals are collateral damage due to no fault of their own."

-- Army spouse



The PCS process has improved in some ways over the last few years, and we are hopeful the impending changes from TRANSCOM will bring about more positive results for all PCSing families soon. One military spouse, in particular, has been instrumental in bringing about some major changes since 2018. Megan Harless was named the [Military.com 2020 Spouse Changemaker](#) for her work in bringing about significant PCS reform. She's an Army veteran and Army spouse who turned her PCS difficulties into an advocacy career. As a free-lance writer and member of the advisory committee for TRANSCOM, Megan has been our voice at the highest levels of decision making.

We want to highlight Megan's example of advocacy by learning about her motivation and strategies in helping military families.

Question 1. What prompted you to write your letter that you posted at Change.org? Can you describe your motivation in making a public statement about how bad the PCS process had been for you and other military families?

So, the letter/petition was written/posted in August 2018. I had several friends that had moved in 2018 who just had a horrible experience. It seemed as if every story you read in the spouse/family groups had been horrible stories as well. For me, it felt like we had hit rock bottom in the process and that something needed to be changed. I wrote the open letter and posted it on my blog page, and immediately someone commented "this would would make a great petition!" So I quickly changed it to a petition and posted the link. It was posted on a Friday and thought it would die off in internet land someplace over the weekend (also, my husband was a week away from coming home from deployment #4!). Instead, the petition gained traction and took off getting the attention of members of Congress, the moving industry and Transcom. At first, my goal was just to get the letter in front of someone who could make changes since it was written as a general military families grievance of the moving process. But once I saw how much traction it was getting and how many feathers were being ruffled, I felt a sense of responsibility to see this thing through (whatever this "thing" was at the time) to make sure that it wasn't just lip service, that real and meaningful changes would actually be made.

Question 2. Your petition has led to major life changes for you and advocacy seems to be your profession these days. We're grateful for all the work you do! What are some lessons you can share about turning a passion into a career or long-term way of life?

I joke that my advocacy is "accidental advocacy"! First, I would say that when you want to make a statement or advocate for change, be willing to go the distance. Anyone can make some noise, but it takes time, determination, courage, and a support team to really see things through long term. Advocacy work is like a marathon. Real change doesn't happen overnight. So

when you start, be willing to be in it for the long haul. The next thing I would say is be ready to learn everything about the topic/change you are pursuing. I think what helps me is that I am a former Army Transportation officer. I was trained to move things. So the process and terminology used isn't foreign to me, and the concept was something I already knew about. But even then there is still so much I have learned about the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, the regulations, and how the business side of the process really works. The third most important thing is that while we want to go in charging- pointing fingers, cultivating relationships with others involved is important. It doesn't matter what I say if they aren't willing to listen and understand, and vice versa. Everyone has to be willing to work together for the change.

Question 3. Our project is designed to encourage senior spouses to advocate for newer and younger military families. What advice do you have for us when we work with younger spouses?

The number one thing I say often and to senior leaders of our military is to remember what it was like when we were the little person at the bottom of the totem pole. Remember the life experience that our younger families have compared to ours. With

"I remember how scary it was in the beginning years with PCSing. Social media didn't exist and there were not many online resources yet. It's sad and scary to feel all alone and not have anyone to turn to for help. Our active duty spouses already have a lot in their plates. It's up to us spouses to help each other out." -- Air Force spouse

PCS advocacy, I always think back to "would a new spouse/service member know what to do in this issue?" If not, then there is an opportunity to change something or create better education and information dissemination. A real quick case in point here - years ago the Army decided to do away with advance DLA for PCS's because every service member has the Government Travel Card and can use that instead. However, folks who made that decision did not realize that many younger families who do not have the built up savings account or are not financially stable use DLA for housing deposits, utility deposits, cleaning fees, or additional hotel days that may be needed - expenses that could not be put on the GTC, and most likely a \$2,000 rent deposit that an E3 with a spouse and 2 young kids could not float for 4 weeks until they received the

reimbursement from their losing location home deposit. Being able to explain this situation to the Army G4 (GEN Russell at the time) and having him understand the importance of having DLA available as an advance made a huge difference. The following week GEN McConville announced at AUSA in 2019 that advanced DLA would be reinstated for Soldiers. So, as you go through and advocate for change, advocate for young families, remember what it was like being in their shoes, what it was like being new to the military, new to the unit and not knowing anything. What can you do to help make things easier and better for them?

Also, you can find her blogs at <https://militaryspousechronicles.com>

HELPFUL RESOURCES TO AVOID AND SOLVE PCSING PROBLEMS:

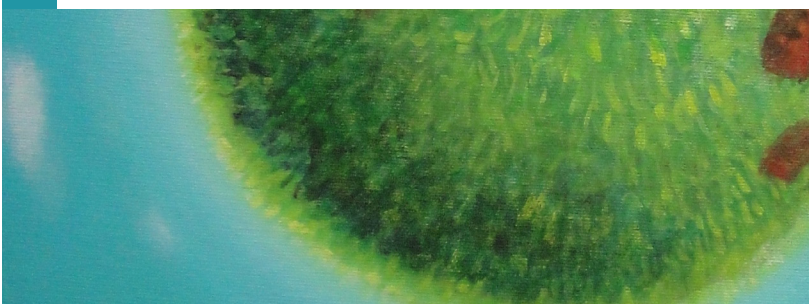
Move.mil- <https://move.mil/> Handy to find and print the current guides, learn the language, and show the moving companies you understand your rights and responsibilities.

<https://www.pcsgrades.com/> Receive help in researching new duty stations

<https://www.gomillie.com/> relocation help for military families

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/moving-housing/moving/>

<https://planmymove.militaryonesource.mil/>



Action plan to advocate for yourself:

1. Know your rights and responsibilities when it comes to dealing with moving companies. These are found at [move.mil](#). Print them for your PCS binder.
2. Be as prepared as possible by using the best system (pre-packing, tracking, traveling, unpacking) that works for you and your family.
3. Keep a PCS folder/binder to maintain the best records. Put it in your car when the packers arrive.
4. Whenever possible, communicate in writing and follow up phone conversations with written summaries in email.
5. Speak up at the first sign of a problem before it escalates by calling and emailing both the moving company supervisor and your military move coordinator.

Action plan to help other spouses:

1. Encourage every service member and spouse to attend the PCS briefing at the Relocation office.
2. Keep a list of helpful contacts at your installation and beyond. Sometimes the person with an answer is in your phone or PCS folder. Depending on the situation, you might share the contact or place a call to ask for information.
3. Host PCS information meetings or social events. For every horror story told, share at least two helpful tips. Share best practices, checklists, contacts, and resources.
4. Offer to bring meals or watch kids and pets on packing and loading days for PCSing families.
5. Offer to be home with a spouse who is alone during packing, loading, and/or delivery. PCSing is not the time to be alone. Having an experienced friend nearby can be very helpful to a new spouse.
6. Encourage families not to vent first on social media or try to shame a company publicly. Sometimes that backfires when simpler solutions can be found.

DEPLOYMENTS AND SEPARATIONS



f all the stressors in military life, deployments are the most intense periods for some of our families. Spouses described difficult operational tempos, single parenting demands, and extreme emotional strain based on deployment and training cycles in all military branches. Many have developed healthy coping strategies for dealing with this kind of stress. They believe supportive relationships with other military spouses were key to living with deployments.

For senior spouses who have decades of experience in managing this phase of life, this is a particularly important opportunity for advocacy. We can certainly empathize with younger and newer spouses whose service members are in harm's way

"Lack of FRG or any kind of support during a deployment. We pretty much PCS'd- were dropped off, he went to war, and we were all alone with no information."

-- Army spouse

and away from home for significant life events. Knowing how and where to find assistance is key for helping spouses deal with deployments. We can meet regularly with our Chaplains, Family Programs personnel, and garrison-level organizations. As spouses in leadership rolls, we can also be familiar with the general training and deployment cycles of service members. It helps us anticipate needs and plan events for families. We must be involved and encourage spouses to connect, look for isolated spouses and families, and offer support to families dealing with training separation or deployments.

"On my worst days, I knew my new best friend next door had my back. We both moved in right before they deployed."

--Air Force spouse

Senior spouses make amazing Care Team volunteers and Family Programs event planners! We know that when those significant days roll around, spouses and families of deployed service members need more love. We can plan Mother's and Father's Day outings, organize help with seasonal chores at home, monitor due dates for pregnant spouses, and much more. Families of our deployed service members must be our priority as command teams and SFRGs.

RETIREMENT



ust as it's been for many of you, life at Carlisle Barracks in AY21 is a little like living in an Instant Pot. We're all home together: service members homeschooling, kids homeschooling, spouses taking classes and/or working from home. Close that lid and add some pressure. Few recreational options available: playgrounds, parks, theaters, restaurants, and social opportunities all closed or limited. Looming changes: PCS? Command? Promotion? Retirement? That's our life. Where are we going? What will life be like when we get there?

"...I believe transitioning into military retirement life, as an active military spouse will be difficult." --Army spouse

A few of us are ready to pull the plug on the military life Instant Pot. Some of us are waiting on news from those Branch Managers to decide our fates. And some are encouraged by finally receiving our dream assignments and think we might have a few more PCSs in our future. We're all thinking about retirement in some way, though.

Transitioning out of the military is not just about the service member changing jobs. The entire family will have to adjust to a new way of life. Resources are available to help the entire family transition away from their current life situation. We can anticipate all the great things about retirement and know there will be a few military life things we'll miss.

Service members will have many resources to prepare them to transition out of military life. A great place to start is here: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/military-life-cycle/separation-transition/> to link to information and benefits. Many of the programs included here are Army-specific, but other branches offer similar resources.

As military spouses, where do we find support? Helpful websites: start here <https://www.milspousemoneymission.org/touchpoints-transitions-landing-page/>

We can attend the retirement planning seminars open to spouses and the Transition Assistance Programs. For Army spouses, here's a sample of what you'll see. <https://soldierforlife.army.mil/Retirement/retirement-planning>

Information about retiree and family healthcare: <https://www.usfhp.com/> and <https://www.va.gov/health/>

Vision and dental care: <https://www.benefeds.com/>

Spouses should also be part of the transition timeline planning. <https://soldierforlife.army.mil/Family> is a great place to start looking for resources for Army spouses. Be informed about the financial aspects of retirement. Sit down together with your service member and the experts to learn about survivor benefits, taxation, disability, healthcare, and retirement pay options. Retirement is not the time to hand all financial decision making to one spouse. Information about the Survivor Benefit Plan: all branches <https://militarypay.defense.gov/benefits/survivor-benefit-program/>

Army specific <https://soldierforlife.army.mil/Retirement/survivor-benefit-plan>

We embrace this change with our military friends and celebrate with those already happily retired. Our spouse community is changing, not disappearing, when our service members retire. Stay connected through Spouse Groups at nearby installations, volunteer with friends at the VA, join a retirement social media group, and keep growing your network of friends. Maybe it's your turn to put the career first. Or finally start that petting zoo behind your forever home. The possibilities are practically unlimited!

MILITARY LIFE CYCLE ADVOCACY

If you have a passion for advocacy, military life at all its phases offers so many ways to help improve lives. Your dedication could lead you to some amazing life-changing opportunities! Whose life will you change?

Gold Star Families	Single service members
EFMP military dependents	International military families
Widows of veterans	Deployed service members
Special needs students	Fisher House families
Young and new spouses	Residents in privatized housing
Families of deployed service members	Wounded, hospitalized, and disabled veterans

Transition resources from our survey responses:

- Care Team- unit-specific groups of trained volunteers who support families in need during emergency situations
- FRASAs- civilian lifesavers attached to military organizations; many positions were eliminated due to budget cuts; if your organization is lucky enough to still have these positions, count your blessings!
- Rear Detachment- the military support system located in garrison when a unit deploys. You'll receive lots of information from them. Make sure you save their contact information and let them know if you travel when your spouse is deployed or training.
- NMFA- National Military Family Association <https://www.militaryfamily.org/> website will connect you with deployment preparation, deployment coping resources, and redeployment help for families in all branches. Also, retirement preparation, marriage and family enrichment, and Gold Star family advocacy

- USO- United Service Organizations <https://www.uso.org/> offers too many amazing services to list here. If a family is in need for any reason, this is a great place to start.
- Red Cross- <https://www.redcross.org/about-us/our-work/military-families.html> support for military families during deployments and emergencies
- TAPS- Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors <https://www.taps.org/> serving Gold Star families
- MilitaryOneSource- <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/> resources for the entire military life cycle
- BlueStar Families- <https://bluestarfam.org/> assistance and policy influencer for military families
- Branch specific military support organizations:
 - Army MWR <https://www.armymwr.com/>
 - Navy FFS https://www.cnrc.navy.mil/ffr/family_readiness/fleet_and_family_support_program.html/
 - Marines MCCS <https://usmc-mccs.org/topics/family/>
 - Air Force A&FRC [https://www.myairforcebenefits.us.af.mil/Benefit-Library/Federal-Benefits/Airman-and-Family-Readiness-Center-\(AandFRC\)](https://www.myairforcebenefits.us.af.mil/Benefit-Library/Federal-Benefits/Airman-and-Family-Readiness-Center-(AandFRC))



OUR CHILDREN, MUCH LIKE DANDELIONS,
CAN GROW ANYWHERE BECAUSE WE SHOW
THEM HOW.



Erinna Price 2015

EDUCATION

EDUCATION

“Military readiness is inextricably bound to military family readiness, and there is no more important consideration for military families than the education of their children.”

-- MCEC_Memo_to_Biden_administration.



American military families celebrate our children every day. The Department of Defense highlights their service during the [Month of the Military Child](#). Our lifestyle provides many opportunities and challenges unique to our military children. They certainly live up to the metaphoric dandelion bloom we use to represent them. And as military spouses, we know we're raising the [next generation of American achievers](#). Many senior spouses who responded to our survey noted that they watched their children leave home to wear the uniform of military service. We're raising many of the next generation of service members and we can be very proud. At any time in the American military, about 80% who join grew up in families where a close relative also served.

More than half (54%) of responding spouses stated that educating their children was the most or second-most difficult military life issue for their family. Many more noted that education problems were intensified by life events like frequent moves and family separations. The challenges begin very early—like finding OCONUS prenatal care and scheduling deliveries during a PCS—and they continue while we help our college age students establish a sense of home when we PCS away from them. Each stage of our children's lives comes with opportunities to overcome problems and grow.

CHILDCARE

[Report on Childcare](#)



Many DoD initiatives for upcoming NDAA involve overcoming inadequate childcare services on military installations. The pandemic multiplied the crisis, but military families describe difficulties wherever they are assigned. Part of their previous changes include giving priority and incentives to Family Child Care providers on installations. Families will continue to struggle with related issues like spouse employment as long as child care options are limited for them.

“Special needs childcare upon arrival at each base during the PCS process was non-existent. There were some briefings that spouses were encouraged to attend, but there was no way I could go. I felt like I missed out on receiving important information. I couldn't attend the newcomer's briefing, nor Heartlink, until months after our arrival. That was only because I was able to finally get our special needs daughter into school so I could go. I felt like I was ignored and left out of an important part of the process upon arrival at each new home.”

--Air Force spouse

SCHOOL



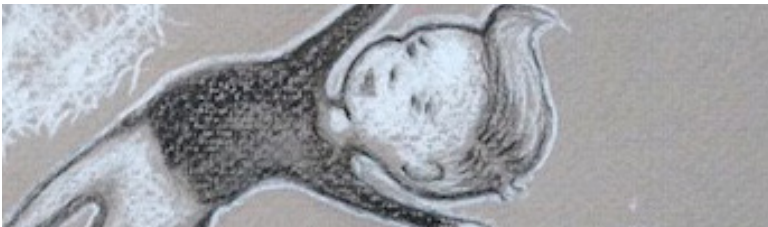
When we arrive at our new installations, an important resource to contact is the School Liaison. They are knowledgeable about education options in the area and can provide up to date information to families. Many incoming families also connect with community groups through social media to ask about school situations before making decisions about their children's education plan for that location.

Whether military families choose DODEA schools, local public and private school options, or homeschooling, we all prioritize our children's needs. Many of our children experience all these options before high school graduation. Parents in the survey described a lack of consistency for their children's schooling experiences. Often, relocations meant kids attending schools where they were either ahead or behind their classmates in the curriculum. Sometimes high school credits don't transfer and differing state requirements have to be repeated after each move. The transition to college is also difficult to manage when families relocate around the time of high school graduation. Every family's experience is unique, yet they describe the decision-making algorithm that includes where to live, how to educate their kids, providing all necessary interventions, and offering extracurricular activities to prepare their children for their future.

“DODEA, it is supposed to be made for military kids but it's rules/ flexibility are way more stringent and inflexible than an average off post school. Should not be this way!”

--Army spouse

Military relocations complicate the process. Each state is responsible for its own education programs. Therefore, it is necessary for you to contact the school district in which your child will attend in order to be connected to a school liaison or counselor to answer specific questions. Unfortunately, most school counselors are not directly linked to the military and might not have all the answers for which you are looking. Each stage of education has its own hurdles, from Pre-K - College.



Education of military children is a priority issue for decision makers in Congress and the Pentagon. For example, Congressional summits and lobbying efforts often focus on improving opportunities and consistency for our children. The [Congressional Military Family Caucus](#) invites advocates and families to share their experiences about topics such as education for children of service members. Organizations such as MOAA and NMFA provide direct connections to Congress and the Pentagon to lobby for improvements in

education. They invite families to join and work together to create positive long-term changes.

Senior spouses can encourage families to explore all options available to them locally and beyond. We can host newcomer events and learning opportunities where families can share experiences and resources. These can initiate positive relationships in our organizations and improve the overall experiences of our families. We don't need to spend lots of money, provide extravagant meals, or entertainment. Simply offering the chance for spouses to meet can go a long way towards building our communities.

[Help your child adjust to military life](#)

SPECIAL EDUCATION/ EFMP STATUS



PCS always comes with a checklist a mile long and lots of change, but for parents needing various types of special education, finding a school with the best services for a child can be very overwhelming.

For children three and under, every state will have its own early intervention program. You will need to contact the early intervention office for the county that you live and get set up with them. They usually have providers that can come to your home, or also programs that your child may be eligible to attend.

For children over three, your special needs child will likely be serviced by the school district that you live in. School districts can vary greatly even in the same geographic area, so how do you find out which schools have the best fit for you child?

One way to get information on schools is to call the school directly and ask to speak to someone in the special education department. A lot of times schools will not be able to answer specific questions about servicing your child, but they should be able to answer general questions regarding how special education is organized and if the school can support the level of support your child needs.

Another way to get information on schools is to look online. There are several sites that rank schools, provide average test scores, and other detailed information about particular schools. These sites should not be the only basis for determining placement for your child, but it can help to give an idea about the school and its priorities.

At many installations, there is a Systems Navigator that can be an excellent resource of information. System Navigators work in the EFMP office at ACS and help families transitioning into the area with specific information about the local area, schools, therapy centers, and more. Not every installation has a Systems Navigator position, but many larger bases do have them.

[The JAG Corps is offering more assistance to families with special needs.](#)

COLLEGE



Navigating the steps between high school and college is definitely difficult for everybody, but for military families it can be complicated even more by our unique situations. Often, PCS-related decisions coincide with their senior year, graduation, or their freshman year in college. We may be simultaneously learning the GI Bill system, FAFSA, and a variety of state education websites. Many of us search for housing options for ourselves and our college students at the same time.

Thanks to their military life experiences, our children seem to view the world differently than many of their non-military friends. Our kids are more likely to apply to and attend schools further away from us. Thanks to the [Higher Education Opportunity Act](#), it is more affordable for them to attend some schools and pay in-state tuition without the restrictive residential requirements. Our military lifestyles helped prepare our children for this significant step towards independence and adulthood. While we have many challenges, we appreciate the experiences our children enjoyed over the years-meeting many friends and seeing a variety of places.

"...Frequent moves made it hard for my child's learning disability to be diagnosed."

--Army spouse

"Transitioning a high school senior. Our children only know the military life and have a hard time transitioning when it's time. We just bought a house to move our child into so she could complete college. Where is home when all they know is moving?"
--Army veteran and Army spouse

Parents responded in our survey with lists of many helpful resources. We appreciate the variety of information they provided.

- MCEC- [Military Child Education Coalition](#) partnership of educators, families, and businesses to improve education for all military children
 - » Purple Star Schools – operating in Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, Ohio, Arkansas, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia (called Military Flagship Schools) and Indiana
 - » [Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children](#)
 - » Communities with Purple Star Schools can help retain bases and attract military families who bring economic benefits to local communities
 - » <https://schoolquest.militarychild.org/> (The tools you need to manage school moves that work for you and your kids.)
 - » <https://www.militarychild.org/webinars> (Webinars for Parents: Study skills for HS students, fostering your child's communication skills to minimize conflict, keys to academic success, dual enrollment vs AP Courses, Scholarship do's and don'ts and communicating with your adolescent child
 - » <https://www.militarychild.org/resources>
- FRSA- especially helpful to newcomers, they provide information about local resources and events
- [DODEA Education Activity-](#) guide for homeschooling parents
- NMFA- [National Military Family Association](#); They participate in Operation Purple, provide childcare financial relief, and resources for special needs children
- Wrightslaw.com- "information about special education law and advocacy for children with disabilities.
- [Partners in Promise](#) - nonprofit organization that specialized in helping military families with education issues
- MIC3- [Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission](#) -government partnership providing resources for military families
- [Understood.org](#)- nonprofit organization specializing in students and adults with disabilities
- [The Jason Foundation](#) – organization that unites students, parents, and educators to help at-risk kids
- [The Trevor Project](#)- hotline and intervention to assist teens and families with LGBTQ issues
- [Center for Parent & Teen Communication](#)- created by the Division of Adolescent Medicine at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
- [Blue Star Families](#) provides important, timely information specific for military families [Report on COVID closings and military readiness](#)
- [All branches school liaison officer directory](#)

Military families with specific issues can follow the Congressional subcommittee hearings about those topics and upcoming changes. They can also communicate with their representatives from their home of record and the states where they reside on Orders.

Congressional committees dealing with DoD schools & education:

Armed Services Committees (subcommittee on personnel) and Appropriations (if funding is involved) (subcommittee on defense)

Senate Armed Services subcommittees <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/about/subcommittees>

SASC hearings <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings>

Senate Appropriations subcommittees, Defense <https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/subcommittees/defense>



House ASC: Mil Personnel <https://armedservices.house.gov/militarypersonnel>

House ASC: Readiness <https://armedservices.house.gov/readiness>

House Appropriations Defense subcommittee <https://appropriations.house.gov/subcommittees/defense-117th-congress>

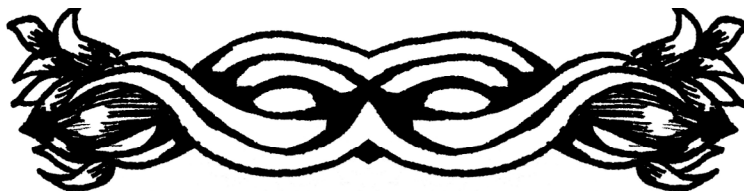
Educators

Many military spouses are educators and deal with the same inconsistent school system opportunities and requirements as they relocate multiple times. While many states are working to transfer certification requirements, spouses find difficulties due to frequent relocations.

Licensing requirements for teachers vary by state, but some states will issue a provisional license if you have a license from another state.

- The [National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification](#) administers an agreement that helps teachers transfer their credentials within member states. Visit its [Interstate Agreement](#) page for details.
- [Department of Defense schools](#) overseas accept teaching licenses from any state or territory as long as the teaching categories are marked on the license.

[Visit this website](#) for a map of the military spouse interstate license recognition options, links to all armed services for the military spouse licensing reimbursement program, links to occupations with interstate reciprocity agreements and links to state occupation license finder.





ack in the day, we
used to walk uphill
both ways in the
dark and snow to
school and now
look how easy it is
with all this new
shiny computer
technology stuff.





CARING FOR OURSELVES MATTERS.
WE HOUSE A VAST SEA OF THOUGHTS THAT
CAN BE CALM OR TURBULENT.

HEALTHCARE



Some of the most gut-wrenching comments from the survey were about mental health and healthcare problems for military families. Many described the stress from a lack of consistent quality medical care at MTFs. The stress is multiplied this year due to the pandemic emergency policies and many families feel pushed to their limits. MTFs and their problems worldwide have not been simple for us to navigate. Combine this inconsistency with PCS requirements: re-start mental health and healthcare, find new providers for family members, spend weeks submitting paperwork, and track down lost records-- and you have what can be just too much at times.

Although the Defense Health Agency (DHA) is working to standardize basic health care services across each MTF, the transformation is not complete; so currently all MTFs are not the same. Some offer a variety of services while others offer just basic services. Do not wait until you have a medical emergency to find this out; be proactive and find out exactly what healthcare services your new MTF provides as soon as you arrive (if not sooner online). Some great resources to use to find this specific installation information are: www.Tricare.mil and the Digital Garrison App for your installation. Schedule an appointment with your PCM and seek out necessary referrals. If you ever find yourself unable to get the information you need, always reach out to the Patient Advocacy Office. The strategies, resources, and links below were recommended by many spouses in our survey.

“...consistency of medical care as we PCS. Waits to get initial appointments, then referrals to specialists, then finally get care just before we PCS to start the process all over.” --Army spouse

Find out how MOAA is lobbying Congress for healthcare improvements for military families. <https://www.moaa.org/content/publications-and-media/news-articles/2021-news-articles/advocacy/moaa-outlines-tricare-mental-health-advocacy-goals/> MOAA is an amazing resource for us and an opportunity to be involved in policy development.

EFMP (EXCEPTIONAL FAMILY MEMBER PROGRAM)



Our survey comments about EFMP included many distressing situations. It's one of the 'unknowns' spouses deal with while learning to navigate the changes in our lives. Also, in our discussions, we noted many common misconceptions about this program. EFMP is a program the Army and other military branches use to ensure proper medical care for family members. The idea behind EFMP is to allow the Army to make sure you and your family are not stationed somewhere that your medical needs cannot be met. In order to do this, the Army needs to know what specific medical needs a particular family member may have. The Army tracks all the information through the EFMP program.

“...the EFMP process to go overseas was a nightmare as I was 8 months pregnant. I felt attacked and vulnerable for being pregnant. The entire process was at the whim of the provider reviewing my file. It was nonsense. Also it was on a joint base.” --Army veteran and Army spouse

This section gives you a little bit of background information if you find yourself needing to enroll in EFMP. At most installations, there are two EFMP offices. There is usually an office at ACS (Army Community Service or other branch-specific offices) and there is usually one at the hospital or clinic. EFMP at ACS usually offers social events, support groups, and other services that are not medical in nature. EFMP at the hospital is typically where you go to fill out initial enrollment paper, renewal paperwork, or other questions dealing with medical issues and EFMP.

EFMP General information link to Appendix

Army EFMP <https://efmp.amedd.army.mil/index.html>

Navy EFMP https://www.cnic.navy.mil/ffr/family_readiness/fleet_and_family_support_program/work-and-family-life/exceptional_family_member.html

Marine Corps EFMP <https://usmc-mccs.org/services/family/exceptional-family-member/>

Air Force EFMP <https://www.airforcemedicine.af.mil/EFMP/>

National Guard and Reserve service members <https://www.tricare.mil/reserve>

In order to qualify for EFMP, a family member needs to have a qualifying condition. These can range from requiring hearing aids to a developmental delay, from speech therapy to organ transplants. Your PCM will tell you if you need to enroll in EFMP, but you can also research your needs online. To enroll in EFMP, you will fill out the DA form 2792-1.

If you search for the form online, you can often find one that is fillable and able to be saved (if you don't want to fill out a paper copy). You will fill out part of the form and your PCM or specialty provider will fill out their part. Once the form is filled out, you submit it back to EFMP at the hospital or clinic. It can take a month or two to be officially enrolled in EFMP, so it's important to begin the process as early as possible. After that you will need to update enrollment every three years, at a minimum.

If you are experiencing difficulties with your EFMP enrollment or other issues regarding EFMP paperwork, the best place to start is the EFMP office at the hospital or clinic of your installation. They can usually help answer questions or direct you to the best place to get your questions addressed. Currently, the Department of Defense is also working to assist military families as we transition from branch specific to DOD EFMP and the Family Member Travel System programs for EFMP continuity with the reduction of family member stress and travel screening time.

This article is about how JAG is beginning to support EFMP families and special education families.

https://www.army.mil/article/238337/special_education_legal_support_now_available_to_efmp_families

Spouses can find plenty of EFMP information online at blog sites and in social media groups. Just like the housing issue, though, there is a lot of confusing information online. It's important to remember where to find accurate information. Sometimes, inconsistency is part of the problem since at each base, and even individuals at the same base, often enforce policies so differently. Kind of like TSA, sometimes a child can go through with a liquid in a bottle and sometimes they can't. Some providers insist a certain condition needs to be enrolled in EFMP and others say it doesn't, so it's easy to see why there is some confusion. Some diagnoses are an obvious enrollment and others aren't.

"(the MTF) discharged a child with a rare genetic condition. They didn't give the parents any information for EFMP, specialty care or support. They just sent them home with a medically fragile child. I called EFMP to get them referred to specialty care (locally) and helped the spouse obtain funds to travel." -- Army veteran, Army spouse

Senior spouses are key players in assisting new and young military families with this confusing topic. We can share accurate and helpful EFMP information, new policy updates, and ask families to share their own stories and feedback with EFMP stakeholders. This information loop should be constantly updated. Wellness Wednesday activities and information blasts are a great way to keep families informed. EFMP intersects many legal and common military life issues such as PCSing, ADA accommodations, and housing on military installations. Be sure to research all the latest EFMP developments to stay informed for your families.

[EFMP Enrollment, Assignment & Support | Military OneSource](#)

[Special Needs Alliance- not military specific, but provides general information](#)

MENTAL HEALTH

In our military spouse community, many of us are struggling. COVID restrictions amplified this in many cases. Although we've made strides in acceptance and transparency in mental health, we have a long way to go to address our needs. Simply put, military families live with several compounding stressful life events and situations. We need advocacy and grace.

Pro Tip:
regarding
non-emergency
Mental Health needs--
these are self-referral--you
do not need to go to
your PCM to get a
referral.

"...for me it was the unspoken expectation to be resilient and put my own desires and sometimes my own needs on the back burner to support my spouse's part in the military and provide stability for my children. It is hard to feel like your needs are last all the time. It makes a spouse feel devalued. I suspect this happens a lot and people don't talk about it, because it is also hard, in military culture, to admit that you are anything less than resilient and get help. If you are not perfect, then it means your husband may not be promotion-worthy. There is pressure from him to be resilient and manage all the hardships with a smile, and pressure from the larger military community on him to present a family that can

handle the unique challenges of his job."

– Air Force spouse

“I became aware of a pregnant spouse during an OCONUS assignment who was being isolated in her home for days at a time while her spouse was on shift work due to her inability to speak the language or drive. I was prompted to get involved because I felt it was not only a danger to her, but a readiness issue for the military, as she could not support herself or survive if he were to get deployment orders as they did not live a walkable distance from stores or restaurants. I advocated to help them get onto base housing where she could at least walk to all resources she needed.” -- Air Force spouse

“... loneliness and isolation. Moving so frequently that close relationships never have time to form.” – Army spouse

*“... isolation while living overseas”
-- Army spouse*

“... being separated from my family and support systems during all the difficult times of my life” -- Navy spouse

Healthcare Prepping for a PCS:

At current duty station:

*update copies of vaccination records for you and any dependents

*if you see any providers outside of the MTF on post, make sure to get copies of your records or at the very least good contact information to provide for your next MTF

*request dental records for you and any dependents

*if you have any prescriptions, make sure to get them filled prior to leaving (if dates permit) so you don't have to stress about missing medications during the moving process

Upon arrival at new duty station:

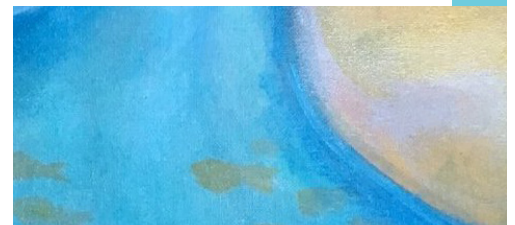
*make contact with new MTF asap, get appointments if new referrals need to be made and see what services that MTF can/cannot provide you so you can properly take action

*reach out to dentists ASAP, as most need you to make appointments months in advance

Army Surgeon General - Shared with Pre-Command Course spouses 2021

Senior spouses can be Ambassadors for Health in their communities:

1. Share Performance Triad and Army Wellness Center information within your sphere of influence
2. Advocate on behalf of the Soldiers and Families in your spouse's unit
3. Influence Community health promotion processes at your installations
4. Encourage families to participate in MEDCOM/Tricare/VA surveys
5. Influence your Soldier and your family to make healthy choices



Congressional committees dealing with healthcare:

Armed Services Committees (subcommittee on personnel and subcommittee on readiness) and Defense Appropriations (if funding is involved)

Senate Armed Services subcommittees <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/about/subcommittees>

SASC hearings <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings>

Senate Appropriations subcommittees, Defense <https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/subcommittees/defense>

House Armed Services Committee- Subcommittee on Personnel <https://armedservices.house.gov/militarypersonnel>

Resources from survey responses

Complete ICE comments for experiences with medical facilities <https://ice.disa.mil> Search by installation

Local Military Family Life Counseling Programs - <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/confidential-help/non-medical-counseling/military-and-family-life-counseling/>

Veterans Administration <https://www.va.gov/health>

National Military Family Association - <https://www.militaryfamily.org/>

USO- for military spouses <https://www.uso.org/programs/military-spouse-programs>

USO- for military families <https://www.uso.org/programs/couples-seminars-stronger-families>

Patient advocates @ military treatment facilities

Fisher House Foundation- <https://fisherhouse.org/> lodging and assistance for families receiving health services

Steven Cohen Veterans Network Clinics <https://www.cohenveteransnetwork.org/>

SOMETIMES WE LIVE IN OUR OWN LITTLE BUBBLES
AND THE MILITARY COMMUNITY OFFERS US A CHANCE
TO JOIN SOMETHING LARGER THAN OURSELVES.



INSTALLATION LIFE

HOUSING

For 10% of spouses who took the Spouse Project survey, privatized housing is the most or second most difficult military life problem. Another 13% reported having housing problems but solving them without serious difficulty. Military families are rarely able to plant themselves and put down roots in one location. We have to build and carry our sense of permanence with us in many different ways. Frequent moves can expose us to many housing opportunities, and many of them are in amazing locations. However, in the last few years, many substandard housing issues have come to light.

[Marine Family's Shocking Bill](#)

One of the most publicized military family problems recently has been the privatized housing crisis on military installations. Although serious housing conditions (lead paint, mold, and other health hazards) have existed for years on installations, the most recent period of media attention began in 2018 with [Ambushed at Home](#). Housing companies and Defense Department leaders testified in Congress while military families shared stories, photos, and videos of horrible conditions in their homes. Two and a half years later, we can see inconsistent improvements, and some families feel like the housing companies seem to be waiting out the bad press. Congressional hearings continue to monitor the status of their recommendations to the housing companies and the DoD. Each NDAA addresses their intent to improve military housing. Military families are participating in the ongoing process by testifying before the Armed Services Committees and sharing their experiences with Congressional staffers in Washington, D.C.

*"I feel like there seems to be a lot of "advocates" and thoughts, words and promises of change when someone important is looking or something tragic happens. Very reactive instead of proactive."
-- Army Spouse and Army Veteran*

Thanks to the pressure by the media and public attention, Congress is monitoring military housing more closely than before. Representatives are visiting installations and reviewing the implementation of their specific recommendations to help families. Residents in military housing and their advocates also offered many solutions to the housing crisis; some of which were included in the [2020 Tenant Bill of Rights](#). While it's an improvement, families are still waiting for [three more significant protections](#) to be added, hopefully in 2021.

Advocacy in military housing is happening in a variety of ways, much of it in social media groups. Many of the first military spouses who testified in Congress started these groups to promote safe military housing. Families can ask questions, monitor news updates, and find forms and advocates assigned to their installations. Each group is different in their approach to the housing crisis, allowing families to locate the specific kind of assistance they need. In many cases, spouses who experience significant problems and learn the process to solve them will become advocates and group organizers themselves. Truly, no one advocates for military families like military spouses do.

All residents in military housing can be advocates. Attending the townhall meetings, neighborhood events, and answering the surveys are great ways to actively advocate for improving the housing conditions. We can also respond when housing companies and the DoD ask to hear feedback by answering and sharing surveys. When companies testify in Congress, they use their satisfaction scores to say "We're doing great!" while reaching only 15% of their residents through the surveys. Also, residents can use the ICE comments to reach the military housing office at each installation. Once they receive comments, they are required to contact you if you request it in your comment. ICE comments also reach the military housing staff above your installation.

Senior spouses often understand some of the more complicated issues related to housing such as tenant rights, and know how to find useful, accurate resources to solve difficult housing problems. We understand that many service members and their spouses are leaving their parents' homes for the first time; some are navigating housing problems while raising young children while their service members are deployed. We can think about how difficult our early years were while we learned some of our hard lessons. Let's talk to families about their housing situations. We can discuss their satisfaction with their residences and demonstrate that we truly care about improving military housing for younger families.

NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR

Bo an online search for military spouses and bullying and you'll see pages of articles about how badly we treat each other sometimes. Bullying among spouses was mentioned in our survey as a major problem among spouses who responded. Sadly, this kind of nasty behavior happens among spouses at all ages.

*What's been your main problem with military life? "Handling the mean girls. I was shocked by the behavior of senior level women."
--Army spouse*

We're not here to talk about why people act that way; there are plenty of articles about that already. Bad behavior happens among all types of people, though. People with a pressure cooker lifestyle -- part of a wartime military service, raising families during extended separations, trying to build careers and understand where they fit into an imagined rank structure -- can rapidly escalate from minor problems to major conflicts. Drama happens.

When it comes to advocacy, spouse behavior plays a huge role in whether we feel motivated to help each other or choose not to get involved. Respondents in the survey often listed DRAMA as a major reason they choose NOT to step in and help another spouse. Whether the nastiness occurs online in social media posts, SFRGs, or neighborhoods, it affects our entire military community. Whether we're the target or a bystander, it discourages us from participating in any community activities again. Plenty of spouses avoid military life altogether because of the negative stereotypes or experiences. We disconnect.

"I stay away from military family life and social media affinity groups..."

--Army spouse

So, bad spouse behavior is both an advocacy deterrent and opportunity.

How can we be part of the solution to this negative cycle of nastiness, withdrawal, and isolation?

✂ Choose your platforms carefully- the social media universe can be an excellent place to make positive connections to other military spouses. Some groups promote healthy living, career opportunities, problem-solving, and communication. A few, however, are cesspools of hateful pettiness. Most are somewhere in-between, depending on the day. Even the most benign comment or question can provoke irrational responses. We've seen it unfold. An assumption, a remark about rank, or a parenting-style critique will drop a match in a comment section. If you've ever been an admin in a group, you know this pain.

How do we do better? What does it take to create a kinder, gentler online milspouse world? For some of us, it's too intimidating and we bail completely from the platforms. We don't handle confrontation well at all. Those of us who are more confident call out hateful posts and try to diffuse everything. Diplomatically, of course. That's actually advocacy in action. It's one way to put yourself out there publicly for another spouse. Terrifying for some; cake walk for others. Deciding to stay engaged in social media takes courage these days.

✂ Scoop them up early- Choosing where to belong --in organizations and online-- and can be an empowering step. Join the positive groups and invite other spouses. Create new groups. Share uplifting information; post helpful tips and stories. Connect with new spouses before they're discouraged by the occasional ugliness that happens. As senior spouses, let's remember our most influential mentors and pass along the lessons we learned from them.

✂ Build a wide circle of spouse friends- Milspouses mentioned loneliness several times in our survey as their most major problem in military life. We're frequently separated from our spouses, families, and friends as we move from place to place and experience multiple deployments and exercises. Being dual military and/or single parents while working and raising families during two decades of war requires incredible strength.

Adjusting to this lifestyle was hard enough before the 2020-21 pandemic locked us all in our homes and away from each other. We live in a world of instantaneous digital communication, yet many of us feel more alone than ever before. All over the world, families are experiencing separations and loss. For us at Carlisle Barracks, we enjoyed a short period of a socially-distant, masked life before being shut down again. It's been a struggle for us to reconnect with each other. We live a few yards apart, yet sometimes it feels like miles. When life returns to something close to normal, we will all need a wider circle of friends. Our children will need to see us return to normal so that they can begin to feel normal themselves. We need our friends! The parties at the firepits, the pop-up margarita parties in the driveways, and the outings will happen again soon and we are here for it!

COMMUNITY LIFE WORLDWIDE

✂ If your family is fortunate enough to live OCONUS, you'll enjoy many wonderful opportunities and experiences in those locations. Spouses mentioned loneliness and isolation in their survey comments as significant problems for spouses living OCONUS, particularly when service members deployed soon after the PCS and the younger spouses were left alone with small children. MilitaryOneSource, the USO, and the Red Cross have many resources to assist families with relocation and adjustments overseas. Senior spouses can also help by building supportive communities and encouraging regular personal contact with spouses in our organizations and neighborhoods.

Depending on our spouse's branch, MOS, or career path, many of us live near large military installations the entire time. For some families, especially Reserve and National Guard, they are separated from the support systems at larger installations. When we have opportunities to meet with these families, it's important to connect and share with them. Using social media and our new COVID Zoom/Teams skills, we can create ways to share the military life connections we enjoy in our installation neighborhoods with families in remote locations. Many of them deal with the same healthcare, career, and separation problems we do; we can use more of them in our communities. Many military organizations include service members from other branches and components. Make a policy to contact their spouses and include them in family activities as much as possible. Help make them feel connected with the organization as many ways as you can.

Another opportunity for senior spouses to reach potentially struggling families is to assist with international military families in our areas. Many military organizations host foreign families, so this situation is fairly common. As leaders in our communities, we can raise awareness, organize programs, and assist these families settle comfortably into our communities. Building relationships with international families promotes the military mission and models the best of what our military spouse way of life means.

These examples of building our communities are just a few of the ways we can improve the lives of our neighbors by being servant leaders. It's a military spouse tradition to take life's difficulties and turn them into opportunities. We live the tradition and pass it to our children. We teach it in our businesses and workplaces. We make lasting friendships quickly. We're made for this.

Being knowledgeable about military life communities means knowing how policies are made. We can participate in this process by following the issues that are significant in our individual situations. We know how to find resources and contact people who make important decisions. Below is a list of Congressional Committees and their areas of responsibility.

Armed Services Committees (Personnel and Readiness subcommittees), Defense Appropriations (for funding), Military construction and VA (MILCONVA) Subcommittee on appropriations (for anything related to funding DoD building such as childcare facility construction or housing construction)

Senate Armed Services subcommittees <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/about/subcommittees>

SASC hearings <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings>

Senate Appropriations subcommittees, Defense <https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/subcommittees/defense>

Senate MILCONVA <https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/subcommittees/military-construction-veterans-affairs-and-related-agencies>

House Armed Services Committee: Mil Personnel <https://armedservices.house.gov/militarypersonnel>

House Armed Services Committee: Readiness <https://armedservices.house.gov/readiness>

House Appropriations Defense subcommittee <https://appropriations.house.gov/subcommittees/defense-117th-congress>

House MILCONVA <https://appropriations.house.gov/subcommittees/military-construction-veterans-affairs-and-related-agencies-116th-congress>

The House of Representatives also has a Military Family Caucus and hosts an annual summit. Here is a link to the 2020 Summit announcement. These are available to view online. <https://bishop.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/advisory-bishop-and-mcmorris-rodgers-will-hold-annual-military-family>

Each Congressional (House and Senate) office includes staffers assigned to deal with military life issues. If you contact the offices of your elected officials, specify first that you're a military family to reach those staffers. Include that in the subject line of every email, as well. It may be helpful to reach the local offices first. Follow all phone conversations with written correspondence to summarize your conversations. Remember that all communication with Congress becomes part of the public record.



GLOSSARY

AFA- [Air Force Association](#), provides support to Air Force and Space Force families, service members, and retirees

ACS- [Army Community Service](#), a resource of many social services for Army families

AUSA- [Association of the United States Army](#), works to improve lives of service members, their families, and Army civilians

AUSN- [Association of the United States Navy](#), organization improving the lives of Navy, Marine, and Coast Guard families and retirees

DLA- Dislocation allowance during a PCS <https://www.defensetravel.dod.mil/site/DLA.cfm>

FAFSA- [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#)

ICE Comments- Interactive Customer Evaluation system operated by the DoD; accessed at <https://ice.disa.mil/> and organized by installation and searchable by the services

MCA- [Marine Corps Association](#), and it's [Foundation](#) supports Marine Corps families

MCEC- [Military Child Education Coalition](#) assisting families with education resources and advocacy

MOAA- [Military Officers Association of America](#), nonprofit national organization with local chapters that works with military leaders and Congress to improve the lives of military families

MOS- Military Occupational Specialties

MTF- Medical Treatment Facility- these vary on installations from being absent, small clinics for service members, clinics with basic services for families, and hospitals providing extensive services

NDAA- National Defense Authorization Act- the huge Congressional bill that governs and funds the Defense Department each year. Passed by the Congressional Armed Services Committees and signed by the President.

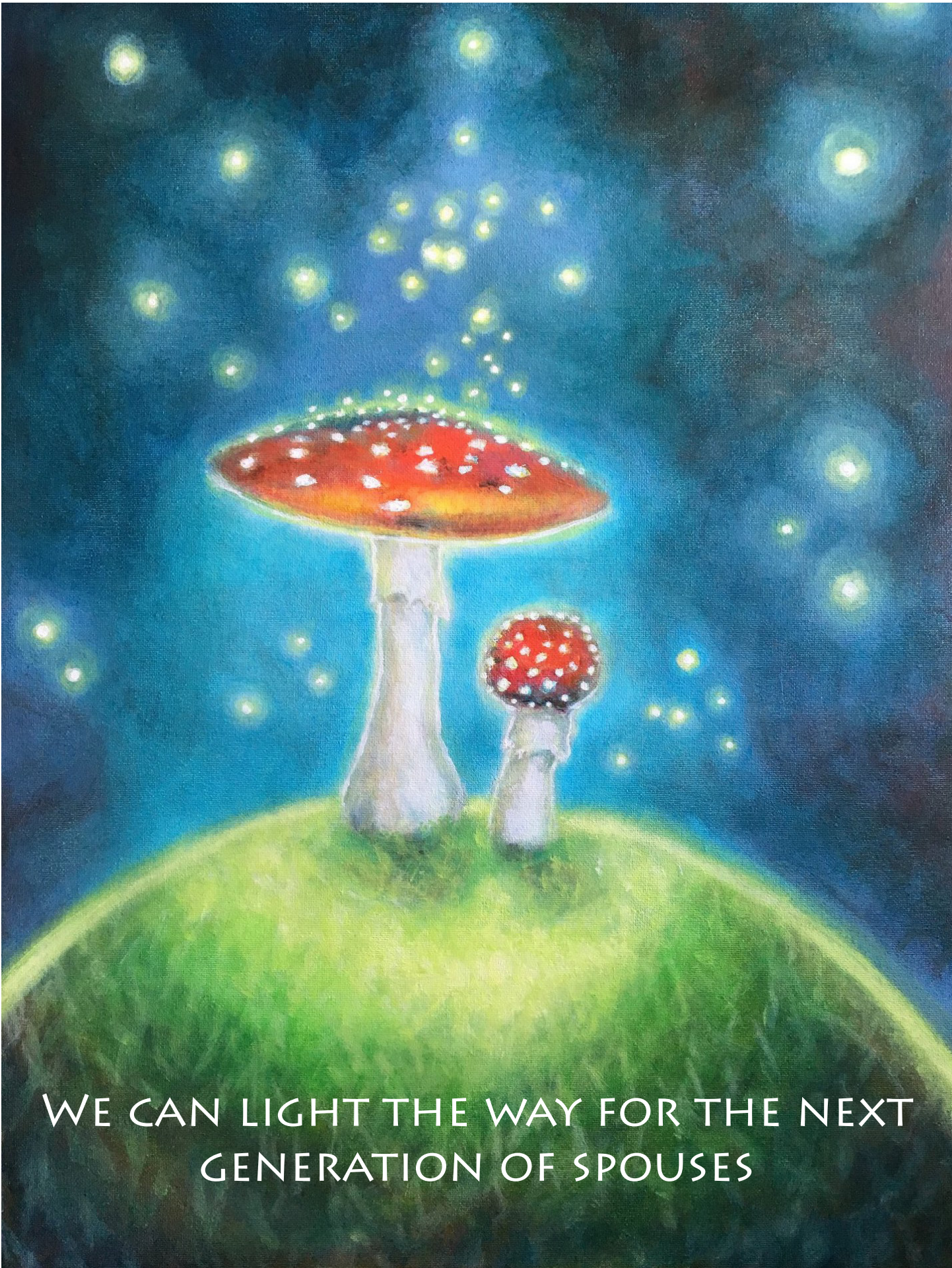
OCONUS- Outside the Continental U.S.

PCM- Primary Care Manager- assigned or chosen medical care provider who will make referrals to specialty care providers

PCS- Permanent Change of Station- moving with the military when service members have orders

TRANSCOM- [US Transportation Command](#) – oversees DoD travel and PCS processes

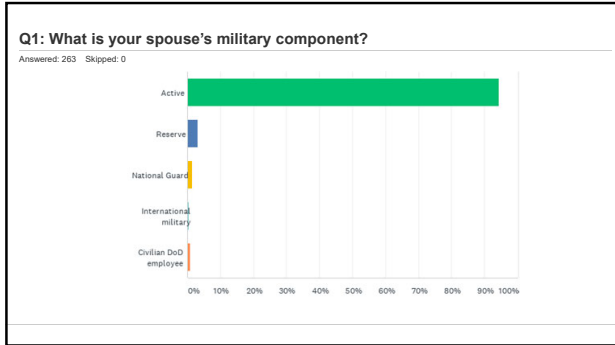




WE CAN LIGHT THE WAY FOR THE NEXT
GENERATION OF SPOUSES

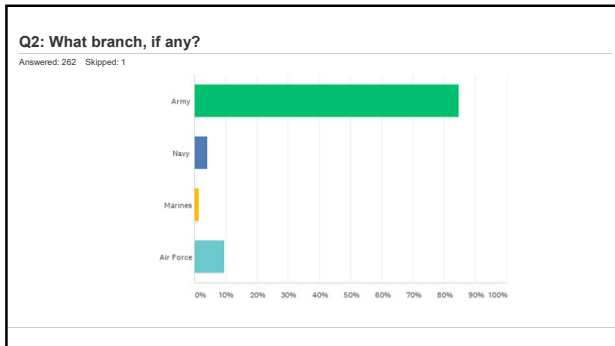
APPENDIX

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT- GRAPHS



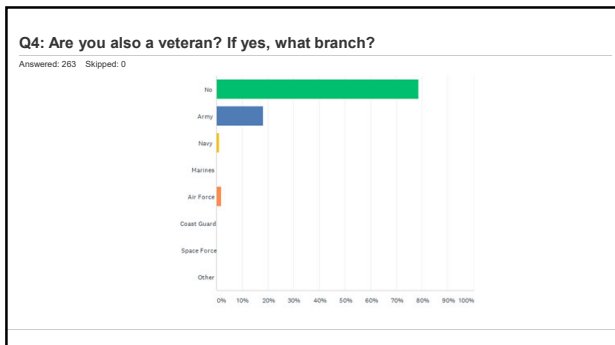
Q1: What is your spouse's military component?
 Answered: 263 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Active	94.30% 248
Reserve	3.04% 8
National Guard	1.52% 4
International military	0.38% 1
Civilian DoD employee	0.76% 2
TOTAL	263



Q2: What branch, if any?
 Answered: 262 Skipped: 1

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Army	84.73% 222
Navy	4.20% 11
Marines	1.53% 4
Air Force	9.54% 25
TOTAL	262

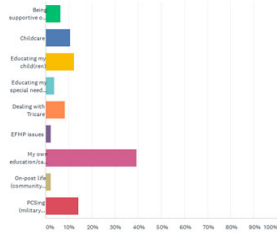


Q4: Are you also a veteran? If yes, what branch?
 Answered: 263 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
No	78.71% 207
Army	18.25% 48
Navy	1.14% 3
Marines	0.00% 0
Air Force	1.90% 5
Coast Guard	0.00% 0
Space Force	0.00% 0
Other	0.00% 0
TOTAL	263

Q6: As a military spouse, which of these areas of military life has been the most difficult?

Answered: 260 Skipped: 3



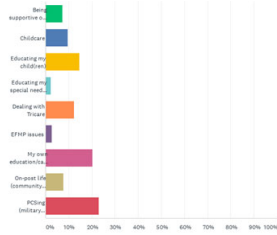
Q6: As a military spouse, which of these areas of military life has been the most difficult?

Answered: 260 Skipped: 3

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Being supportive of my spouse's health/career	6.54% 17
Childcare	10.77% 28
Educating my child(ren)	12.31% 32
Educating my special needs child(ren)	3.85% 10
Dealing with Tricare	8.46% 22
EFMP issues	2.31% 6
My own education/career	39.23% 102
On-post life (community and/or housing)	2.31% 6
PCSing (military moving process)	14.23% 37
TOTAL	260

Q7: What is the next most difficult problem, the runner-up problem area?

Answered: 260 Skipped: 3



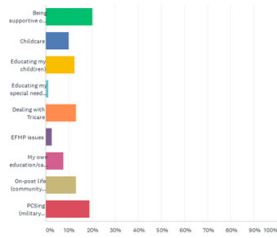
Q7: What is the next most difficult problem, the runner-up problem area?

Answered: 260 Skipped: 3

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Being supportive of my spouse's health/career	7.31% 19
Childcare	9.62% 25
Educating my child(ren)	14.62% 38
Educating my special needs child(ren)	2.31% 6
Dealing with Tricare	12.31% 32
EFMP issues	2.69% 7
My own education/career	20.38% 53
On-post life (community and/or housing)	7.69% 20
PCSing (military moving process)	23.08% 60
TOTAL	260

Q8: With which one of these did you have issues, yet they were the easiest to solve?

Answered: 257 Skipped: 6



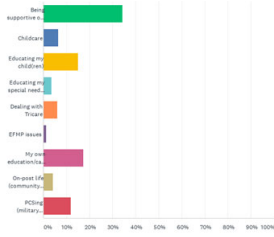
Q8: With which one of these did you have issues, yet they were the easiest to solve?

Answered: 257 Skipped: 6

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Being supportive of my spouse's health/career	20.23% 52
Childcare	10.12% 26
Educating my child(ren)	12.45% 32
Educating my special needs child(ren)	1.17% 3
Dealing with Tricare	13.23% 34
EFMP issues	2.72% 7
My own education/career	7.78% 20
On-post life (community and/or housing)	13.23% 34
PCSing (military moving process)	19.07% 49
TOTAL	257

Q10: Of these areas, which have you spent the most time handling over the years?

Answered: 260 Skipped: 3



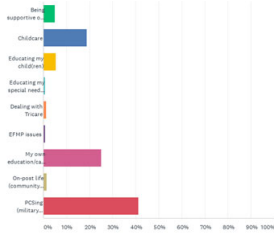
Q10: Of these areas, which have you spent the most time handling over the years?

Answered: 260 Skipped: 3

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Being supportive of my spouse's health/career	34.23% 89
Childcare	6.54% 17
Educating my child(ren)	15.00% 39
Educating my special needs child(ren)	3.46% 9
Dealing with Tricare	6.15% 16
EFMP issues	1.15% 3
My own education/career	17.31% 45
On-post life (community and/or housing)	4.23% 11
PCSing (military moving process)	11.92% 31
TOTAL	260

Q11: Which of these has been the most financially difficult for your family

Answered: 259 Skipped: 4



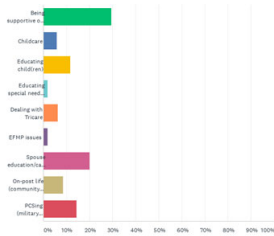
Q11: Which of these has been the most financially difficult for your family

Answered: 259 Skipped: 4

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Being supportive of my spouse's health/career	5.02% 13
Childcare	18.92% 49
Educating my child(ren)	5.41% 14
Educating my special needs child(ren)	0.77% 2
Dealing with Tricare	1.16% 3
EFMP issues	0.77% 2
My own education/career	25.10% 65
On-post life (community and/or housing)	1.54% 4
PCSing (military moving process)	41.31% 107
TOTAL	259

Q19: In which of these areas would you be MOST likely to assist another military spouse?

Answered: 258 Skipped: 5



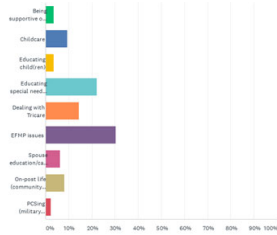
Q19: In which of these areas would you be MOST likely to assist another military spouse?

Answered: 258 Skipped: 5

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Being supportive of service member's health/career	29.46% 76
Childcare	5.81% 15
Educating child(ren)	11.63% 30
Educating special needs child(ren)	1.94% 5
Dealing with Tricare	6.20% 16
EFMP issues	1.94% 5
Spouse education/career	20.16% 52
On-post life (community and/or housing)	8.53% 22
PCSing (military moving process)	14.34% 37
TOTAL	258

Q20: In which of these areas would you be LEAST likely to assist another military spouse?

Answered: 257 Skipped: 6



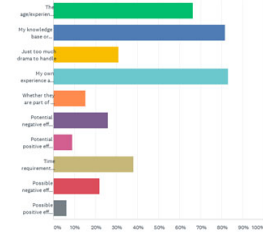
Q20: In which of these areas would you be LEAST likely to assist another military spouse?

Answered: 257 Skipped: 6

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Being supportive of service member's health/career	3.50% 9
Childcare	9.34% 24
Educating child(ren)	3.50% 9
Educating special needs child(ren)	22.18% 57
Dealing with Tricare	14.40% 37
EFMP issues	30.35% 78
Spouse education/career	6.23% 16
On-post life (community and/or housing)	8.17% 21
PCSing (military moving process)	2.33% 6
TOTAL	257

Q21: Which of these would you probably consider when deciding how to assist another military spouse/family? Check all that apply.

Answered: 255 Skipped: 8



Q21: Which of these would you probably consider when deciding how to assist another military spouse/family? Check all that apply.

Answered: 255 Skipped: 8

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
The age/experience-level of the military spouse	66.27% 169
My knowledge base or professional training	81.57% 208
Just too much drama to handle	30.98% 79
My own experience and personal contacts related to the situation	83.14% 212
Whether they are part of my spouse's military organization	15.29% 39
Potential negative effect on my spouse's career	25.88% 66
Potential positive effect on my spouse's career	9.02% 23
Time requirement involved	38.04% 97
Possible negative effect on my personal reputation	21.96% 56
Possible positive effect on my personal reputation	6.27% 16
Total Respondents:	255



ADVOCACY SKILLS

US Government policy makers: Congressional Armed Services Committees (Subcommittee on Personnel) and Appropriations (if funding is involved) and (Subcommittee on Defense)

Senate Armed Services subcommittees <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/about/subcommittees>

SASC hearings <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings>

Senate Appropriations subcommittees, Defense <https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/subcommittees/defense>

House ASC: Mil Personnel <https://armedservices.house.gov/militarypersonnel>

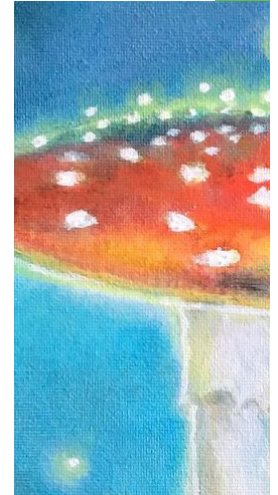
House ASC: Readiness <https://armedservices.house.gov/readiness>

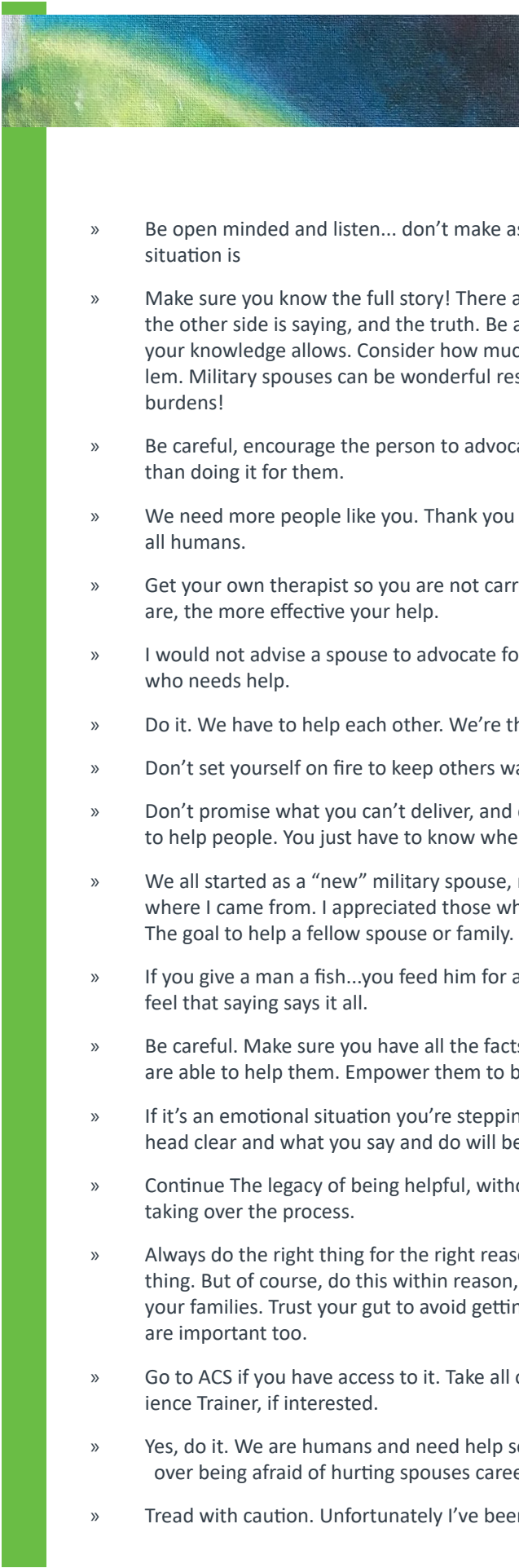
House Appropriations Defense subcommittee <https://appropriations.house.gov/subcommittees/defense-117th-congress>

ADVOCACY

Advice from spouses about being advocates: encouragement and caution

- » Make sure you are helping because you are being compassionate, and not just to get a pat on the back
- » Don't personally take on solving other spouses issues but offer resources and guidance to enable them to find support in solving their own issues
- » Consider to what level you want to help, do you have the time and energy, and will it hurt your or your spouse's reputation.
- » Do it, but do it right! Know the facts. Know the resources available. Remember that there are professionals to help with issues that are out of your scope, skillset, or education. Do not be afraid to involve the appropriate people. Do it all with the utmost concern for ethical behavior, confidentiality, respect, genuine concern, and love. If you do that, you'll never be wrong.
- » I would tell them to have a discussion with their spouse first to be aware of how they feel. I would also tell them to be educated before jumping in.
- » Be open that despite helping, the other person may use your help and then move on.
- » Be supportive and listen. Don't bring your own problems into the situation. And understand where the spouse is coming from so you can hopefully point them in the right direction to get help.
- » Be very careful! Assist but don't enable. Don't burn bridges. Be polite. Don't attempt to pull rank ("My husband said"). When possible, talk to people in person - it's hard to say 'no' to a polite, in-person request & I've found that people generally try to be helpful. Utilize the ICE program at your assigned post. Depending on your role (Cdr's spouse, etc) go to agencies when you first arrive, introduce yourself & find out how they support your families.
- » Talk with your command leadership for full transparency. Get guidance on resources the unit has provided to soldier. Provide a listening (non-judgmental) ear. Know your community resources.
- » Know your stuff! Unless you really know for sure what the policies are- you might be spreading rumors. So get your facts down before interceding. Also, keep good notes about your interactions. I always keep contact notes whether I am advocating for myself or talking with another spouse.
- » First, ask if that person wants your support, encouragement, and advocacy. NEVER assume it's wanted and welcomed. If it is, ask exactly what that person wants and expects? Is risk involved? How much risk are you willing to take? What consequences are you prepared for? How long will you advocate? Are you prepared to advocate and not enjoy the fruits/ success?
- » Make sure not to interfere with anything going on with your spouses work/job/coworkers that will cause further drama or negative consequences for your spouse. Your relationship with them is very important and is the only constant for the most part in your life. Always try to help others when you can.
- » Get them connected with the support groups/organizations that know best about their types of situation.
- » Be sure that the information, or the route you are taking to advocate and support is the best, current practice. If there is one thing I have learned, things change!
- » Be patient and remember that you are there to assist. You are not there to solve all their problems, but to direct them and support them.
- » Listen. Really Listen. Ask if they would like you to advocate for them. (Some just need you to listen) don't gossip. Don't cause drama.
- » Advocating is a phenomenal way to make change when done professionally. Stay off of social media with gossip or personally offensive complaints.
- » Never bring rank into it and in the end, it's not your problem. You can help but don't do it to the detriment of your mental health.





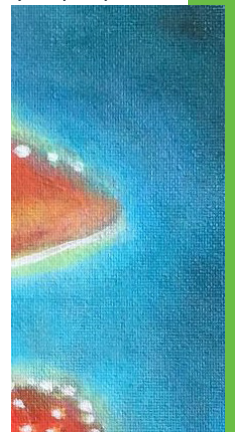
» Research and know the regulations. You will probably be better versed that the office you are trying to get answers from. Know what's able to be done and educate everyone along the way.

» Only take on what you can handle. Your primary responsibility is to your family, if someone is not willing to help themselves, there's nothing wrong with pointing them in the right direction and stepping back if continuing to assist would cause hardship or frustration for you.

- » Be open minded and listen... don't make assumptions - take notes and make sure that you understand what the situation is
- » Make sure you know the full story! There are often three sides to every story--what they are saying happened, what the other side is saying, and the truth. Be a kind and compassionate listener and offer resources and assistance if your knowledge allows. Consider how much time you're willing to give to this person to help them solve the problem. Military spouses can be wonderful resources for one another, but they do not have to take on everyone's burdens!
- » Be careful, encourage the person to advocate for themselves, try to give them the tools to learn how to do it rather than doing it for them.
- » We need more people like you. Thank you for what you do. Please be compassionate and kind in your quest. We are all humans.
- » Get your own therapist so you are not carrying all the emotional weight. The better you feel and clearer of mind you are, the more effective your help.
- » I would not advise a spouse to advocate for someone else. I would advise her/him to advocate alongside that person who needs help.
- » Do it. We have to help each other. We're the family we get to pick. It can mean to world to them.
- » Don't set yourself on fire to keep others warm, but give what you can
- » Don't promise what you can't deliver, and don't do it all yourself, there are truly a lot of available resources out there to help people. You just have to know where to look.
- » We all started as a "new" military spouse, meaning we didn't know everything at some point. I try to remember where I came from. I appreciated those who helped me along the way. You don't have to be a subject matter expert. The goal to help a fellow spouse or family.
- » If you give a man a fish...you feed him for a day...if you teach a man to fish...you feed him for life. As an educator, I feel that saying says it all.
- » Be careful. Make sure you have all the facts. Then when you have a clear understanding, act in whatever ways you are able to help them. Empower them to be their own best advocate.
- » If it's an emotional situation you're stepping into, make sure you don't get caught up in the emotions. Keep your head clear and what you say and do will be more effective than spouting off or flying off the handle.
- » Continue The legacy of being helpful, without unknowingly stepping out of your lane. Support the person without taking over the process.
- » Always do the right thing for the right reasons. If someone needs help and you can help them, then do the right thing. But of course, do this within reason, don't jeopardize your safety, mental health, or significant time away from your families. Trust your gut to avoid getting wrapped up into silly drama - boundaries to protect yourself and family are important too.
- » Go to ACS if you have access to it. Take all of the classes at each Post because services differ. Become a Master Resilience Trainer, if interested.
- » Yes, do it. We are humans and need help sometimes. This should not affect spouses's career. That is absurd! I'm so over being afraid of hurting spouses career because families are having a rough go of things.
- » Tread with caution. Unfortunately I've been burned in the past attempting to help. So it makes me more wary, I'd

advise having another person present so the conversation cannot be misconstrued to protect the person helping the spouse.

- » Think of how you would feel if you were the one who needed help. Wouldn't you want someone to step up and advocate for you? One wise senior military spouse told me that I should never suffer in silence. In order to cultivate an atmosphere in which one does not suffer in silence, we need to be willing to help those who are having a hard time finding their voices.
- » Make sure you're not chasing drama. Is the problem something that the person has already tried to fix? Stay calm, collected, and don't bring the problem home to affect your family.
- » Just be present & listen. Pray.
- » Don't speak on topic as if you are the authority.. refer them to specialists.. but most importantly.. just be the support person
- » Be kind, don't judge and just be a listening ear. It's stressful to move away from your hometown and live somewhere new and know nobody. Sometimes we all just need to vent
- » Trust your gut and do what you know is right. Don't let others make you feel like you don't deserve the same level of care as everyone else
- » If someone tells you to prove it, be able to prove it by providing the primary source otherwise you are creating a baseless rumor.
- » Choose the harder right over the easier wrong. The "Bystander Effect" is psychologically proven - (where everyone assumes someone else is helping the victim, which results in inaction from all the witnesses). Moral: if you can help, do so...don't assume someone else is helping
- » Look to a seasoned spouse first to find out how they could help and find out what resources they could share with the other spouse to help them.
- » Get all the facts. Make sure you are not projecting your own issues into the situation. Get help from reputable resources. Stay objective.
- » Have a full understanding of the situation before you potentially put yourself or your Spouse's career at risk. Many times things are already happening behind the scenes that you are unaware of.
- » I would tell anyone who was willing to advocate for anyone else to avoid gossiping about that situation and never brag about doing good
- » Put yourself in their shoes or think back to when you needed help or answers to an issue. If it's in your heart do it. It can make a difference.
- » Step back and make sure you are not acting on emotions, particularly if it is a close friend. Get the whole story, find out what the person has already done or not, help them navigate the process but also understand the process yourself so you can be a better advocate.
- » Seek help from experienced senior spouse mentors who can help based on years of military life experience.
- » IMO, the key to advocating is not really to advocate for others but to give people the tools to advocate for themselves. As advocacy groups can be valuable to highlighting issues that many people face. Once a majority of people face a similar issue policy change can be created.





Military Housing Privatization Initiative Tenant Bill of Rights

The Department of Defense is fully committed to ensuring our Nation's most valued resource—its military service members and their families—have access to safe, quality, and well-maintained homes and communities on DoD installations.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 set out eighteen rights of military service members and their families (Tenants) residing in privatized housing. The Department of Defense commits to ensuring that privatized housing Tenants receive quality housing and fair treatment from the Military Housing Privatization Initiative project owners (MHPI companies) that operate and maintain privatized housing.

It is paramount that residents receive the full benefit of each right. The Department of Defense, through each of its Military Departments, will work diligently and expeditiously to develop the processes and procedures needed to implement these rights and make Tenants aware of them. However, many of the rights set forth by Congress pertain to legal matters that do not lend themselves to unilateral action by the Department. To the extent it is not already the case, the Military Departments commit to working with the MHPI companies to incorporate these rights and procedures into appropriate project legal documents. In some cases, more work is required before the benefits of these rights are fully available to tenants.

The Department commits to providing the full benefit of the following 15 rights by May 1, 2020.

1. The right to reside in a housing unit and a community that meets applicable health and environmental standards.
2. The right to reside in a housing unit that has working fixtures, appliances, and utilities and to reside in a community with well-maintained common areas and amenity spaces.
3. The right to a written lease with clearly defined rental terms to establish tenancy in a housing unit, including any addendums and other regulations imposed by the Landlord regarding occupancy of the housing unit and use of common areas.
4. The right to a plain-language briefing, before signing a lease and 30 days after move-in, by the installation housing office on all rights and responsibilities associated with tenancy of the housing unit, including information regarding the existence of any additional fees authorized by the lease, any utilities payments, the procedures for submitting and tracking work orders, the identity of the military tenant advocate, and the dispute resolution process.
5. The right to have sufficient time and opportunity to prepare and be present for move-in and move-out inspections, including an opportunity to obtain and complete necessary paperwork.
6. The right to report inadequate housing standards or deficits in habitability of the housing unit to the Landlord, the chain of command, and housing management office without fear of reprisal or retaliation, including reprisal or retaliation in the following forms: (A) unlawful recovery of, or attempt to recover, possession of the housing unit; (B) unlawfully increasing

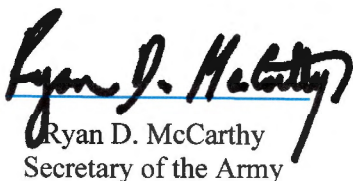
the rent, decreasing services, or increasing the obligations of a Tenant; (C) interference with a Tenant's right to privacy; (D) harassment of a Tenant; (E) refusal to honor the terms of the lease; or (F) interference with the career of a Tenant.

7. The right of access to a Military Tenant Advocate or a military legal assistance attorney, through the housing management office of the installation of the Department at which the housing unit is located to assist in the preparation of requests to initiate dispute resolution.
8. The right to receive property management services provided by a Landlord that meet or exceed industry standards and that are performed by professionally and appropriately trained, responsive and courteous customer service and maintenance staff.
9. The right to have multiple, convenient methods to communicate directly with the Landlord maintenance staff, and to receive consistently honest, accurate, straightforward, and responsive communications.
10. The right to have access to an electronic work order system through which a Tenant may request maintenance or repairs of a housing unit and track the progress of the work.
11. With respect to maintenance and repairs to a housing unit, the right to the following: (A) prompt and professional maintenance and repair; (B) to be informed of the required time frame for maintenance or repairs when a maintenance request is submitted; and (C) in the case of maintenance or repairs necessary to ensure habitability of a housing unit, to prompt relocation into suitable lodging or other housing at no cost to the Tenant until the maintenance or repairs are completed.
12. The right to receive advice from military legal assistance on procedures involving mechanisms for resolving disputes with the property management company or property manager to include mediation, arbitration, and filing claims against a Landlord.
13. The right to have reasonable, advance notice of any entrance by a Landlord, installation housing staff, or chain of command into the housing unit, except in the case of an emergency or abandonment of the housing unit.
14. The right to not pay non-refundable fees or have application of rent credits arbitrarily held.
15. The right to expect common documents, forms, and processes for housing units will be the same for all installations of the Department, to the maximum extent applicable without violating local, State, and Federal regulations.

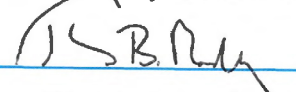
With respect to the remaining three rights—access to maintenance history, process for dispute resolution, and withholding of rent until disputes are resolved—the Department will continue to work with the MHPI companies and, as necessary, Congress to ensure the benefits of these rights are fully available. While the Department develops standardized, formal processes for these rights, service members and their families will be able to leverage the support available from their respective Military Departments to address and resolve relevant housing issues. Tenants seeking assistance should continue to engage their housing office, installation leadership, or chain of command.



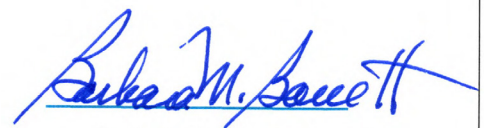
Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense



Ryan D. McCarthy
Secretary of the Army



Thomas B. Modly
Acting Secretary of the Navy



Barbara M. Barrett
Secretary of the Air Force

