

Quick hire of military spouses starts in September

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 14, 2009 – Under a personnel rule that takes effect next month, some military spouses could be quickly hired for federal jobs without going through the usual competitive process.

The new hiring authority takes effect Sept. 11. The Office of Personal Management issued the authority's final regulatory guidelines Aug. 12. The guidelines are posted in the Federal Register under the title: "Noncompetitive Appointment of Certain Military Spouses."

The intended effect of the rule, according to documents listed in the Federal Register, "is to facilitate the entry of military spouses into the federal civil service as part of an effort to recruit and retain skilled and experienced members of the armed forces and to recognize and honor the service of members injured, disabled, or killed in connection with their service."

"Military spouse employment is a key to the quality of life of our military families," Kathleen Ott, director of talent acquisition, development and management in the Office of the Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Civilian Personnel Policy, said yesterday during an interview with Pentagon Channel and American Forces Press Service reporters.

The availability of jobs for military spouses contributes to the sustainment of the all-volunteer force, Ott said, citing a recent survey in which employed military spouses reported that their work income constitutes about 48 percent of total family income.

"But, it's really hard to keep a job if you have to move from station to station," Ott said. Federal employment, she said, offers military spouses a portable career with transferable benefits and worldwide presence.

"We thought, in order to help our military spouses continue their employment, it would be a good thing for us to facilitate their entry into the federal government," she said.

Eligible individuals, Ott said, include spouses of active-duty servicemembers who have been called on to relocate. This includes spouses of Guardsmen or reservists who've been called up for more than 180 days of active service other than training. Eligible spouses must be moving to another duty station accompanied by their servicemember husband or wife.

Spouses of former servicemembers listed as 100-percent disabled and separated or retired, as well as widows or widowers of servicemembers who died on active duty and who have not remarried also are eligible.

The new hiring authority does not constitute a hiring preference for eligible military spouses, according to OPM. "This authority is a noncompetitive hiring mechanism; it does not establish or constitute a hiring preference for eligible spouses, nor does it create an entitlement to a federal job for an eligible spouse," according to regulatory documents listed in the Federal Register.

Applicants still must meet specific job-qualification criteria listed for individual positions, according to OPM documents.

"This is not a preference. We firmly believe that our spouses can compete on their own merits," Ott said, noting that the new hiring rules provide military spouses with "a streamlined, facilitated means of obtaining federal employment."

Use of the new hiring authority "is completely at the discretion of hiring agencies," according to OPM documents, and "it is one of many hiring tools agencies may use to recruit needed individuals."

Spouses who complete three years of continuous satisfactory service will be converted from a career-conditional appointment to career appointment, Ott said.

Personnel officials do not anticipate that the new military-spouse hiring authority would adversely affect the hiring of military veterans into the federal government, Ott said.

Military spouses can find out about federal job opportunities through OPM's USAJobs Web site, Ott said.

The new hiring authority "sends a very important message to our military families that their sacrifice is recognized by the federal government, and that they recognize that having a career opportunity is really critical for their family's well being," said Barbara Thompson, director of the Pentagon's Office of Family Policy/Children and Youth.

More than 77 percent of military spouses have indicated in surveys that they are interested in establishing careers, Thompson said. Other data, she added, indicates that military spouses are, overall, more highly educated than their civilian counterparts.

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