Policy Priorities

In the 116th Congress, Blue Star Families will advocate for policies aimed at addressing the needs and concerns of service members, veterans, and their families, as identified by Blue Star Families’ annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey.

MILITARY PERSONNEL & READINESS

Objective: Champion military cultural changes and policies that support a healthy work-life balance and enable greater career control.

- Maintain adequate manning levels / reduce personnel tempo
- Pilot an online database in each branch to automate and increase service member influence over future assignments
- Allow military families to exercise greater control over whether or not they choose to accept an overseas assignment and/or the timing of such an assignment

FINANCIAL SECURITY

Objective: Ensure that service members and their families are financially secure.

- Incentivize private sector employers to initiate flexible work programs for military spouses by amending the Internal Revenue Code to make employers of military spouses eligible for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (thereby allowing them to claim a tax credit equal to a portion of the wages paid to said spouses)
- Allow military spouses who must leave their jobs due to PCS to defer their student loan payments for a fixed period
- Modify the military spouse licensure reimbursement program (FY18 NDAA) to automatically discount licensure fees (up to $1,000) for military spouses who were relicensed at the state level following a PCS; state licensing agencies can then seek reimbursement from the federal government
- Reduce the high incidence of food insecurity among military families by (a) establishing a basic needs allowance to supplement the base pay of junior enlisted members at or below 130% of the federal poverty line, and/or (b) amending the Farm Bill to prevent the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) from being treated as income when calculating SNAP eligibility
- Restore BAH to 100% of local area rent

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Objective: Sustain and protect the health and wellness of our service members, veterans, and their families.

- Standardize the EFMP experience across installations and military branches (as recommended by the GAO)
- Ensure that EFMP families and families with special needs and/or chronic conditions are given priority regarding scheduling health appointments after relocation and colocated childcare
- Fast-track referrals for specialists for EFMP families by not requiring a PCM referral for chronic conditions
- Enhance warm hand-offs of EFMP families from one duty station to the next
- Increase access to mental health services via alternative hours (weeknights and weekends), and alternative delivery methods (e.g., telehealth)
CAREGIVING

Objective: Provide military caregivers with the support and resources they need to thrive.

- Enact paid family leave policies for situations involving: (a) qualifying exigencies arising out of a family member being on active duty in a foreign country (or being notified of an impending call/order of active service in a foreign country); (b) caring for a family member who is a covered service member; and (c) caring for a family member with a serious health condition
- Formally designate caregivers in patient medical records, so that they can be consistently included in medical planning discussions
- Strengthen and expand eligibility for the VA’s Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) to all severely disabled veterans, and improve consistency and accountability in the administration and execution of the PCAFC
- Increase military caregiver employment by incentivizing private sector employers to initiate flexible work programs for military caregivers

CHILDCARE

Objective: Make childcare more affordable and accessible to military families.

- Exempt military families from having to include BAH as part of their total income when applying for publicly-supported childcare programs
- Expand fee assistance eligibility to military families who wish to enroll their child in a childcare facility that is state licensed (even if it is not accredited)
- Incentivize local childcare providers to obtain national certification via federal reimbursements

K-12 EDUCATION

Objective: Ease education-related challenges for military children.

- Provide high-quality online educational resources to military families who choose to homeschool their children
- Fully fund Department of Education Impact Aid and increase funding provided via DoD Impact Aid to ensure that public schools serving military children have adequate resources

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Objective: Celebrate the diversity of our Armed Forces, and ensure that all service members and military families feel a sense of belonging to their military communities

- Amend to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to include non-discrimination protections on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation
- Review and correct the records of service members discharged due to their sexual orientation
- Ensure that LGBTQ+ service members have access to equitable, gender-affirming, and culturally-competent health care
- Establish a special prosecutors office within the DoD that is independent from the chain of command to prosecute military sexual assault cases
- Protect veterans and military family members from deportation and review the cases of individuals who have been deported for possible return to the United States
- Make it easier for non-citizens who serve honorably in the military and their families to naturalize and become citizens
EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT & TRANSITION

Objective: Ease transition-related challenges and expand the education and employment opportunities available to service members and their families.

- Build strong formal support networks for transitioning service members and veterans, aimed at empowering them to develop informal networks in their local communities.
- Protect students from predatory lenders and fraudulent for-profit schools, and restore GI Bill benefits to those cheated by fraudulent for-profit schools.
- Close the 90/10 loophole that for-profit schools use to target veterans.

CIVIL-MILITARY INTEGRATION

Objective: Foster civil-military integration and promote military cultural competency in civilian communities.

- Create or energize existing installation positions responsible for community engagement.
- Pilot joint-governmental-use facilities and “joint zones” where military and local community members can take advantage of social programs and services together, to avoid duplication of services and foster civil-military integration.
- Formalize relationships and synchronize classes between ROTC programs and public policy schools/departments so that future civilian and military policy-makers develop relationships early on.
- Support grants to local municipalities to create military family friendly programming and communications, and establish a military community member liaison staff position.