



## Blue Star Families

# 2022 Policy Priorities

Blue Star Families' 2022 Policy Priorities are informed by research we conducted in the past two years and draw on recommendations from that research. They are intended to **elevate innovative solutions** to long-standing military life challenges and are selected with four overarching objectives in mind: (1) ensure military families are not at a disadvantage by virtue of their military service; (2) sustain the All-Volunteer Force through resilient & inclusive family policies; (3) enable and empower stronger civil-military relations at the local level; and (4) improve overall data collection, use, and understanding. Contact [survey@bluestarfam.org](mailto:survey@bluestarfam.org) to learn more.

### Ensure military families are not at a disadvantage by virtue of their military service.

#### CONGRESS

- Support a fixed period of federal student loan deferment for military spouses who leave a job to relocate due to military orders. (2020 MFLS)
- Exclude the Base Allowance for Housing (BAH) from income calculations for SNAP eligibility, which would allow military families who live off-base to receive the same treatment as families who live on-base and civilian families who receive federal housing benefits. (2020 MFLS)
- Help military spouses return to the labor force by funding pilot programs to explore innovative approaches that address root causes (e.g., offering child care at no cost to military spouses during their job search). (2021 MFLS)
- Extend TRICARE Young Adult eligibility for young adult dependents up to age 26, in line with commercial health insurance plans.

#### MILITARY

- Provide instruction (DODI or other policy change) and encourage military treatment facilities with fertility treatment providers to loosen "time trying" requirements when working with military families due to frequent time apart. (2021 MFLS)

### Sustain the All-Volunteer Force through resilient & inclusive family policies

#### CONGRESS

- Restore BAH to 100% of local area rent until BAH calculations are reformed and appropriately aligned to real housing costs. (2020 MFLS)

- Explore options for improving the calculation of BAH, taking into consideration issues such as school district quality, housing availability, etc. (2021 MFLS)
- Request a study on the demand for various caregiver support options among military families and to evaluate the effectiveness of programs supporting caregivers (including the Exceptional Family Member Program [EFMP] and DOD's Warrior Care Office), and identify solutions from these programs that can be adapted to serve a broader community of caregivers in military families. (2021 Caregiver Study)

## **MILITARY**

- Update diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) plans to address challenges military dependents of color face and identify best practices for working with local civilian communities to solve them. (2022 MFoC)
- Continue to diversify ROTC scholarship recipients through broader recruitment and assess program completion and commissioning rates among those enrolled in the program. (2022 MFoC)

## **Empower civilian communities to support military and Veteran families and encourage military installations to continually engage their local communities.**

## **CONGRESS**

- Allocate additional resources to strengthen civil-military relationships at the local level and bolster support systems on installations. (2022 MFoC)

## **STATE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

- Increase access to crucial mental health care by facilitating the enactment of interstate compacts that allow for practice via telehealth and for provider license acceptance across state lines. (2021 MFLS)
- Allow homeschooling military families to utilize their "home state of record" instead of their current residence for homeschooling education requirements to maintain continuity across relocations. (2021 MFLS)
- Enable online school enrollment to enhance the "warm hand-off" between the sending and receiving districts and minimize disruptions in special education services. (2020 MFLS)
- Elected officials at all levels can signal their support of military families by issuing a proclamation declaring the last week in September to be "Blue Star Welcome Week." (Contact [survey@bluestarfam.org](mailto:survey@bluestarfam.org) for more information and suggested language.)

## **Improve data collection, use, and understanding.**

## **CONGRESS**

- Change legislation to allow federal agencies to shift to a combined race/ethnicity question, in line with the U.S. Census Bureau recommendations. (2022 MFoC)
- All federal agencies should add military and Veteran identifiers to existing records and include this information in publicly-available datasets and reports. (2022 MFoC)