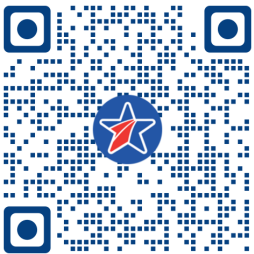
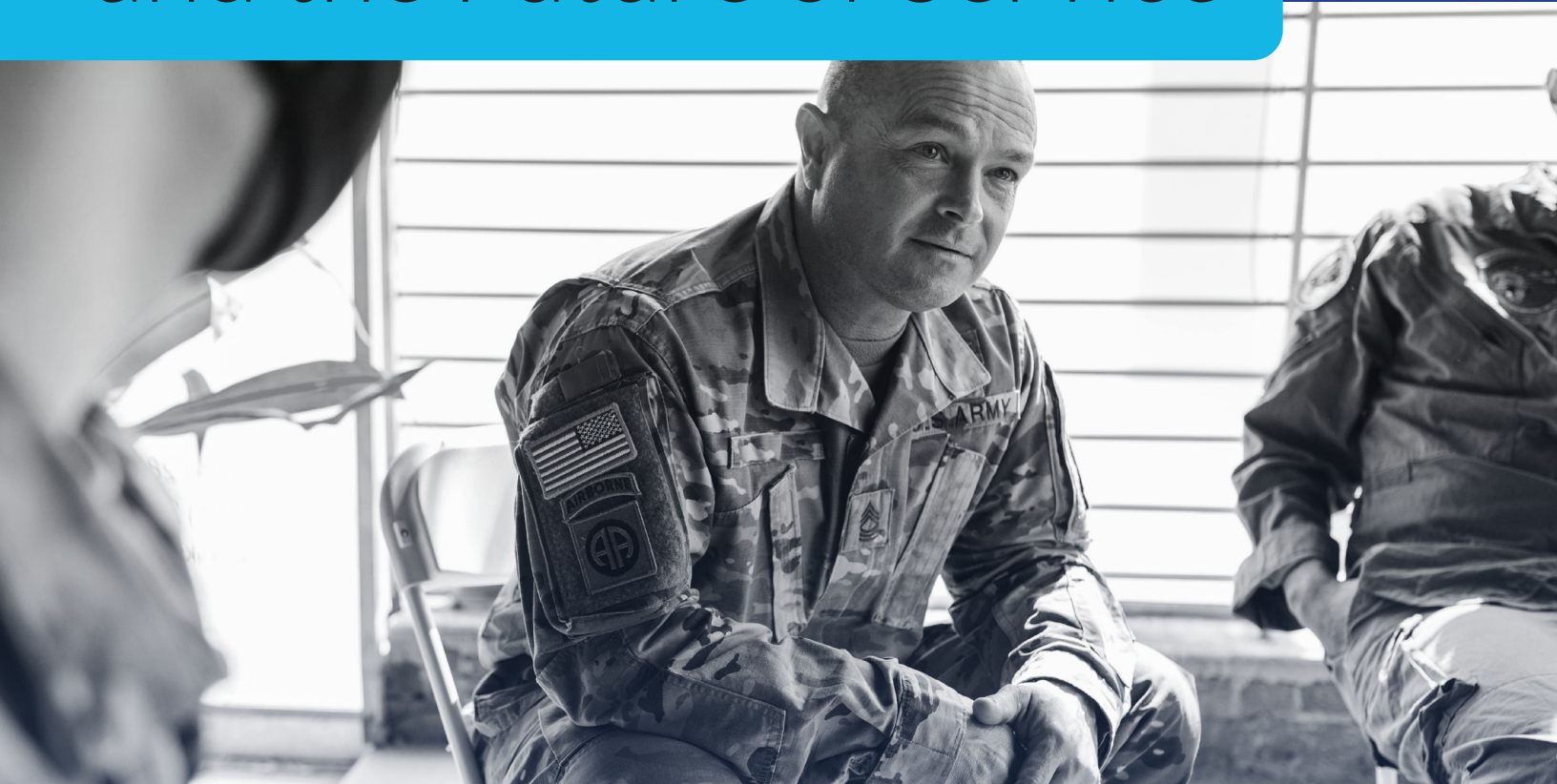


Morale, Belonging, the Nation's Support, and the Future of Service



Since 2009, the Blue Star Families Military Family Lifestyle Survey (MFLS) has collected responses annually from military families addressing issues related to housing, financial security, employment, food insecurity, healthcare, childcare, and community belonging. The 2025 MFLS heard from more than 6,000 military-connected respondents, including 2,608 active-duty family respondents (15% (n=401), active-duty service members, and 85% (n=2,207) spouses/domestic partners of active-duty service members). *Morale, Belonging, the Nation's Support, and the Future of Service* investigates service member morale and attitudes about service, active-duty families feelings of belonging and their perceptions of public support, and impacts on the future of service.

We are deeply grateful to our sponsors: AARP, Chobani, Lockheed Martin Corporation, Macy's, Inc., and USAA for their generous support of the 2025 Military Family Lifestyle Survey (MFLS). We also want to extend our heartfelt thanks to The BlackRock Foundation, craig newmark philanthropies, CSX Transportation, and the Patrick J. McGovern Foundation for their ongoing support of Blue Star Families as a whole. Your contributions enable us to continue serving military families with impactful programs and research year-round.

Attitudes About Service

Active-duty service member **morale** and **attitudes about work-family balance** were tied to **likelihood to recommend service**: Service members who reported high morale and success in balancing work and family life were **more likely to recommend military service** to a young family member.

Reasons for Satisfaction with Military Life

40% (n=407)

Stability¹

- Job and income security
- Medical benefits
- Housing benefits



20% (n=199)

Care & Support for Military Families

- On- and off-installation resources and support systems exclusive to military families
- The military community



16% (n=165)

Relocation

- Satisfaction with current location
- Positive PCS experience



15% (n=154)

Pride in Service Member's Career

- Career advancement
- Pride in service
- Coworkers and command



Forty-four percent (n=959) of active-duty family respondents reported they were satisfied with the military way of life, 20% (n=430) were “unsatisfied,” and the remaining 36% (n=770) were “neither unsatisfied nor satisfied.” Active-duty service members (48%, n=163) and active-duty spouses (44%, n=796) reported similar levels of satisfaction with military life.

Service Member Morale and Likelihood to Recommend Service



24% (n=47)
Male Service Members



19% (n=27)
Female Service Members

Rated morale as very high/high



44% (n=91)
Male Service Members



32% (n=48)
Female Service Members

Would recommend service to a young family member

Less than one-third (28%, n=95) of active-duty service members indicated their morale was “very low” or “low.” The remaining active-duty service members reported their morale as “moderate” (50%, n=169) or “high” or “very high” (22%, n=74).

Overall, 39% (n=139) of active-duty service member respondents were likely to recommend service to a young family member (child, niece, nephew, etc.). However, morale was associated with likelihood to recommend service — **those with higher morale were more likely to recommend service** ($r(336)=.50, p < .001$). This year, male service members were more likely to recommend service than female service members. However, in the 2024 MFLS, female service members were more likely to recommend service than their male counterparts.²

About half (47%, n=157) of active-duty service members feel they are “successful” or “very successful” in balancing work and family life. Among those who feel successful in their work-family balance, 59% (n=91) are likely to recommend service to a young family member. Of those who feel unsuccessful in their work-family balance, only 22% (n=23) are likely to recommend service.³

¹This data is from an open-ended question. In the instance of qualitative data, the “n” here represents the total of six categories: the stability military life offers, how military families are cared for, the opportunities military families experience due to the lifestyle, service member’s career, positive (no comment), and negative (no comment). Here, and with all qualitative themes, “n” refers to the instances (in this case, 407) any of these categories were mentioned.

²In 2024, the mean likelihood to recommend service scores were reported (male service members: $M=4.46, SD=3.19, n=185$, female service members: $M=5.42, SD=3.33, n=169$). In 2025, the mean scores for male service members were $M=5.50, SD=3.02 (n=205)$. For female service members, $M=5.12, SD=2.80 (n=150)$.

³Of those active-duty service member respondents who selected “neither successful nor unsuccessful” in balancing work and family life, 20% were likely to recommend service to a young family member.

Sense of Support

Most active-duty family respondents indicated that **support during service strongly impacts future recruitment**, yet many were **not confident military families will receive the long-term support they need**.

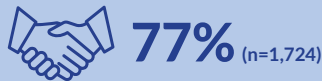
In the 2024 MFLS,⁴ 83% (n=2,434) of active-duty families indicated it was likely or very likely the U.S. would be involved in a major conflict in the next 3–5 years. This year, **more than half (57%, n=1,253) of active-duty family respondents did not think the general public would be prepared to support military families if the U.S. were to enter a major conflict.**⁵ Relatedly, only 14% (n=306) agreed the general public are well-informed regarding global affairs.⁶

Active-duty family respondents who said the general public does not appreciate the sacrifices made by military families were asked what would help them believe the general public is appreciative (see Table 1).

Table 1. Top Five Themes for Active-Duty Families to Feel Appreciated

Percentage	Theme	Quote
27% (n=318)	Education About Military Life ⁷	“Better education for civilians on the sacrifice that military members AND their families go through. What the military REALLY entails, not just the butterflies and rainbows of what is promised if you join the military. There’s so much more of an education that needs to happen.”
21% (n=242)	Local Community Changes ⁸	“It would help to have neighbors introduce themselves when we move in. Maybe neighbors could help with telling us companies for landscaping or plumbing or heating and air conditioning or auto mechanics or anything.”
20% (n=231)	National Changes ⁹	“The general public being appreciative isn’t really necessary; support from the government is what is actually important.”
12% (n=146)	General Changes ¹⁰	“I feel like people support on certain holidays but when asking for actual support like time and effort is crickets.”
12% (n=141)	Non-Military Families Cannot Understand	“The public does not truly understand the sacrifices made by military families because they cannot relate to our lifestyle.”

Feeling more appreciated could impact future recruitment:



of active-duty family respondents indicated that support of military families during service strongly impacts future recruitment.¹¹

⁴ Blue Star Families. 2025. “2024 Military Family Lifestyle Survey: Pride in Service.” https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/BSF_MFLS24_Comp_Report_Pride_Svc-v2.pdf

⁵ ‘Did not think’ is defined as those respondents who selected “somewhat disagree,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree.” The remaining respondents selected “somewhat agree,” “agree,” or “strongly agree” (29%, n=627) or selected “neither agree nor disagree” (13%, n=281).

⁶ ‘Agree’ is defined as those respondents who selected “somewhat agree,” “agree,” or “strongly agree.” The remaining respondents selected “neither agree nor disagree” (12%, n=263) or “somewhat disagree,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree” (73%, n=1,590).

⁷ This overall theme includes the subthemes: education about military life in general (20%, n=231), education about military benefits (5%, n=62), and for the general public to stop saying “thank you for your service” (2%, n=25).

⁸ This overall theme includes the subthemes: welcoming military families into the community, 5%; events and discounts for military families, 5%; and tangible help (resources/programs), 11%.

⁹ This overall theme includes the subthemes: political activism (voting, congressional bills, etc.), 13%, and news/social media coverage, 7%.

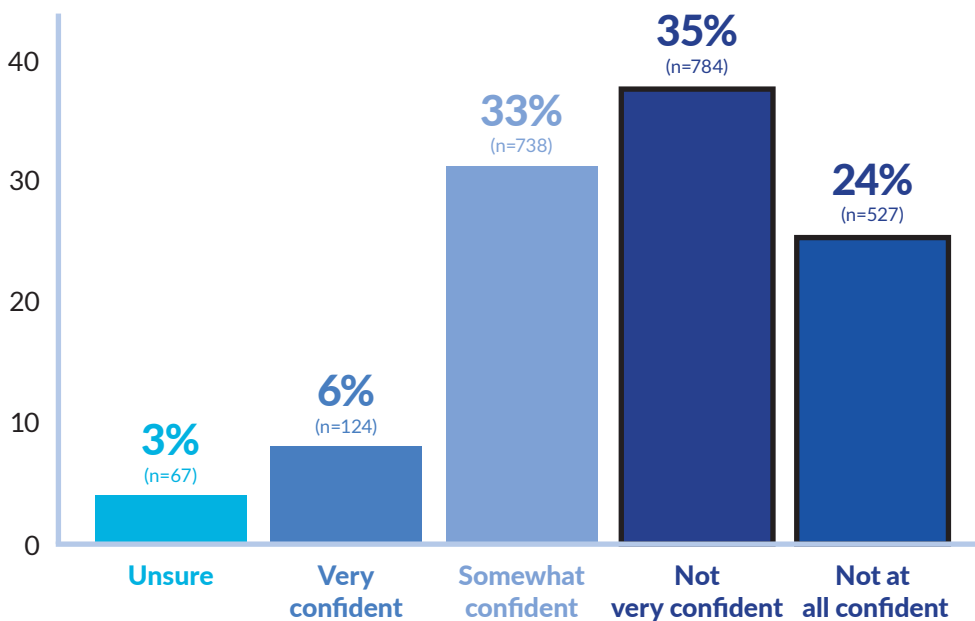
¹⁰ This overall theme includes the subthemes: understanding the mental health toll military life has, 1%; veteran support, 2%; acknowledge service members and their families, 9%; and mandatory service, 1%.

¹¹ Regardless of a sense of belonging to the local civilian community.



Confidence in Service Members and Families Receiving Long-Term Support

Active-Duty Family Respondents



59% (n=1,311)

NOT confident that service members and their families will continue to receive the long-term support they need.

- **Unsure**
I don't have a sense of where things are headed (n=67)
- **Very confident**
Support will strengthen and adapt over time (n=124)
- **Somewhat confident**
Support exists, but worried about future commitment (n=738)
- **Not very confident**
Support is already eroding or becoming fragmented (n=784)
- **Not at all confident**
Service members and their families will be increasingly overlooked (n=67)

Perceptions of Service, Support, and Sense of Belonging

Active-duty family respondents **who did not feel a sense of belonging** were the least likely to recommend service, be satisfied with military life, or anticipate support from the general public.



Table 2. Perceptions of Service and Public Support Differ by Belonging
Active-Duty Family Respondents

Of those who felt a sense of belonging ¹² to their community ¹³		Of those who did NOT feel a sense of belonging ¹⁴ to their community
45% (n=481)	Would recommend that a young family member join the military	26% (n=184)
58% (n=629)	Plan to stay in service until retirement	52% (n=366)
56% (n=606)	Were satisfied with the military way of life	29% (n=203)
46% (n=493)	Were confident military families will receive long-term support they need ¹⁵	25% (n=178)
37% (n=398)	Agreed ¹⁶ the general public would be prepared to support military families if the U.S. engaged in a major conflict	17% (n=121)

¹² Those who reported a sense of belonging to their local community are defined as those who selected "strongly agree," "agree," or "somewhat agree" with the statement "I feel a sense of belonging to my local community."

¹³ Of those active-duty family respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement "I feel a sense of belonging to my local community:" 35% (n=109) would recommend that a young family member join the military; 55% (n=173) plan to stay in the military until retirement; 39% (n=121) were satisfied with the military way of life; 40% (n=127) were confident that service members and/or their families will continue to receive the long-term support they need; and 37% (n=398) agree or strongly agree the general public are prepared to support military families if the U.S. engages in a major conflict.

¹⁴ Those who did not report a sense of belonging to their local community are defined as those who selected "strongly disagree," "disagree," or "somewhat disagree" to the statement "I feel a sense of belonging to my local community."

¹⁵ 'Were confident' is defined as those respondents who selected "very confident - support will strengthen and adapt over time" or "somewhat confident - support exists, but I worry about future commitment."

¹⁶ 'Agree' is defined as those respondents who selected "somewhat agree," "agree," or "strongly agree."

Attitudes About Future Service and Separation

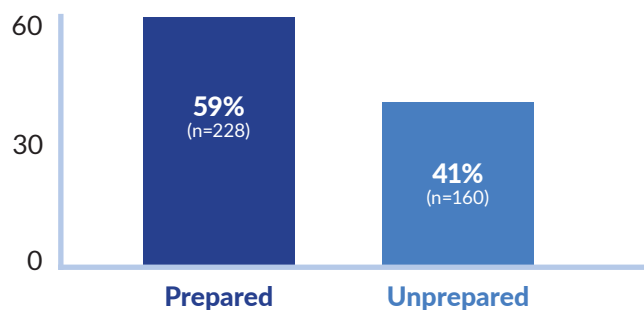
Many active-duty family respondents reported they are **likely to stay in service until retirement**, but those who are not staying **could be influenced to stay**.

Looking to the future, respondents were asked to describe their or their service member's military career intentions. Three-quarters (78%, n=1,669) of active-duty family respondents reported they will likely stay in until retirement.¹⁷ Four percent (n=76) reported they would definitely stay beyond their present obligation, but not necessarily until retirement. The remaining 18% (n=391) were either leaving after their current obligation or undecided whether to stay in, here categorized as approaching separation from the military.¹⁸

Additionally, **41% (n=160) of those active-duty families approaching separation¹⁹ felt "somewhat" or "very unprepared" for the overall transition from military to civilian life**, while the other 59% (n=228) felt somewhat or very prepared.

Preparedness for Overall Transition from Military to Civilian Life

Active-Duty Families Approaching Separation from the Military



Top Concerns for Transition to Civilian Life

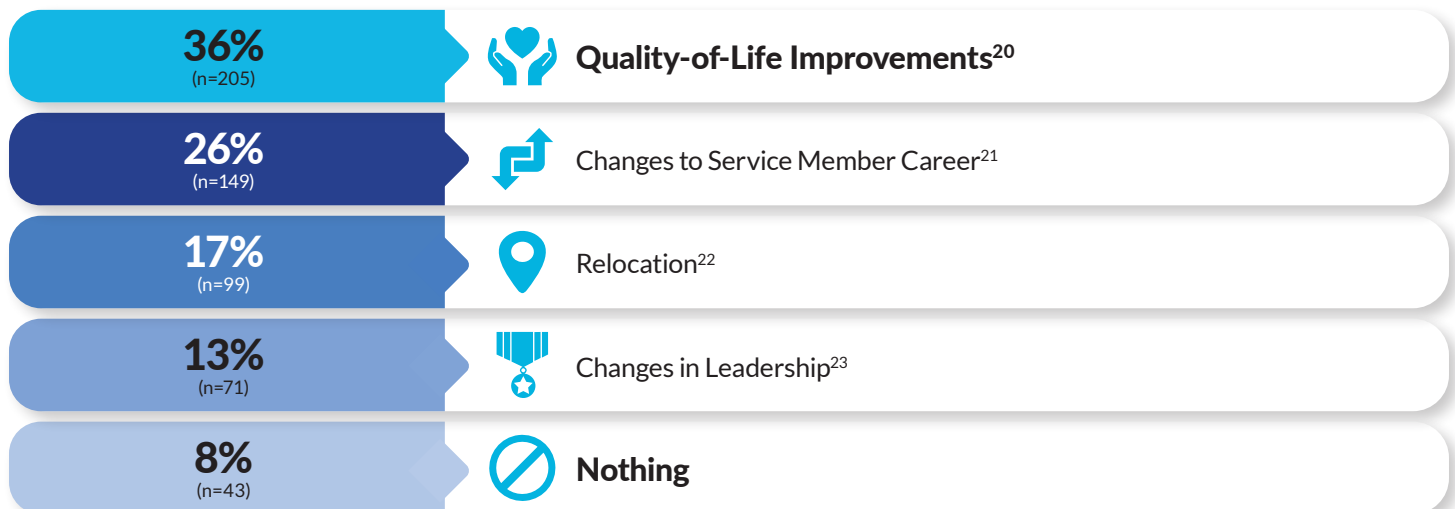
Active-Duty Families Approaching Separation from the Military



68% (n=305) losing job, financial, insurance, and housing security (quality-of-life benefits)

Factors to Serve Beyond Present Obligation

Of those approaching separation, respondents were asked what would influence them to serve beyond their present obligation.



¹⁷ 'Likely to stay in until retirement' includes respondents who selected "currently eligible for retirement and plan to stay in" (5%, n=110), "definitely staying in the military until retirement" (55%, n=1,183), and "probably stay in the military until retirement: (18%, n=376).

¹⁸ 'Approaching separation' includes respondents who selected "undecided whether to stay after present obligation" (9%, n=199), "probably leave after present obligation" (3%, n=66), and "definitely leave after present obligation" (6%, n=126).

¹⁹ 'Approaching separation' includes respondents who selected "undecided whether to stay after present obligation" (9%, n=199), "probably leave after present obligation" (3%, n=66), and "definitely leave after present obligation" (6%, n=126).

²⁰ This overall theme includes the subthemes: increased pay/bonuses, 18%; family support (childcare, education, and employment), 10%; and better benefits (BAH, military housing, and healthcare), 9%.

²¹ This overall theme includes the subthemes: Military promotion/career progression, 8%; control over career, 9%; and improved work/life balance, 10%.

²² This overall theme includes the subthemes: location stability (i.e., less relocation), 6%, and choice of duty station, 11%.

²³ This overall theme includes the subthemes: general military leadership changes, 8%, and change in political climate/leadership, 5%.