

REPORT TO CONGRESS

Support for Military Families with Special Needs

Background

Section 563(a) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (NDAA 2010), Pub. L No. 111-84 added a new section 1781c to Title 10, United States Code (U.S.C.), which established an Office of Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs (OSN) in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, to enhance and improve Department of Defense (DoD) support for military families with special needs, through development of appropriate policies, enhancement and dissemination of appropriate information, support for such families in obtaining referrals and services, and oversight of the activities of the Military Departments in support of such families.

Subsection (h) of 10 U.S.C. § 1781c of the legislation requires the Secretary of Defense to submit to the Congressional defense committees a report on the activities of the OSN not later than 180 days after the enactment of the NDAA 2010, which was enacted on October 28, 2009, and then annually thereafter. The report is required to address:

- A description of any gaps in services available through the Department of Defense for military families with special needs.
- A description of the actions being taken, or planned, to address such gaps.
- Such recommendations for legislative action as the Secretary considers appropriate to provide for the continuous improvement of support for military families with special needs.

This is the second annual report submitted.

Introduction

The Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy (MC&FP) has historically addressed issues concerning military families with special needs. These issues traditionally included the policy for coordination of assignments for overseas travel; and the policy for and oversight of the DoD programs that provide early intervention and special education services.

DoD Instruction 1315.19, "Authorizing Special Needs Family Members Travel Overseas at Government Expense," December 20, 2005, requires the Military Services to establish a system to identify, document and consider a military family member's special needs when approving travel at government expense to an overseas location. The Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) was established by each of the Military Services to implement this

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Department of Defense a total of approximately
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policy and to provide family support services. DD Form 2792, EFMP Medical Summary and DD Form 2792-1, EFMP Special Educational/Early Intervention Summary documents the exceptional family member's special medical and/or educational needs. When a service member is being considered for an assignment overseas, the family member's special medical requirements are submitted to the receiving military medical personnel, and/or, as applicable, the family member's special educational requirements are submitted to the DoD Education Activity. These two activities make recommendations to the military personnel system whether the overseas community has the services necessary to meet the family member's needs. Over 116,000 military family members are enrolled in the EFMP, and their needs are always considered when the military sponsor is considered for an overseas assignment. A member's career may not be prejudiced by this process.

Gaps and Actions

Establishment of a DoD Office. Various steps were taken to implement the establishment of the *Office of Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs* (OSN) in the NDAA 2010. The office is now fully staffed. In addition to three existing staff members who have experience and training in special needs, six additional staff have been hired and include medical and special education professionals, one of whom is an active duty service member. The Principal Director for Military Community and Family Policy also serves as the Director of the office. The OSN continues to work with the DoD/Joint Services EFMP Working Group. That group was initially established in 2009 to develop a 5-year sustainability campaign aimed at raising awareness of programs and services available to families, to develop what is not available and to encourage enrollment in the EFMP. The Working Group ensures Service representation in development of policy.

Community Support Services. Based on the needs of the Services, DoD has provided funding to the Military Services during the past year to hire an additional 120 community support personnel to assist military families with special needs with identifying and accessing beneficial programs and services. At this time, all installations have either a full- or part-time staff person, or (in smaller locations) a point of contact for military families with special needs. Installations with greater numbers of families with special needs may have multiple case managers. Each Service has developed training for newly hired staff.

Military OneSource (MOS) is a program that is especially helpful for families who are geographically separated from an installation. MOS was previously established by the Department of Defense as a "one-stop" call center to provide resources and support to active-duty, National Guard and Reserve service members and their families anywhere in the world 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. OSN collaborated with MOS to ensure there were specialty consultants available to families with special needs. Over 2,900 military families have received special needs consultations with MOS specialists in calendar year 2010. Military Community and Family Policy will continue to market this valuable resource.

DoD has revised the *DoD Special Needs Parent Toolkit* for children with disabilities from birth through 21 years of age to teach families about services available to them, including

special education. The Toolkit provides information on what a family should expect and receive under the law and how to voice their concern if they are not receiving these services. The Toolkit is available at no cost to military families through MOS and is delivered directly to them free-of-charge.

The Special Care Organizational Record (SCOR) for Children with Special Health Care Needs is a recently revised customizable records organizer. It is intended to help track and organize a child's medical and special educational information to assist families when transitioning from assignment to assignment. It also helps families keep essential information in one place, making it easier for someone else to care for the child in the primary caregiver's absence. The SCOR is also available to families at no cost from MOS. A SCOR for Adults with Special Health Care Needs has been developed and is available on the DoD website, MilitaryHOMEFRONT. Hard copies of the SCOR for Adults will be made available to families through MOS by Summer 2011.

Policy. The OSN is currently revising DoD policy to clearly define the two required functions of the EFMP: (1) identification, enrollment and assignment coordination to ensure that the exceptional family member's (EFM) needs are considered during the assignment process, regardless of his/her location and (2) community support that provides information and referral services including non-clinical case management to military families with special needs. The policy will also define the required components of an individualized Services Plan.

Establishment of a Joint Database/Case Management System. The Military Services have independent databases that contain information on their enrolled EFMP population. The DoD is initiating a Functional Analysis of the current databases and case management systems as a first step in developing a joint database/case management system. The Functional Analysis will be conducted during FY 2011 to examine existing systems and project future needs for sharing information. This is a long term project that will assist in the development of a joint database that will network EFMP family support, personnel and military health systems to provide information as needed for assignments and for family support.

Research. DoD has been collaborating with the United States Department of Agriculture under a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that addresses certain research efforts by land-grant universities and the Cooperative Extension Service. Under this agreement, the following research has been conducted.

- Education Services for Military Dependent Children with Disabilities. From October 2009 to November 2010, Ohio State University (OSU) conducted a comprehensive review of the access and availability of evidence-based educational practices for military dependents with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in the states of California, Georgia, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. These states were selected because they had the largest concentration of assigned military personnel. The project focused on the educational services for children with ASD ages 3-21 provided by public school districts serving covered military installations in the five identified states. The results of this study will assist in developing a system to identify the availability of educational services

for children with ASD and aid in the EFMP assignment coordination process within the United States.

DoD has contracted with OSU to conduct a second phase of this project. Phase II will continue the focus on ASD in ten additional states with a high concentration of military families, include a review of early intervention services in all 15 states, and review the availability of services for children with intellectual disabilities and emotional/behavioral disorders.

- **Benchmark Study.** Cornell University and the Beach Center of the University of Kansas are conducting a benchmark study to identify the concerns of military families with special needs, the support they require, and the systems that have been effective in providing services. The research team will conduct focus groups with military families from all branches of Service. Research will be conducted with civilian and military populations. The anticipated outcomes will be recommendations for the military in establishing community support programs including staffing models, metrics, evaluation standards, and a family satisfaction scale. The anticipated completion date of this study is November 2011.
- **Medicaid Study.** The law school of the University of West Virginia is conducting a study on the availability and accessibility of Medicaid to military families with special needs. Concerns about lengthy waiting lists for Home and Community Based Services Medicaid waivers and challenges with accessing these waivers due to frequent moves have been raised by a number of military families. The results of this study will assist the OSN in understanding the scope of the problem and to formulate recommendations. The anticipated completion date of this study is September 2011.

Communication. Communication with military families with special needs remains a major focus of the OSN and the Military Services. Each Service is implementing a communication plan developed by the DoD/Joint Services EFMP Working Group. In collaboration with the Services, the OSN is developing the first of several on-line learning modules for military families (*Services for Children from Birth through Two*) with an anticipated release in the Spring of 2011. Future topics include modules for the school-age child, introduction to the EFMP, adults with Special Needs and marketing for EFMP providers. The DoD/Joint Service EFMP working group developed an EFMP logo that is prominent on all marketing and communication materials. Marketing and communication materials have been developed and will be disseminated to EFMP providers in the Spring of 2011, including information packets for families. The Special Needs/EFMP section on the DoD website, MilitaryHOMEFRONT, has undergone a full content revision, and a new special needs launch page was incorporated into the Military OneSource website.

NDA 2011 requires the establishment of an Advisory Panel on Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs. The DoD/Joint Services EFMP Working Group has discussed a nomination and appointment process. Details are being worked within the Department to establish the Panel and details are being finalized.

Legislative Action

No recommended legislative action at this time.

Summary

DoD has taken significant steps to expand the Department-wide EFMP and to establish DoD-level oversight to provide a consistent level of support at all locations and to all members of the Armed Services. The office is now fully staffed and continues to move forward with the development of DoD policy through collaboration with the Military Services, which will ultimately be responsible for policy execution. E-learning modules and marketing materials will further educate families and ensure they are aware of the EFMP functions of 1) identification, enrollment and assignment coordination as well as 2) community support services that are available to them. Increased staffing and placement of EFMP community support providers will increase awareness as well as provide more support to the families. The partnerships with land grant universities and the Functional Analysis will help identify best practices of EFM programs as well as develop a standardized program and central database for each service to access. We look forward to sharing EFMP challenges and successes in future reports to Congress.