

DoD linking civilian child care providers, military families

By Karen Jowers

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Defense officials are digging deeper into civilian communities to find more high-quality child care for military families.

Child development liaisons will be hired in 13 states in a pilot program that aims to improve access to child care for military families who are not stationed near an installation, as well as those at installations where child development centers are full.

Barbara Thompson, director of the Defense Department's office of family policy, children and youth, said the liaisons will identify potential child care providers who are interested in caring for military children.

MEMBER STATES

Thirteen states are taking part in a new child care pilot program through the Defense Department: Alaska, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Vermont and Washington.

military children and installations with a high deployment tempo; others have no installations but do have geographically dispersed National Guard and reserve members, as well as special-duty personnel such as recruiters. Some states have been identified as needing to improve their child care.

The Defense Department child care program has been recognized as a national model.

"We think we have a lot to share with the nation," Thompson said. "We want to make sure all children have access to high-quality care."

The pilot program will share some of the military's "lessons learned" to help civilian communities "raise the bar of quality," she said.

Sometimes it's difficult for military officials to refer families to child care off installations when those providers are just barely meeting state licensing requirements, Thompson said, adding that not all states have high standards for child care.

Pilot program liaisons will work with the states' early childhood councils, licensing agencies and

block grant programs. Since federal block grants go directly to the states, the pilot program will look to leverage those grants to support military families, Thompson said.

Kelly Hruska, deputy director of government relations for the National Military Family Association, said this could be a winning solution both for military

and civilian families.

"As you expand capacity, you expand options for military families," she said. "And for the community, it raises the level of the



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The program is a partnership between the Pentagon and the departments of Health and Human Services, Education and Agriculture, under the White House's Military Family Interagency Policy initiative. □



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