

# Senior Spouse Update Summary

Current as of Nov. 27, 2023



On Nov. 27, 2023, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy Patricia Montes Barron provided a quarterly update to 23 senior military spouses. In that update, Mrs. Barron and members of her leadership team presented MC&FP resources to strengthen families' economic security and address complex issues military families face every day.

Mrs. Barron opened by asking, "If today was the last day of peace, are you ready? Is your family prepared?" before previewing presentations on spouse employment and the new dependent care flexible spending account. "It is imperative that you know about the resources available to help you take care of yourselves, your family and the service members around you," she said.

Mrs. Barron underscored the Defense Department's continued commitment to increase military families' economic stability in the next year. The next Senior Spouse Update will occur in early 2024 and will provide an update on the Defense-State Liaison Office's work with state lawmakers to improve the well-being of service members and families.

## **Spouse Employment**

Eddy Mentzer, associate director of Military Community Support Programs and program manager, Spouse Education and Career Opportunities, provided an update on spouse employment programs. Mr. Mentzer recounted October's annual Military Spouse Employment Partnership two-day event, which focused on new employer partner inductions and was attended by First Lady Dr. Jill Biden. MSEP announced 130 new inductees, which is the largest class ever. Sixty inductees were small businesses, which are new to 2023. MSEP now has more than 700 employer partners that have hired 275,000 military spouses so far. Mr. Mentzer anticipates the dates will shift for next year's event, as the annual induction will occur in January 2025 instead of November 2024.

Mr. Mentzer discussed a November internal roundtable on spouse hiring at the Defense Department, which brought together DOD partners to talk about internal hiring practices, including adding MilSpouses into the overall talent management strategy.

Mr. Mentzer then provided an update on the Military Spouse Career Accelerator Pilot program, which provides spouses of currently serving members of the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force and Space Force, including active, reserve and National Guard components, with paid, 12-week fellowships at civilian employers across various industries and locations.

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Since the program's launch in December 2022, 223 employers have hosted spouse fellows. MSCAP's goal is to convert spouse fellowships into paid positions, and 82% of spouses were hired at the end of their fellowships so far. Because job portability is so important for spouses, 70% of the fellowships were offered as remote positions. MSCAP fellowships are currently available in 27 states. The pilot program, which has two years remaining, hopes to add fellowships in another 10 states by the end of 2023. MSCAP will offer skill-based fellowships to entry-level spouses to build work experience in 2024.

## Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account Update

Next, Jennifer Walker, executive director for the Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account initiative, discussed this new benefit, available to as many as 400,000 service members with eligible dependents.

- This benefit helps military families budget for dependent care costs and save money, as funds contributed to a DCFSA are pretax. Enrollment in a DCFSA is open to DOD civilians, regular (active) component service members, and active Guard reserve members on Title 10 orders who have dependents with eligible expenses.
- A DCFSA is a pretax account used to pay for eligible dependent care services such as child or adult day care. DCFSAs allow eligible service members and their families to contribute a minimum of \$100 and a maximum of \$5,000 per household in pretax earnings. This benefit lowers taxable income, which results in lower taxes, including federal, state (in most states), and Medicare and Social Security tax.
- Eligible expenses include before- or after-school programs, au pair care, day camp, elder care, nanny care, preschool, nursery school, sick child care, and babysitting (work-related only). Ineligible expenses include babysitting (not work-related), school tuition (kindergarten and up), sleepaway camp, tutoring, medical and nursing home care, meals, and activity lessons (e.g., piano, dance).
- Federal Benefits Open Season runs from Nov. 11 to Dec. 13, 2023. During this time, service members can elect to enroll in a DCFSA for the 2024 plan year (Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 2024). If a military family experiences a qualifying life event, such as a change in marital status, deployment or PCS at any point during the year, they are eligible to enroll outside of the open season period.

## How You Can Help

As trusted leaders in the military community, you — senior spouses — are uniquely positioned to share these and other important military spouse-related resources with your networks, including local and regional businesses. By informing them of the benefits of hiring spouses and by encouraging their participation as employers, you can

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help place more spouses in quality, flexible jobs and boost their families' economic security.

Help us reach and educate spouses and military leadership by sharing the resources discussed in the webinar on social media platforms. Download the [My Military OneSource app](#) and subscribe to our SECO and Military OneSource [eNewsletters](#).

## Links Discussed by Mrs. Barron

- **Taking Care of People Fact Sheets:** <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/financial-legal/personal-finance/taking-care-of-people/>
- **Economic Toolkit (Financial Well-Being):** <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/leaders-service-providers/economic-security/#financial-well-being>
- **Defense-State Liaison Office:** <https://statepolicy.militaryonesource.mil/>

## Links Discussed by Mr. Mentzer – Spouse Employment

- **MySECO:** <https://myseco.militaryonesource.mil/portal/>
- **Military Spouse Employment Partnership:** <https://myseco.militaryonesource.mil/portal/msep>
- **Military Spouse Career Accelerator Pilot:** <https://myseco.militaryonesource.mil/portal/article/military-spouse-career-accelerator-pilot>

## Links Discussed by Ms. Walker – Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account Initiative

- **DOD Office of Financial Readiness landing page:** <https://finred.usalearning.gov/DCFSA>
- **Military OneSource Benefits page:** <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/benefits/dependent-fsa/>
- **FSAFEDS Uniformed Services landing page:** <https://www.fsafeds.com/explore/usmdcfsa>