



SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
1000 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

SEP 13 2024

MEMORANDUM FOR SENIOR PENTAGON LEADERSHIP  
COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS  
DEFENSE AGENCY AND DOD FIELD ACTIVITY DIRECTORS

**SUBJECT:** Our Enduring Duty to America's Service Members and Their Families

Early in my tenure as Secretary of Defense, I made taking care of our people a top priority. Doing right by our all-volunteer Joint Force and their families is a core readiness issue. Taking care of our people is fundamental to the Department's ability to recruit and retain the most talented American patriots and to ensure that the U.S. military remains the most lethal fighting force on the planet — and it is simply the right thing to do. I am proud of the progress that we have made, with thanks to Congress for their support.

**Actions to Take Care of Our People.** Over the past three and a half years, the Department of Defense has taken important steps to take care of our people, including:

- **Economic Security.** The Department has made significant investments in economic security for our Service members and their families. This includes a cumulative 9.8 percent pay raise over the past two years and the proposed 4.5 percent pay raise in the President's Fiscal Year 2025 budget request. We have also increased Basic Allowance for Housing rates by an average of 18 percent over the 2022 rates, and we have directed the Defense Commissary Agency to achieve a global savings of at least 25 percent compared to commercial grocery stores.
- **Making Moves Easier.** The Department has expanded the maximum number of days for which Service members may receive Temporary Lodging Expenses, increased the Dislocation Allowance, and authorized reimbursement to Service members for the cost of relocating pets during any Permanent Change of Station (PCS) after January 1, 2024.
- **Supporting Military Spouses.** Frequent moves make it harder for military spouses to find good jobs, maintain professional momentum, and excel in their own careers. We are deeply committed to making it easier for military spouses to find — and maintain — employment that meets their financial and professional needs and goals. The Department has expanded programs such as the My Career Advancement Account (MyCAA) and the career accelerator. DoD has also increased the number of partners in the Military Spouse Employment Partnership program to more than 800 employers, and we continue to work with the states to make professional licenses portable. In addition, the Department has entered into an agreement with the Department of State that streamlines the Domestic Employees Teleworking Overseas approval processes for military spouses who are Federal employees accompanying a Service member to an overseas military installation.

- **Affordable and Quality Childcare and Early Childhood Education.** We are supporting parents and expanding military families' access to affordable and high-quality childcare. I have directed actions to invest in childcare facilities and staff compensation, standardize a minimum 50 percent discount in Child Development Program (CDP) childcare fees for the first child of our CDP DoD civilian employees in direct-care positions, establish Dependent Care Flexible Spending Accounts, and launch newly funded universal pre-kindergarten at DoD Education Activity (DoDEA) schools, which will enable 4,000 more military children to attend DoDEA schools over the next five years. The Department has also restructured and implemented a new childcare fee schedule, which ensures affordability and keeps costs to Service members close to seven percent of total family income for one child in care.
- **Eliminating Sexual Assault.** We have made important strides to eliminate sexual assault and sexual harassment in our ranks. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, for the first time in more than eight years, the Department saw a decrease in the estimated prevalence of sexual assault. The Department is rapidly and effectively implementing the approved recommendations from the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military that I ordered established in 2021. This includes the establishment of the Offices of Special Trial Counsel in the Military Departments, which take sexual assault cases, sexual harassment cases, and cases involving other specified crimes out of the chain of command and entrusts them to specialized, highly trained, independent military lawyers. This landmark change is the most important reform to our military justice system since the creation of the Uniform Code of Military Justice in 1950.
- **Suicide Prevention and Response.** The Department is also implementing the approved recommendations of the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee that I stood up in 2022. That means actions across five lines of effort: (1) fostering a supportive environment, (2) improving the delivery of mental health care, (3) reducing the stigma of mental health issues and lowering other barriers to care, (4) revising suicide prevention training, and (5) promoting a culture of safety around lethal means. We continue to push hard here. One suicide is one too many.
- **Quality Housing and Facilities.** To provide our Service members with high-quality housing and facilities, we must continue to overcome a generation of underinvestment, especially in our barracks. First, we will continue to make necessary investments, while also exploring opportunities for public-private ventures. Second, to ensure that we maintain those improvements, I am directing Military Departments to fully fund barracks maintenance accounts in future budgets. Third, with thanks to Congress for its support, the Department has added civilian barracks managers and Department of Public Works personnel to improve maintenance processes and timelines. Fourth, to implement Government Accountability Office recommendations, we launched an Unaccompanied Housing Tiger Team to make ongoing and urgent unaccompanied housing improvements that will also improve food access and food security. We also continue to look for opportunities to make immediate quality of life enhancements in unaccompanied housing. Additionally, the

Department recently launched the DoD Housing Feedback System, a publicly accessible database for tenants of privatized military housing to submit comments to promote transparency and accountability.

- **Access to Quality Healthcare.** We are working hard to increase the quality and accessibility of healthcare for all Service members, families, and beneficiaries enrolled in our Military Health System. This includes steps to support and retain our existing medical personnel and to recruit more military and civilian clinicians. We are also continuing to modernize our health information technology platforms to provide more user-friendly digital health tools to make it easier to get medical appointments and referrals, including telehealth consultations. Since many Service members' duty hours conflict with pharmacy hours, we are improving pharmacy automation solutions. The Department has also expanded telemedicine capabilities for behavioral health services in remote and overseas locations and enhanced access to non-medical counseling through a Military and Family Life Counselor Locator. The Department is also working every day to protect brain health and help those suffering from adverse effects of blast overpressure.

**New Actions.** The Department has made enormous progress, but we have more to do. I have met directly with junior Service members and families, with our Senior Enlisted Advisors, and with Service leadership to explore further steps to enhance quality of life for our people. To that end, I am today directing the following additional actions:

- **Establishing Health Care Flexible Spending Accounts.** Service members or their families sometimes must pay out-of-pocket for certain healthcare expenses to supplement the comprehensive coverage offered through TRICARE. So I am announcing the extension of Health Care Flexible Spending Accounts (HCFSAs) to military members. HCFSAs will enable eligible Service members in the Active Component and certain Reserve Component members performing Active Guard and Reserve duty to enroll and elect up to \$3,200 in pre-tax earnings per Service member to pay for eligible healthcare costs such as co-payments, contact lenses, glasses, dental care, annual deductibles, and point-of-service fees for healthcare services.
  - The Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD(P&R)) will work with the Secretaries of the Military Departments and the Office of Personnel Management to make this benefit available to Service members through a special enrollment period, anticipated in March 2025.
- **Increasing access to WiFi.** Service members need reliable and private internet connections to access mandatory online training requirements and resources such as telehealth appointments, Military OneSource, and Military and Family Life Counselors. WiFi access also keeps Service members connected with their family and friends and can provide entertainment during off-hours. To this end, the Department will build upon existing Service initiatives to implement a series of WiFi pilot projects in select unaccompanied housing facilities over the course of FY 2024 and FY 2025, which will form the basis of a long-term plan to build a WiFi-connected force.

- The Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment (USD(A&S)) will work with the Military Departments to track pilot projects and share best practices.
- USD(A&S) will engage with internet service providers to develop innovative programs for the provision of WiFi to Service members in unaccompanied housing.
- **Making moves even easier.** The Department asks our Service members and families to move frequently, which can cause strain. We have already taken key steps to ease the burden of PCS moves, and today, we are doing even more.
  - USD(P&R) will work with interagency partners on an expedited basis to:
    - Increase Temporary Lodging Expense to 21 days (from 14 days).
    - Allow Temporary Lodging Allowance (TLA) to be authorized for a period that ordinarily will not exceed 60 days when departing from a permanent duty station (PDS) outside the continental U.S. (OCONUS); this aligns TLA at departure with the normal TLA period authorized on arrival at an OCONUS PDS.
    - Initiate a study on increasing household goods weight tables for the entire Force.
- **Expanding military spouse employment programs and professional development.** Our military spouses are the rock upon which their Service members stand, and we continue to invest in their careers. MyCAA provides up to \$4,000 (\$2,000 per FY) in financial assistance for eligible military spouses to pursue a license, certification, or associate's degree. In March 2023, I directed that the Department expand MyCAA eligibility to the spouses of Active Duty Service members and the spouses of National Guard and Reserve Component members serving in an Active Duty status on Title 10 orders in pay grades E-6 and O-3.
  - Today, I am further expanding MyCAA eligibility, which will cover the spouses of Service members on Active Duty, as well as the spouses of National Guard and Reserve Component members serving in an Active Duty status on Title 10 orders in pay grades of E-7, E-8, E-9, and W-3 effective on October 1, 2024. Eligibility will continue for W-1 and W-2, O-1 to O-3, and E-1 to E-6.
- **Increasing access to quality childcare.** Amid a national shortage of childcare providers, we must do everything possible to make DoD an employer of choice — including doing more to provide superb and affordable childcare. The President's Fiscal Year 2025 budget request includes a \$33.5 million investment in our childcare workforce by targeting improvements in the recruitment, the retention, and the working environments of the Department's CDPs. This investment includes a redesigned childcare provider compensation model and modernizes the childcare workforce by adding two key positions: lead educators and special needs inclusion

coordinators. These positions will enhance the developmental and educational support provided to children served by our Child Development Centers.

- The Department looks forward to working with Congress to fund this program, and I am directing the Military Departments to work with my office on further enhancements to our CDPs in the FY 2026 budget process.
- In September 2022, I directed a minimum 50 percent discount in childcare fees for the first child of our CDP civilian employees in direct-care positions. Today, I am expanding the authorities provided to the Military Departments to provide incentives to recruit and retain childcare providers. Military Departments are now encouraged to provide a 100 percent childcare fee discount for the first child and a 25 percent discount for the second child of our CDP civilian employees in direct-care positions.
- **Making life easier at remote and isolated installations.** Service members and families at some installations face unique — and sometimes acute — hardships. We must do everything that we can to tackle these difficulties, including accessing in-person healthcare, purchasing affordable WiFi, finding off-base housing, locating good schools, and helping military spouses find employment.
  - I am therefore directing that USD(P&R) initiate a review of three remote and isolated installations during the 2025 On-Site Installation Evaluation process that will provide quantitative and qualitative data to better tackle this critical issue.
- **Easing uniform costs and improving uniform quality for the enlisted Force.** Our enlisted Force should be adequately compensated for the unavoidable replacement of required uniform items. I therefore direct that:
  - The Secretaries of the Military Departments, in conjunction with the Director of the Defense Logistics Agency, shall by April 2025 execute a quality review of standard issued uniform clothing items to determine if the items meet their intended wear life.
  - The USD(P&R), in coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments, shall by September 2025 execute a review of the enlisted monetary uniform replacement allowance rates to ensure that they are sufficient.

The Department is grateful for the many ongoing collaborative efforts among Federal agencies, Congress, and state and local leaders to take care of our people. We look forward to continuing this work shoulder-to-shoulder with you.

We continue to work hard every day to take care of our Service members and families. This is more than a commitment. It is a sacred obligation.

