

Military OneSource Podcast — Child Care in Your Home From a Parent’s Perspective

Children, Youth and Families Program

Episode transcript

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource Podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit militaryonesource.mil.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody. Today, we're going to talk about child care, arguably one of the most important topics for a family. Specifically, we're going to talk about Child Care in Your Home Fee Assistance. This is a program. We're going to get into all of the details with our guests. Lieutenant Colonel Maria Quinn joins us. Colonel Quinn is with the Space Force, and she's the first Guardian that we've ever had on the podcast. So welcome to you.

Lt. Col. Quinn:

Thank you.

Bruce Moody:

Also joining us today is Marci George with Children, Youth and Families. That's a program within Military Community and Family Policy, which makes her a colleague. Marci, it's great to have you on the podcast.

Marci George:

Thank you. So happy to be here today.

Bruce Moody:

Absolutely. Marci, let's begin with you. So, this is a particular program, and it's called Child Care in Your Home Fee Assistance program. It's a pilot program, but let me just step back and give you the opportunity to explain this program.

Marci George:

Thank you, Bruce. Well, the Department of Defense implemented the Child Care in Your Home Fee Assistance pilot program to help with expanding child care needs in military families for full-time, in-home child care services. So, this program was initiated under the National Defense Authorization Act of fiscal year 2021 under Section 589, establishing a pilot program to provide fee assistance to military who pay for in-home child care providers. The pilot program helps military families actually cover a portion of the cost of full-time child care, which is provided in their homes.

This program's a little different compared to our other military child care programs in that the parents are the employers of their child care providers, and care is provided in the service member's home. So, the parent actually finds, hires and employs their child care provider that best meets their child care and family needs. So, what we've heard from families is that this program allows the parent to hire someone that may have similar family values. The program is offered right now in 11 locations, but spaces are limited. The locations are the National Capital Region; Hawaii; Norfolk, Virginia; San Antonio, Texas; San Diego, California; Colorado Springs, Colorado; Fayetteville, North Carolina; Jacksonville-Mayport, Florida; Fort Walton Beach, Florida; Las Vegas, Nevada; and then the Seattle-Tacoma, Washington state area.

Child Care Aware® of America is the department's third party contractor that administers the program for the department. And what they do is they actually verify eligibility of the service member and the provider. They distribute the fee assistance payments that are approved to the in-home provider, and they ensure the provider successfully completes and maintains background check requirements and training. And, most importantly, they provide the provider and the parent some information about the program requirements and help them navigate through the application and enrollment process.

Bruce Moody:

Thanks, Marci. Colonel Quinn, I'd like to talk to you about your experience. Would you share with us your family situation and how you came to navigate in-home child care?

Lt. Col. Quinn:

So, we, my husband and I, have been in the service now 15 years, originally Air Force and then Space Force. And right now, we have six little ones — so ages 10, 8, 6, 4, a newly 3-year-old on Wednesday and an 8-month-old. And so, as you can imagine, child care really makes a difference between us being able to serve or not to serve. When we came out to DC in 2014, we had one child and one on the way, and we were both starting jobs in support of 24-hour operations where we were going to be required to work 12-hour shifts.

Additionally, he was traveling very extensively with a special team. So, as you can see, we really only had one option. We needed another adult to help us out. And, as most military families, we were moved away from our core families, so we didn't have anybody that could step in to help out. Additionally, the current military child care options up to that point in 2014 were really the CDC, on-base child care, the FCC, the family child care in somebody else's home, or perhaps a day care, but none of those were going to meet our 24-hour needs sometimes.

So, we have always desired to serve to our highest potential and also grow our family. And so really that's what we did. We hired a nanny and navigated it, and figured it all out. And so that's what we've been using the last almost 10 years to ensure that we're ready when our, you know, force readiness is number one, right, for all of us, and then also being able to grow our family. So, we've had incredible women along the way that served our families, and they're still close with us today.

Bruce Moody:

Great. Of course, happy birthday to the 3-year-old.

Lt. Col. Quinn:

Thank you.

Bruce Moody:

So how did you end up hearing about the fee assistance pilot program?

Lt. Col. Quinn:

So, I think there was a press release right when it came out back in June 2021, and, all of a sudden, we started getting texts and emails from friends and family sending us this great new program. And we were so excited. And the thought of even people that were thinking of us in our situation was incredibly encouraging because we had really been

doing it on our own, right? Seeking to serve, seeking those tough jobs, but also wanting to grow our family.

And so, we were very excited that maybe we wouldn't be investing perhaps one of our full paychecks into child care. And so, we signed up immediately, and I think — Marci can correct me — but I think we were probably one of the first, the early families, trying to figure it out, right? We were pretty uniquely suited as someone that had done this already for about nine years navigating this, right, being a household employer. Yeah.

Marci George:

Yeah. Colonel Quinn's family was our very first parent, so we have been so excited working with her and have gotten a lot of great information from her on how to make the program, the pilot better.

Bruce Moody:

I'm so glad that we sent out that press release.

Lt. Col. Quinn:

Me, too. Me, too.

Bruce Moody:

Well, so okay. So, you read the press release, and you said, "Godzooks! This is what we need." So, what did you do then? What was your process of signing up?

Lt. Col. Quinn:

Well, I am happy to report, and Ms. George will back me up on this one, it looks a little bit different now, right? The team there at OSD has invested so heavily, specifically Ms. George and Ms. Welch, in making improvements. So, if I'm being honest, those first, you know, I think the first of us had... It was pretty stressful, pretty unknown. There were some kinks to work out.

And so, I'm happy to report, as I've told everybody I've ever told about the program, it can only get better with the continued investment. So, we signed up, and I think they sent us a link for an Army family, and so then we had to go back and say, "That's not us." And so, there was a lot of learning early on that made it a little bit painful. However, I know it looks much different for our families today.

Bruce Moody:

Well, thanks for being with us on the first of that journey. So, when we're talking about this Child Care in Your Home Fee Assistance program, what are some of the resources along the way that you were able to tap into while going through this process?

Lt. Col. Quinn:

There are more today than there were in the past, which is wonderful. There really wasn't a lot in the beginning, and I think this is where some of the confusion for a lot of our military families at all different ranks and all different services in the beginning. They understood at first glance that they were going to become a household employer, which meant they were going to be responsible for finding a care provider that met their family's needs, ensuring that they were a good fit, right?

Establishing a contract, checking their references, doing taxes — all those things that come with being a household employer. Many of our folks, they may have interviewed somebody or hired someone into their unit, but most of them haven't. And so, we knew how to do it. And the first two times that we did this early on, we worked with an agency. And I knew immediately that that was something that I wanted to protect our military families from doing, was paying anywhere from six to \$15,000 to an agency to hire for them.

I really wanted our families to be empowered and capable to hire well for themselves and save that additional cost. So, honestly, there weren't very many. I did call out to Military OneSource one time to make sure in their financial, in their tax area, because it was pretty complicated in the beginning, and they were really competent. So really it was just going back to the CCA team and then Ms. George's team to ask those questions. But now, like I said, I'm so happy to see on the website much greater investment to really streamline that information for families.

Bruce Moody:

You know, you did talk about using a service or not using a service. Do you have any other lessons learned or recommendations for other families who are considering hiring a nanny?

Lt. Col. Quinn:

I think, when I talk with families, what I encourage them to think about is take a step back, right? Whether they're in an immediate crisis over child care, whether they are thinking about having kids or whether they're about to move and trying to figure out what's going to make sense, I really encourage families to take a step back and look at their long-term family goals. Look at those first. Then look at your career goals, and then

start figuring out, "Okay, how do we get from here to there?" Right? Those long-term goals to ensure that, if we're married, that our marriage is thriving, that our kids are well, well taken care of and also thriving, and that we can also serve to our fullest capacity.

What is it going to take to do that? And that's going to be different for every single family. And that's why this program is so critical — is we do have the CDC, and we do have the FCC and we do have Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood. And yet there's other families that have different situations. And so, this is such a critical tool in that suite of options we give families. So, I want them to take time and think about what they need. And sometimes they just have questions about the program. Like, "Is this...What are the hours? What are the limitations?" And sometimes it's, "I'm too scared about taxes." Or "I'm too nervous about writing a contract."

So, there's this operating space right in there where families have a ton of questions, and sometimes those aren't available unless they've talked to someone that has hired a nanny. So that's really what I've been trying to work on the last two years is, is there a missing piece for families when they're trying to make child care decisions, whether it comes to new jobs they're going to take on or whether they're going to be PCSing? Because child care is scary, and it doesn't need to be, right? We know there's a national crisis, and that's why this is so critical — is another option for families.

I think a big thing that has been helpful more recently is helping families run through the numbers of how much it could cost them and then how to negotiate well with their provider once they find one to really create a mutually beneficial opportunity. Not one where a provider feels taken advantage of and not one where the family is not getting someone that can meet their family's needs. So really focusing on getting clear on what's important to the family for the long term, and then helping them piece that together in the short term.

Bruce Moody:

That's really interesting. Marci, let's bring you into the conversation. How can parents access information and resources so that they can learn more about this pilot program?

Marci George:

Well, thank you for asking. Parents can find out more information about the pilot program through Military OneSource or [MilitaryChildCare.com](https://militarychildcare.com), which is the department's request for child care system, as well as through Child Care Aware® of America. We are continuing to try to update information, especially like on [MilitaryChildCare.com](https://militarychildcare.com). And, recently, we added two videos explaining the program in a little more detail. One is a 2-minute video that kind of gives an overview of the program,

and the other one is a 6-minute video that provides a little more information about the program.

As far as provider eligibility, the provider's eligibility, they should be a U.S. citizen or a legal permanent resident. They may be 18 years of age, hold a high school diploma or equivalent, and comply with, of course, the employment laws, which include the tax requirements. But, also, we have also included this year that the provider may be a family member such as a grandparent, an aunt, or an uncle or an older sibling. However, they cannot be financially dependent on the parent. And then, this year we implemented an option to start the provider under something called provisional approval. And under the provisional approval, a sponsor may agree in writing to allow their provider to start caring for their children once the FBI Fingerprint Check is completed and favorably adjudicated. The remaining background checks, which are the state Criminal History Repository Check, the state Child Abuse and Neglect Repository Check and the state Sex Offender Registry Check, must be initiated though.

But under provisional approval, it allows a family to receive fee assistance prior to having the other four background checks or other three background checks returned. The Child Care in Your Home provider must also agree to the provisional approval and the requirements for that. Now, what we're really excited about is we are currently working on pilot year 3. We hope to have that plan announced in the next few weeks. We've really tried to listen to families and to the parents' needs and are making some changes based on those requests. And, so, the other thing that we're doing is we're looking at expanding the child care spaces for the program. So, we're really looking forward to our third year for the pilot.

Bruce Moody:

Marci, that's a lot of information. You know, I imagine that this program, helpful as it is, presents some unique considerations as parents are hiring in-home child care providers. Can you talk us through some of these unique aspects?

Marci George:

It's really important for parents to understand that child care is personal, and it should meet their family needs and their child care requirements. Just as Colonel Quinn has mentioned, parents must, of course, locate and hire their provider, and they are serving as the provider's employer. And serving as an employer has tax implications. And most families are not tax experts when hiring their child care provider. So, it's kind of important for them to find out what's required through the IRS in the state where the family resides because we're finding that taxes are a little — employer taxes are different from location to location.

Of course, Military OneSource has some information that can assist families understand the taxes and what taxes are withheld as employees and taxes that have to be paid by the employer. And there's also a fact sheet on Military OneSource about tax considerations for the household employers. And, as Colonel Quinn mentioned, it's also important to establish that written provider agreement because the parent is actually working with the provider in negotiating what is needed for their child care arrangement. So, a written agreement is really important to outline the hours of services, where child care is going to take place in the home and what is expected by the parent for that provider.

The other thing is that providers are also required to complete some training. And some of the training requirements, especially for the orientation training, is focused on keeping the children safe and healthy. Our orientation training requirements are infant child CPR certification, first aid certification, child abuse prevention training, and identifying child abuse and also safe sleep requirements for especially when you're caring for an infant.

And then, as I mentioned a little earlier, the providers must successfully complete the minimum background check requirements, and they're very similar to our child and youth programs on the installations. And they include the fingerprint-based FBI Criminal History Background Check, the state Criminal History Repository Check, the state Child Abuse and Neglect Repository Check, and the state and national Sex Offender Registry Check. Child Care Aware® of America actually provides support on how to complete the background checks by providing some information for their local, state and regional areas for our locations. And then they also work really closely to make sure that the background checks are reviewed and adjudicated. And they even help the providers with their training and making sure that they're completing their training.

Bruce Moody:

Marci, this is a lot of really great information. Maybe what we should do — so we have a bunch of resources we're going to put in the program notes. Maybe generally talk to them. I'm really interested in kind of talking to people who are just wondering what is that first step. And maybe that step is just calling Military OneSource and getting help through Military OneSource. So, talk about that resource and just touch on some of the other resources that we're putting in the program notes.

Marci George:

Yeah. What we're trying to do, Bruce, is ensure that these websites — because we have really three websites — so we're trying to start to connect everything, whether it's Military OneSource, if there's a link, we can attach that link to [MilitaryChildCare.com](https://www.militarychildcare.com) as well as through Child Care Aware® of America. Families really have to request child care through [MilitaryChildCare.com](https://www.militarychildcare.com), and that's their first step really.

So, when they go onto [MilitaryChildCare.com](https://militarychildcare.com), they can look for the Child Care in Your Home program. And there's some frequently asked questions and some information about the program there, as well as links to take them to Military OneSource and to Child Care Aware® of America. So that would be a really good place for families to start.

Bruce Moody:

You know, as we wrap up this conversation, I guess I just want to invite final thoughts about the program, about the ability to have in-home child care. Colonel Quinn, let's start with you.

Lt. Col. Quinn:

Thank you. Yes. As we mentioned earlier, right, child care is infrastructure, so just like Senator Warren said recently. And so it's not really a nice to have, it's a necessity. And so I loved what Ms. George said earlier with saying, "Yeah, child care is personal." And we, as a DOD, are wanting to ensure that there's options for families. So, what I really wanted to talk about in the last two years is, in meeting with families as they're trying to figure this out, is there's an opportunity here for families to be able to ask more questions when they need it and to receive that education when they need it.

And sometimes they just want to talk to someone that's done it before. So, you said my name earlier, and I welcome questions on my official email if families are interested because sometimes you just need to talk to someone to make sure you're not alone. I know we felt so alone early on in the process, and as the team continues to grow, there's more and more options. So, I'm happy to serve in whatever way possible as families figure out ways to serve their best while also growing the family they love.

Bruce Moody:

Thank you for that. Thank you especially for, you're the third person in this space of a couple of weeks to refer child care as part of infrastructure, and it really is so true. And on that note, Marci, I just welcome your final thoughts on this topic.

Marci George:

Well, thank you. Yeah, child care is very important, and like we said, it's personal. There are so many things that when it comes to child care, just meeting the family's needs and the child's needs. And, so, this is just one of the child care options. We feel it's an important option for families. It's meeting a different need for our military families. And so, we're happy that we're able to offer this pilot program. We're learning every day. I learn something new so often that we can make improvements to better the program.

And so, we're kind of fortunate that it's a pilot program because we can make those changes and meet families' needs. And so, we're just looking forward to our next couple of years as we run the pilot. We've been so fortunate with Colonel Quinn as a parent who's been very honest with us and straightforward, and we've taken some of her ideas, and we try to run with them. And we also are trying to listen to what our parents' needs are to meet their needs. So, it's just, we're very excited about this pilot as well as moving forward with our other child care programs.

Lt. Col. Quinn:

We didn't say it yet, but Ms. George, I think you would agree with me. This is one tool in the suite of options. This is not the right solution for every single family. And so that's kind of that operating space of, "Okay, does this make sense for us? Can we afford it? Is this what we need right now?" That's some of those things where this child care can be an investment, right?

It can be pretty expensive, and an informed provider is, on average, more expensive than our FCCs or our CDCs or day cares. So, for some folks, this is going to make all the difference, right, if they can navigate that fee assistance and be able to afford it. But it is not for everybody. And so, sometimes, we just can help them figure that piece of it out too. Does it make sense for them or not?

Marci George:

Yes. And Colonel Quinn, that is just a very good point because we have other options for our families, whether it's, like you said, the center-based programs for our child development centers or school-aged care programs or family child care, which is a provider. You're bringing your child to a provider's home. Or it's Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood. So, there are a lot of options for our families, but this is just another option for families to decide what's best for them when it comes to child care.

Bruce Moody:

Absolutely. And we'll close on that note. Marci George is with Children, Youth and Families, a program within the Office of Military Community and Family Policy. So also, a colleague. And Lieutenant Colonel Maria Quinn is with the Space Force. And, again, our first Guardian on the podcast, and we hope to have you back, ma'am, and many more of your Guardian colleagues as well. So, thank you very much to the both of you.

Lt. Col. Quinn:

Thank you, sir.

Marci George:

Thank you.

Bruce Moody:

Want to remind everybody that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We'd love to hear from you. There's a link in the program notes. Go ahead and send us a comment, a question, maybe an idea for a future episode, and be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen to your podcasts because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life. I'm Bruce Moody. Thank you for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.