



Key Message

Federal law requires the Defense Department to address child abuse and neglect within the military. States can protect victims by coordinating at the beginning of investigations and identifying the military affiliation of victims or suspects.

Discussion Points

1. Title 10 United States Code Section 1787 directs the secretary of defense to request each state to provide for the reporting of any known or suspected instances of child abuse and neglect in which the victim or suspect is a member of the armed forces (or the spouse of the member).
2. The DOD established the Family Advocacy Program to address the prevention of and response to child abuse and neglect involving military families. FAP incorporates prevention, education and training efforts to make all personnel aware of the scope of child abuse and neglect, domestic abuse and problematic sexual behavior in children and youth, as well as to facilitate collaborative and cooperative efforts.
3. There is often no corresponding state statutory authority for state and local governments to share case information with the appropriate military authorities, and child protective services may lack direction to collect information concerning military affiliation of families; consequently, these agencies may not be aware of families that should be reported, and when to report information to FAP.
4. As 70% of military families live off a military installation and in our communities, statutory authority would support development of more consistent memoradums of understanding, allowing better coordination of local child welfare and military protective and rehabilitative services in support of military children and families.



A 2020 Government Accountability Office report to Congress highlighted the importance of state statutes that require the collection and reporting of military affiliation to the appropriate military authorities as part of state child abuse cases. The bottom line, particularly for those who do not know the military way of life, is that unlike civilian employers, the military services have the obligation to know what is happening with our service members and families 24/7. It is part of how we do business.