

stakeholders are heard – leadership of DeCA and the Exchanges, industry partners, and – most importantly – patrons. ***We also recommend an independent GAO review of the recommendations in the business case analysis.***

WHAT DO TODAY’S MILITARY FAMILIES NEED TO ENSURE READINESS?

It has often been said while the military recruits a service member, it must retain a family. Our Association has long argued in order to build and maintain the quality force our nation demands, the military must support service members as they balance the competing demands of military service and family life. We urge Congress to strengthen the programs and services available to support all troops and families in diminishing uncertainty and meeting the daily challenges of military life.

We thank Congress for providing military families with greater flexibility in timing their relocation either before or after a service member’s permanent change of station (PCS) report date in the FY18 NDAA. We are anxious to see how the Services implement this new policy and will monitor whether it minimizes the upheaval associated with moving.

Yet, budget issues have increased stress and anxiety for families facing a military-ordered move. The military must evolve to meet the needs of today’s military families, but it needs a predictable budget and appropriation to do so.

PRIVATIZED MILITARY HOUSING

In recent weeks we’ve heard from thousands of military families who have endured deplorable conditions within privatized military housing. We are encouraged, and thankful Congress has taken the first steps to address the situation. We urge Congress and the Services to move forward with improved oversight and management of the contractors and housing officials responsible for these conditions which have, and continue to, affect the health, safety and wellbeing of service members and their families.

Nearly twenty years ago when Congress and DoD were considering privatization of military housing, our Association was encouraged by the promise that conditions faced by military families living in military-run facilities would be drastically improved as civilian contractors took over and built and maintained housing to civilian standards. However, we strongly warned Congress of the consequences if the military abandoned its oversight over the housing developers. In fact we specifically warned, “If the Services’ oversight of developers mirrors their own care of housing, we could foresee families caught in the vise of the new management company blaming failures on the construction company, the Services blaming both, and families left with the residual mess.” It saddens and angers us to have to say, “We told you so.” After almost twenty years, families are still looking for the answers to these questions:

- ***Who provides oversight of housing management and maintenance?***
- ***What is the role of the installation commander?***
- ***Who is the advocate for family members living in the housing?***

With 50-year contracts and millions of dollars, we’ve witnessed and experienced what privatization of military housing with a lack of proper oversight yields. We continue to be horrified at stories of

mold growing through walls and inhabiting heating, ventilation and air condition (HVAC) systems, a lack of proper installation of windows and insulation causing major problems with temperature regulation, vegetation such as mushrooms and moss growing in bathrooms and out of carpets, infestations of vermin and the disgusting list goes on. We've also heard from families that in some places maintenance workers and housing officials have stonewalled efforts to improve conditions- from telling the families that they're simply not going to fix a problem to presenting nondisclosure agreements to tenants living in these conditions who desire to move their family to a clean and safe environment.

Further complicating the situation is the notion that a service member may be deployed or remotely assigned and concerned about conditions in which his/her family is living. This affects not only the readiness of the individual, but also the safety of their units and jeopardizes operational success on the battlefield.

Families want to know:

- What has changed for those who are currently experiencing problems?
- What has changed for those who discover issues in a month?
- How are the Services going to address the short and long-term health problems of families? What if the service member has separated from the military? How will families receive care?

What will Congress include in the FY20 NDAA to address these questions?

CHILD CARE

Military families often tell us that finding high-quality, affordable child care is one of their biggest challenges. In part, of course, this reflects a national shortage of affordable child care options. The demographics of the military family community make the issue particularly acute: two-thirds of the more than 1.6 million military-connected children are under the age of twelve and the largest cohort – nearly 38 percent – is under age five.⁹

DoD is to be commended for recognizing the importance of ensuring military families have access to high-quality, affordable child care and for taking concrete steps to provide this care. Its facilities are usually top-notch and offer curricula developed by experts in early childhood education. In addition, it provides admirable training and professional development opportunities to CDC employees as well as care providers in its network of Family Child Care (FCC) homes. It developed a single website, MilitaryChildCare.com, to provide better information about on-base child care options and allow parents to seek a space for their child in advance of a PCS move. In response to concerns that lengthy background check requirements were leading to hiring delays and staff shortages, DoD implemented procedures to speed the process while still ensuring the safety of children in their care.

⁹ 2017 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community,
<http://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2017-demographics-report.pdf>