

## **The Needs of Military Families: How are States and the Pentagon Responding, especially for Guard and Reservists?**

**Bill Number:**

**Hearing Date:** July 21, 2004, 2:00 pm

**Location:** SD-430

### **Witness:**

Charles S. Abell

Department of Defense

Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness

### **Testimony**

Mr. Chairman and members of this distinguished Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today and for your continuing support of the men and women who serve in our Armed Forces and their families.

Today, I will be addressing the myriad ways the Department of Defense (DoD) is supporting Service members and their families as we continue to attract and retain the best and brightest for our high quality all-volunteer force. The Defense Planning Guidance 2003-2007 challenged us to determine the adequacy of current quality of life programs and address the needs of over 60 percent of our military members and families who live off base as well as members of our Reserve component. We have also been challenged to realign support to coincide with the movement of troops and families. In the global posture planning, more jointness is expected.

To retain dedicated men and women, we must ensure that education, family support, a sense of community, and other quality of life benefits are comparable to American society. To that end, DoD has entered into a new social compact - a written commitment to improve life in the military, and underwrite family support programs. We acknowledge the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the accomplishment of the DoD mission and quality of life. Families also serve.

Military families are a top priority for the Department, especially those families directly impacted by deployment. The Department is sensitive to the hardships and challenges faced by military families when Service members are away from home for lengthy periods. Service members perform tough duty in challenging locations, while their families deal with the stress and anxiety associated with extended separations. Current deployments necessitate robust support. Examples of increased support service include:

- Increased access to e-mail, telephone cards, and satellite phone services. The frequency and duration of Health, Morale and Welfare (HMW) calls are determined by the commander so as not to interfere with the mission. Over 55,000 HMW calls are made daily, at no cost to the Service member. The Armed Services Exchanges provide unofficial telecommunications systems using the AT&T network. Call volumes using Exchange AT&T Global prepaid phone cards from Exchange phone centers in Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan, and aboard ships is nearly 12.3 million minutes. There are approximately 57 call centers (1,649 phones) and 583 satellite phones in Iraq,

Afghanistan, and Kuwait. The Department has also authorized the Exchanges to sell their prepaid phone cards to the general public for use by military members and their families, through the "Help Our Troops Call Home" Program, which is available to the public on the three exchange Internet homepages.

- Service members have free access to the non-secure military Internet and they also have free Internet access through approximately 32 MWR-operated mobile Internet cafes in Iraq. The Services have provided a broad assortment of morale, welfare and recreation (MWR) support to forces deployed to fight the war on global terrorism. The MWR sites in Iraq and Afghanistan provide library books and periodicals, large screen televisions, DVD/CD players, Playstation II's and game CDs, exercise and sports equipment, and first run movies.

- The Armed Forces Entertainment Office, in cooperation with the USO, has, and will continue to provide much welcomed celebrity and professional entertainment to our forces engaged in the war on global terrorism. Robin Williams, Robert De Niro, Conan O'Brien, David Letterman, Drew Carey, Gary Senise, Paul Rodriguez, George Gervin, Lee Ann Womack, Miss Universe, several NASCAR and World Wrestling Entertainment stars, and several NFL cheerleading squads, are some of the many entertainers who have generously donated their time to bring a taste of home to our deployed forces.

- America wants to support troops and families. Service members and families have enjoyed the outpouring of support. Donations of frequent flier miles to help with family reunions, special televised tributes, celebrity entertainment, and corporate contributions from companies including Home Depot, Sony, Circuit City, and Sears are but a few of the ways our citizens have shown support for the troops.

The Department of Defense is committed to meeting the quality of life needs of our Service members and their families as we transform our military to meet the needs of the 21st century. DoD leaders, at all levels, are monitoring the status of the force and seriously evaluating family support issues as we engage in major transformation efforts. Our commitment to provide the very best programs for the military families during deployment is a certain and significant contributor to readiness and retention.

I am pleased to report that the Department has made significant strides in the area of deployment support since the Persian Gulf Conflict of 1990-1991 by taking the lessons learned and building highly responsive support networks and systems in each of the Service components.

#### Family Assistance Centers and Deployment Support

Central to our system are family assistance centers. Today we have 700 family assistance centers around the world that meet the short-notice "surge" mobilization requirements to provide services to active duty, Guard, and Reserve families. About 400 of these centers are managed by the National Guard and provide mobile outreach capabilities to families not located near a military installation. During deployments, the centers focus on increased education, outreach, and personal assistance to Service members and their families.

Each of the Military Services has comprehensive deployment support programs. These programs educate families and help them cope with the demands of military life including separations and reunions. Personal contact with families on a regular basis is essential to the outreach effort. Through technology, families can access information or link to services around the clock. Personal services include emergency assistance, respite

care for children, counseling, financial assistance, and help navigating the often complex military support systems.

Surveys and anecdotal information indicate that we are addressing the needs of families and we know there is always room for improvement. We must continue to emphasize the “basics” of family readiness, our efforts must be for a joint and total force, and our goal remains 100 percent contact with families.

The Department is committed to facilitate family readiness during uncertain times. We formed a Joint Family Readiness Working Group in October 2002. The group plays a critical role in our efforts to monitor deployment and family readiness and serves as an advisor to DoD leadership on emerging policy and operations issues.

#### Military OneSource

The Department has leveraged the power of technology to deliver information and referral services to Service members and their families regardless of where they are located. Military OneSource delivers a customized approach and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days of the year from anyplace, tailoring services specifically to individuals and individual families. By calling the toll free telephone number - which is always answered by a masters level consultant - military families can obtain information on topics as diverse as child care, parenting, housing, education, and medical services. It is sometimes vital while a Service member is deployed, for a spouse to ask for some help with referrals for home repairs, finances, and major purchases. Military OneSource offers support to all members of the Armed Forces, including the Reserve and National Guard members and families who do not live on military installations and may not be able to take advantage of DoD offerings. Military OneSource is an augmentation to, not a replacement of, the installation family centers. Each of the Military Services fully implemented this service in FY 2004.

#### Family Assistance Counseling

DoD is extending its OneSource outreach by implementing a program of face-to-face non-medical counseling for military families experiencing the normal stress of deployments and reunions. Families who contact the toll-free number in need of specific assistance in coping with current challenges can schedule counseling from a licensed counselor within their immediate geographic area anywhere within the continental United States. This counseling is outside of the TRICARE benefit, and includes issues such as parent and child communications, single parenting, deployment stress, financial pressures, and career and education counseling. On average, counseling consists of about six sessions. Access to this kind of counseling is particularly beneficial to families of Service members on an extended tour of duty in Operation Iraqi Freedom or mobilized Guard and Reserve units who do not live within proximity of installations and the services they offer. We deployed these counselors to support the families of the 1st Armored Division soldiers whose deployment was extended 120 days. The mission was so successful that other overseas communities are exploring ways to provide counseling support.

#### SITES4

Frequent relocation has always been a stress point in military life. Even for career military family - experts in moving, having the right information in a timely manner is essential. The SITES4 Web-based information helps families locate housing, schools, community services, spouse employment, medical assistance, and other aspects of daily

life. It is a planning tool for families whose complex and busy lives demand instant and accurate information and guidance.

#### State Support/Partnerships

Not all solutions to fulfilling the quality of life needs of Service members and their families are within the purview of the Department of Defense. State governments and local communities often influence answers to some of the military's most compelling quality of life needs. As a result, the Department is encouraging partnerships of excellence among the states. Military friendly states foster a climate that is very favorable to our Service members and their families. The Department recognizes financial stability, spouse careers, and school support for military children as three areas in which state governments, nonprofit organizations, and industries can assist DoD in addressing quality of life issues.

These partnerships have already yielded very important and tangible results. Thank you, Governor Bush for recently signing into law a series of measures, which, among other things, improved transition for military dependent students and increased military spouse access to unemployment compensation benefits. In Georgia, Governor Purdue and the legislature listened to military leaders and personnel concerning the corrosive nature of payday lending and enacted statute in the face of considerable opposition from the payday lending industry. Governor Warner has established a Citizen-Soldier Council charged with advising him on support of military members and their families living in Virginia.

The Department has emphasized financial well-being through a financial readiness campaign designed to enhance the education and awareness of the Military Services through the support of 26 federal agencies and non-profit organizations. These organizations and the military Services have collaborated to implement needed interventions. Through partnership with these organizations the Department is also attempting to alleviate the impact of difficult issues such as payday lending by advocating alternative solutions and by supporting state initiatives to curb predatory practices. Governor Purdue and the Georgia Assembly recently established a statute that will significantly inhibit the predatory nature of payday lending and will particularly protect military families from these corrosive practices.

We are employing a similar collaborative approach to improve employment opportunities of military spouses by partnering with federal, state and local governments to address legislative and regulatory barriers that may inhibit financial stability and portability of jobs. The goal is to develop partnerships with state government, non-profit and private sector organizations to enable spouses to develop careers. Barriers to the transfer and acceptance of certifications and licensure that occur when state rules differ can have a dramatic and negative effect on the financial well-being of military families. Military spouses routinely lose six to nine months of income during a military move as they try to re-instate their careers. And, as with civilian families, military families depend more and more on two incomes. Differing licensing requirements limit advancement or deter re-entry into the work force at a new location. Removing these barriers, creating reciprocity in licensing requirement and creating placement opportunities can not only ensure financial stability of the military family but speed the adaptation of the family into its new location. In addition, military spouses represent a desirable new employee pool for a state, especially in education and health care.

Issues such as the transfer of certifications and licensure between states can have a dramatic effect on the financial well being of military families. Spouses may seek jobs below their qualifications in order to sustain necessary family income because of differing state certification or licensing requirements. The military families transfer between states to fulfill military requirements; hence, military moves should be recognized as involuntary moves that require accommodations.

The Department plans to work with states, especially those heavily impacted by military families, to encourage them to consider policies and statutes that are supportive of military families. Governor Bush and the Florida legislature have established the model for State support of military families. The Florida Senate 2003 interim report on support of military families clearly outlines the benefits and impediments experienced by military families residing in Florida. The comprehensive legislation that resulted from the report will assist spouses with employment, help military children transition into Florida public schools and support housing agreements for military families.

Allowing the Department to participate in your meeting with Governors Bush and Kempthorne to discuss the actions state governments can take to support military families provided an entrée into discussing possible collaborations with states to resolve financial stability, spouse employment and school support issues. As a result of this interaction, the Department has met with officials from Texas, North Carolina and Virginia, in addition to Florida and Idaho, to explore means of removing or minimizing barriers that inhibit military families from achieving stability in their lives.

The proposed collaboration was extended to include the unique requirements of Guard and Reserve families. The Department sent a team of subject experts to an Idaho Guard Family Readiness Workshop in Boise. Our intention is to assist states with supporting Guard and Reserve who are called to serve. Through cooperation and collaboration, the Department intends to make best use of its resources to support the total force: Reserve, Guard and active duty in their various roles.

At the invitation of the National Governors Association, Dr. Chu (the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness) participated in a Governors-only lunch and working session this past Sunday to talk about The Federal/State Military Partnership. This meeting provided an excellent opportunity to talk with Governors about key issues and mutual concerns that impact the quality of life of our active duty, Guard and Reserve members and their military families. Dr. Chu asked the Governors what would be the best way to work with them on these issues, perhaps opening dialogue through an Advisory Group. Regardless of what form this should take, the Department is committed to open collaboration with the Governors and will aggressively work with them to support our Service men and women and their families that serve us so well.

At the same time as my appearance before this Subcommittee, Mr. John Molino (the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy) is addressing state legislators at their National Conference in Salt Lake City. Mr. Molino is sharing with them how the Department supports military families in their communities and the importance state laws and policies may have on impacting military families as they move between states or overseas.

To facilitate collaborative efforts with states, as well as nonprofit organizations and industry, the Department has also established a website:

[www.USA4MilitaryFamilies.org](http://www.USA4MilitaryFamilies.org). The site will provide a forum for sharing information

about State and local initiatives that support military families.

#### Regional DoD Quality of Life Coordinators

To undergird our strong belief in the importance of establishing working relationships with states, a Quality of Life liaison will work in four regions across the United States. These liaisons will be responsible for working with state, local and community officials, as well as corporate America, to address the issues of school-aged children of military families, spouse employment, and financial stability. They will promote awareness of the issues of military families who move frequently and are deployed, facilitate partnerships between military installations and surrounding communities, and encourage legislation and reciprocity within and across states.

#### Spouse Employment

Quality of life for our military families is also defined by the successful employment of spouses. To succeed we will need the help of corporate America. Sixty-five percent of the 700,000 spouses of active duty personnel are active in the workforce. Working military spouses move, on average, every 25.2 months and these frequent moves are a tremendous barrier to the development of a career track, consistent employment benefits and tenure. Reflective of American society, over 40 percent of the spouses report that their pay represents a major contribution to the family income. The Department is committed to enhancing the employment and career opportunities of military spouses.

The historic partnership agreement, signed by Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and Secretary of Labor (DoL) Elaine Chao in July 2003, affords both Departments a unique prospect to increase employment opportunities for military spouses while enhancing the competitiveness of the American work force. Since July, DoD and DoL have made great strides in collaborative use of DoL's One-Stop Career centers and in creating a broad spectrum of Web-based services exclusively for military spouses, including the online Military Spouse Resource Center, [www.milspouse.org](http://www.milspouse.org). An Interagency Work Group has convened to address issues of spousal employment and a joint initiative is underway to coordinate recovery and employment assistance for families of transitioning injured Service members and surviving spouses. A multi-pronged approach is being used to address related priority issues such as expanding the availability of portable telework career opportunities, and the previously discussed initiatives to improve the portability of state licenses and certifications. DoD and DoL are also developing a military spouse employment index to measure spouse participation in the work force and determine the impact of military spouse employment on retention.

DoL-funded career advancement centers in San Diego, CA; Fort Campbell, KY; and Hampton Roads, VA, have significantly reduced employment challenges facing military spouses who have been dislocated from jobs at their previous duty site. The San Diego facility has proven especially effective in dealing with the licensing and certification issues.

DoL is demonstrating its commitment to the employment aspirations of military spouses in Texas, Colorado, North Carolina, California, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia. Since last fall, DoL has awarded three grants totaling approximately \$15.5 million to assist military spouses and DoD civilian personnel transition to new jobs. A grant for \$6.8 million has been providing transition services to 663 military spouses and 200 civilian DoD personnel at Fort Hood in Central Texas. Another grant for \$2.6 million has been providing reemployment services to 1,500 military spouses and DoD civilian

personal at Fort Carson Army Post, the Air Force Academy, Peterson Air Force Base, and Schriever Air Force Base in the Colorado Springs area. The most recent grant for \$6.1 million has been providing job training for spouses of military personnel and DoD employees at Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base.

DoL, through its Office of the Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training, in cooperation with DoD through the Transition Assistance Program workshops, is also providing employment-related support and information to separating Service members and spouses designed to enhance their competitiveness in the civilian workforce.

DoD is also exploring innovative placement strategies. In April 2004, DoD began a one-year pilot program establishing a network of local, regional, and national corporations interested in employing the spouses of military personnel. The program, called IMPACT JEMS (Jobs/Employment for Military Spouses), will initially focus on aiding 1,600 military spouses who are relocating this year to Scott Air Force Base in O'Fallon, IL. The program will also be open to spouses currently located at the base.

In October 2003, the Department of the Army entered into a partnership with over a dozen private corporations to enhance employment opportunities for Army spouses. Among the areas being explored by the partnership are proactive use of Web-based employment tools and spouse-friendly human resources policies. It is anticipated that successful strategies will be expanded to include spouses from other Military Departments.

#### Spouse-To-Teachers

Built on our highly acclaimed Troops-to-Teachers initiative, DoD is establishing a similar program to encourage spouses to enter the teaching ranks. America's public schools need more highly qualified teachers dedicated and committed to public education, who can also serve as positive role models. The leadership skills and expertise that military spouses bring to public education make them effective candidates.

Spouses with degrees who may require additional certification will be aided by a Web site that will provide information regarding state licensure and reciprocity requirements, credentialing programs, potential teaching jobs, and installation contacts. Spouses who desire to pursue a degree and acquire teacher certification will also have access to a Web site for career mapping contacts and information regarding educational requirements for specialized degrees, lists of teaching areas with the greatest hiring potential, lists of colleges offering degrees on and off base, and an expanding Teaching as a Second Career Seminar on installations in the continental United States.

To date, over 6,000 former Service members have been hired in 50 states by nearly 2,500 school districts through the original Troops-to-Teachers initiative. We anticipate similar successes with our Spouse-to-Teachers program.

#### Rebasing

Quality of life considerations are reflected in our development of the new global rebasing strategy designed to meet future national security strategy requirements. Although the operational dimensions are paramount, improving the quality of life of relocated forces and their families is also significant. For this reason, the Department intends to consider quality of life in its rebasing strategy recommendations. Considerations include schools, health care, housing, child care, spouse employment, standard of living, transportation and safety.

### Healthy Parenting Initiative

Our dedication to quality of life enhancements is also reflected in the programs we sponsor for the benefit of our military children. Due to current deployments, parents often struggle with intermittent single parenting concerns, separation from extended family members which limits their access to family-based parenting advice, frequent relocations, and children's concerns about their parent(s) working in dangerous situations.

Recognizing that our military families face challenges quite unlike those experienced by civilian families, we have produced tools and resources that address their needs and their concerns.

Through the Healthy Parenting Initiative, DoD in partnership with the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, created a number of military-specific parenting resources. These materials, designed for parents with pre-school through adolescent children, offer military families dozens of activities and tips to help them through deployments, relocation, and the challenge of reassuring a child whose parent works in dangerous conditions. The materials are easily accessible, are available on CDs, DVDs, and VHS videos and can be downloaded from the Military Family Resource Center Web site. The materials are available at every installation that supports military families.

### New Parent Support

Because military parenthood often presents challenges compounded by deployment, the four Military Services have developed programs to help new parents create safe, nurturing environments for their children. The New Parent Support Program is a home visiting program for expectant parents and parents of children from birth to 3 years of age who are considered to be at-risk for child abuse or family violence. Participation is voluntary and available to family members who live both on and off the installation. New Parent Support staff provides services such as parental role modeling, mentoring, respite care referrals, health care support, and parent support group referrals, as well as information on child development. These services create a much-needed support system for new mothers and fathers while enhancing parenting skills.

### Child and Youth Development Services

The Department of Defense operates the nation's largest employer-sponsored childcare system, serving more than 200,000 children daily. The DoD system is a model for the nation. We have received recognition as an exemplary program from national organizations, and researchers. Under normal circumstances, balancing home and work demands is a challenge for all parents. These demands are amplified today, in the midst of the Global War on Terror. The Services initiated many special support programs. The Army has an infrastructure to support the child care and youth supervision needs of soldier parents. This systematic approach may range from ensuring there is a cadre of well-trained in-home care providers who can handle overnight care or respite care to support the single soldier or geographically-single spouse, to guaranteeing extended hours at child development centers that mirror the installation duty day. The Army, in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, 4-H, and Military Child Education Coalition, is launching a new community-based initiative, "Operation Military Kids," to create community support networks for geographically dispersed military-connected youth.

The Marines have added supplemental child care for families when their regularly



scheduled child care is unavailable. A recent beneficiary was a child whose ill mother had to be hospitalized while dad was deployed.

The Navy approached the need for longer periods of care by launching two round the clock programs in the Hawaii and Norfolk regions. The sites include two delivery systems: the Child Development Group Home concept and specialized in-home care providers. They have proven successful. A central enrollment and waiting list approach helps to make placements faster, and allows parents flexibility as their needs change.

The Air Force programs such as Returning Home Care for the period when the sponsor returns from deployment, and during the well-deserved rest and relaxation periods. The Air Force's Guard and Reserve Home Community Care and Installation Care Programs provide full time and weekend care for Air National Guard and Reservists. One of the most appreciated services is the Air Force's Extended Duty Care Program for parents who work extended hours or experience a shift change or other emergency. Help is provided through high-quality licensed family child care homes at nominal or no cost to members.

All of the Services are testing ways to expand child development spaces by partnering with civilian centers and homes. While this will be tested at limited sites, the partnerships forged and the types of agreements made may assist with expanding spaces and meeting the long-term need for quality care.

#### Youth

The Defense Department and the Boys and Girls Clubs of America (B&GCA) have enjoyed a long, collaborative relationship as they open their doors to our military youth to provide wholesome recreation and nationally recognized programs designed to help young people succeed in school, stay healthy, and learn important life skills.

The National Military Family Association (NMFA) and Sears have recently partnered with the military to conduct several summer camps for youth with deployed parents. NMFA and Sears, their corporate sponsor, are currently funding at least 13 camps in various regions for 50 youth each.

#### Department of Defense Education Activity

The Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) has been an active partner in supporting students and families during the Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom. All schools within DoDEA have Crisis Management Teams to assist students and teachers during stressful times. Working in collaboration with military and civilian communities, they provide support before, during, and after each deployment.

The Department has a great deal of pride in its school system and continues to address quality issues in the areas of curriculum, staffing, facilities, safety, security, and technology. Our schools are comprised of two educational systems providing quality pre-kindergarten through 12th grade programs: the DoD Domestic Dependent Elementary and Secondary Schools (DDESS) for students in locations within the United States and its territories, possessions, and commonwealths, and the DoD Dependents Schools (DoDDS) for military students residing overseas. DoD schools are located in 13 foreign countries, seven states, Guam, and Puerto Rico, serving more than 100,000 students in 223 schools. Students include both military and civilian federal employee's dependents. The quality of DoD schools is measured in many ways, but most importantly, as in other school systems, by student performance. DoD students regularly score substantially

above the national average in every subject area at every grade level on a nationally standardized test.

In addition, students participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests. NAEP is known as “the Nation’s Report Card” because it is the only instrument that permits a direct comparison of student performance among states and jurisdictions across the country. DoDEA students, and in particular its Africa-American and Hispanic students, score exceptionally well on this test, often achieving a first or second place national rank when compared with their contemporaries.

DoDEA’s 2003 graduates were awarded nearly \$33.5 million in scholarship and grant monies for further education. Graduates in 2003 reported plans to attend over 800 different colleges and universities worldwide.

To meet the challenge of the increasing competition for teachers, DoDEA has an aggressive U.S. recruitment program. The program emphasizes diversity and quality, and focuses on placing eligible military family members as teacher in its schools.

#### DoD Supplemental Impact Aid

The DoD supplemental Impact Aid program provides funds to heavily impacted school districts in addition to the funds provided by the Department of Education through the Federal Impact Aid program. The Department of Education's Impact Aid program provides financial support to school districts educating military dependent students, students who reside on Indian lands, and students who live on, or whose parents work on, Federal property. The DoD supplemental Impact Act program provides funds to school districts in which the enrollment of military dependent students constitutes at least 20 percent of the total student enrollment. As in the case of the Federal Impact Aid program administered by the Department of Education, funds are provided to offset the revenue loss due to the presence of Federal lands or activities.

For FY04, \$30 million was appropriated for the DoD supplemental payments to heavily impacted districts while \$5 million was appropriated for the program for military children with severe disabilities.

#### Military Child in Transition and Deployment

A significant percentage of Service members who dedicate their lives to the security and well being of our nation are parents, too. The education of their children is of utmost importance to them. In fact, the quality of education is a major factor in Service members choosing assignments.

The Department is committed to supporting students of military families involved in frequent moves and deployments. The Educational Opportunities Directorate actively seeks to assist schools in providing quality education to military dependent students. In order to affect significantly, the children of families of the Total Force, the Department has developed the Web site, [www.MilitaryStudent.org](http://www.MilitaryStudent.org). It provides military children, their parents and teachers with important information related to student needs. Seven Web sites on one site, [www.MilitaryStudent.org](http://www.MilitaryStudent.org) provides special sections for children ages 6-12, teens, parents, special needs families, military leaders, and educators with articles, videos, guidebooks, resources, and bulletin boards to address the challenges of frequent moves and deployed parents.

The Promising Practices Program, featured on the Web site promotes worldwide replication of school programs and policies that make a difference for military children during deployment.

Skilled educators, counselors and mental health workers associated with the public schools attended by military children generally do not have an awareness of the lifestyle, issues, or challenges of the military child. To be effective, they must be trained in military child issues and appropriate interventions.

The Department has initiated several partnerships that have addressed the awareness issues for educators. A partnership with the Department of Education's Safe and Drug Free Schools program has expanded to include work with the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (sponsored by UCLA, Duke University, and the Department of Health and Human Services) and world-renowned trauma experts, to develop publications such as: Educator's Guide to the Military Child During Deployment and Educator's Guide to the Military Child During Post Deployment: Challenges of Family Reunion. In addition, Parent's Guide to the Military Child in Deployment has been written in collaboration with the same agencies. All three guidebooks are available on the DoD Web site [www.MilitaryStudent.org](http://www.MilitaryStudent.org). A partnership with the Child Study Center of the New York University School of Medicine has made their outstanding guidebook, Caring for Kids After Trauma and Death: A Guide for Parents and Professionals, available on the Web site.

A partnership with Generations United is allowing DoD to work with this non-profit organization to develop a literacy tutoring program for children of deployed military families by training retired military members in their community as tutors and mentors offering educational and emotional support on a one-to-one basis.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network and DoD are also partnering to develop a program to work with children of severely wounded military members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan in order to help children comprehend the life-altering changes of the military member and the impact on their family.

#### Military Families with Special Needs

I would be remiss to talk about programs for military children without mentioning the efforts we have made for families with special needs. The National Center for Health Statistics estimates that approximately 15-20 percent of the child population will be identified as having physical, learning, or emotional disabilities that will require special education services and/or special medical rehabilitative services associated with their education programs. Among the 1.8 million family members of active duty military personnel, prevalence rates suggest that over 270,000 of them have special needs.

Although the military healthcare system provides quality care to military beneficiaries, assistance is needed in priority housing, case management for involved medical problems, access to community programs, and family support personnel who can direct them to community programs.

The Department has taken a number of steps to address this situation. In February, we launched a Web site ([www.EFMconnections.org](http://www.EFMconnections.org)) for military families with special needs that provides a secure location to exchange information, ask questions, and obtain support from other military families with special needs. At the Web site, family members can reach a point of contact at their next assignment, connect with school personnel, and learn about community programs.

In July, we partnered with other Federal agencies to provide a training opportunity for military family support personnel to gain knowledge of the programs and services available and mechanisms for obtaining services.

## Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, thank you and the members of this subcommittee for your outstanding and continuing support of the men and women of the Department of Defense. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you our many successes in the quality of life arena. Our objective is to ensure that our Armed Forces remain the best in the world and that military families are a reflection of that same desire for excellence.