

ROA policy priorities for Reserve and National Guard recognition in Joining Forces focus areas

Focus area: employment and entrepreneurship.

- Support H.R.1277/S.596, the *Military Spouse Hiring Act*.

Maintaining employment and advancing professionally while relocating every few years (and taking care of children, often on their own) has been a difficult hardship for military spouses to overcome. For the past decade, the military spouse unemployment rate has been consistently higher than 20 percent.

ROA thanks the Biden-Harris Administration for its commitment to strengthening economic opportunities for military and veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors. The Executive Order signed on June 9, 2023, codified many ROA supported policies, including the development of a government-wide strategic plan on hiring and retention for military families.

One additional action that can be taken is to support the codification of the *Military Spouse Hiring Act*. The Work Opportunity Tax Credit is available to employers who hire job seekers that have faced systemic barriers to employment, with more than 10 million job seekers securing employment since FY 2018. The *Military Spouse Hiring Act* extends the WOTC to include military spouses.

ROA requests support for H.R.1277/S.596, the *Military Spouse Hiring Act*.

- Support H.R.3253, the *Reservist Pay Equity Act*.

According to the 2022 Department of Defense Demographics report: 43.9 percent of Selected Reserve members are married, and 32.9 percent are married with children. To make ends meet, these families likely rely on income from the Selected Reserve members civilian employer.

Unfortunately, like military spouses, members of the Reserve and National Guard face barriers to employment. Further, protections provided by the *Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act* are not always followed by private and public sector employers.

Having laws and policies that positively influence employers to support reserve component service members in their workforces is vital to sustaining the financial readiness and wellbeing of reserve component families.

One example is the differential wage payment tax credit, which incentivizes employers to provide differential wage payments to activated Reserve and National Guard service members.

The *Reservist Pay Equity Act* merely increases the existing tax credit from 20 percent of up to \$20,000 of differential wage payments paid to 50 percent of up to \$20,000 of differential wage

payments paid indexed by inflation. ROA requests support for H.R.3253, the *Reservist Pay Equality Act*.

- Explore and support permanent programs that increase access to childcare for Reserve and National Guard service members and families.

Access to affordable childcare is important for military families of both components. Ensuring adequate childcare arrangements is perhaps even more difficult for the 8.5 percent of Selected Reserve members that are single with children. For example, members of the Reserve and National Guard in drill status are not eligible for childcare on active duty installations even if they drill on that location.

Currently, there are several pilot programs facilitated by the services designed to increase access to affordable childcare for members of the Reserve and National Guard.

ROA requests support for measuring the success of these pilot programs, making the effective programs permanent and standardized across the services, and further exploration into viable childcare options that reflect the unique experiences of reserve component service members and their families.

- Expand access to the Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account to all Reserve and National Guard service members.

In coordination with the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, the Department of Defense recently expanded eligibility for the Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account, which provides military families with another financial option to reduce the burden of the cost of childcare.

Unfortunately, access to this Account is only available to approximately 400,000 active component service members, members of the Active Guard Reserve on Title 10 orders, and DoD civilians. Restricted from access are “traditional reserve members,” who serve less than or equal to 179 days of consecutive active duty.

ROA requests support for expanding access to the Account, or one similar, to all members of the Reserve and National Guard.

Focus area: military child education.

- Include the ROA STARS program in the Month of the Military Child Toolkit for Schools.

The Month of the Military Child Toolkit features important resources that help military families support their children. ROA believes that our STARS in Schools program would be a valuable addition to the Toolkit.

ROA’s STARS in Schools program provides information about available resources for educators, school staff, and parents so they may better understand the unique needs of military children with deployed parents.

- Encourage the DoD Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program to include on their “Deployment To-Do List” a section on ‘Notify Children’s School’.

Under this part of the checklist, the Military Student Identifier could be included as something to be discussed with a child’s school. This would help to ensure that schools become aware of military connected children in their midst.

Focus area: health and wellbeing.

- Provide parental leave parity between components.

Section 621 of the FY 2022 NDAA enhanced the military parental leave program by authorizing 12 weeks of leave following a period of convalescence (regardless of whether the members gives birth or is the non-birth parent) for active component members, reserve component members performing active guard and reserve duty or full-time national guard duty for more than 12 months consecutively, and reserve component members performing duty under a call or order to active service for more than 12 months consecutively.

However, for members of the Reserve and National Guard, spouses and parents of adoptive or foster children cannot receive this benefit. This is not the case for active duty. House Sec. 601 of the FY 2024 NDAA provides for parity between components in parental leave policy by righting this wrong. There is no companion provision in the Senate’s FY 2024 NDAA.

ROA requests support for the inclusion of House Sec. 601 in the final FY 2024 NDAA.

- Establish a reserve component curriculum in the Transition Assistance Program.

Both the Transition Assistance Program and Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program promote the wellbeing of reserve component service members and their families throughout the deployment cycle and when separating from service.

Unfortunately, TAP *does not* meet the needs of Reserve and National Guard service members. Senate Report 114-225 directed DoD to conduct research on the transition experiences of reserve component members and make recommendations on how to better serve the transition needs of this population (or alternatively, suggest a program specifically designed for the reserve component).

According to the report, “TAP focuses on active component members’ transition needs and does not adequately address reserve component members’ transition needs.”

To resolve this, ROA requests support for the establishment of a reserve component curriculum in TAP, solely focused on the unique needs of reserve component service members and their families.