

Executive Summary

Military Family Readiness Council Meeting

Oct. 7, 2014

On Tuesday, Oct. 7, 2014, the Military Family Readiness Council meeting was held at the Pentagon Conference Center. The purpose of this meeting was to review previous business, receive an informational briefing, and to discuss and vote upon the annual council recommendations to be sent forward for consideration by the secretary of defense.

A full transcript of the meeting and attendance of members and advisers present is available.

Navy Cmdr. Peter Hoegel, designated federal officer, opened the meeting by welcoming council members, advisers and public guests. He proceeded with a review of the rules and regulations the council must follow while conducting business pursuant to the Federal Advisory Committee Act and Department of Defense Instruction 5105.04 and advised, with 12 members present, the council had a quorum. Further, he reminded attendees that all documents produced in the meeting were open to the public and submissions presented to the council for review would also be available upon request. Following a review of the meeting's agenda, Cmdr. Hoegel concluded his comments and introduced the acting chairperson, Ms. Stephanie Barna, acting assistant undersecretary of defense, Readiness and Force Management.

Ms. Barna welcomed everyone to the 13th, and the year's most important, Military Family Readiness Council. She shared Mrs. Wright's regrets for being unable to attend the day's session and then reminded attendees the bulk of the meeting was to be dedicated to formulating recommendations, which would be the centerpiece of the yearly report to the secretary of defense and Congress. Next, Ms. Barna shared with the group some of the topics that had been discussed at the pre-meeting and her willingness to discuss and improve readiness. Concluding her opening comments, Ms. Barna turned the floor over to Cmdr. Hoegel to review previous council business.

Council business review and discussion

Four business topics were reviewed for the council: public submissions, service policy changes since the last session, council focus areas for 2014 and the Aug. 18, 2014 meeting.

To open the discussion, Cmdr. Hoegel reviewed the public submission from the Aug. 18, 2014 meeting wherein the TRICARE for Kids Stakeholders Coalition, in response to the DoD "Study on Health Care and Related Support for Children of Members of the Armed Forces," provided a section-by-section analysis and initial response to the findings in that report. He went on to review two new public submissions for the current session. First, the Military Family Advisory Network submitted recommendations for improving the Military Family Readiness Council.

Their recommendations included holding a council meeting outside of the national capital region, increasing the transparency of the member selection process, increasing the awareness of the work of the council, adding additional non-governmental representatives to the Military Family Readiness Council and, finally, recording or broadcasting council meetings for the public. The second new submission, actually 13 separate submissions on the same topic, concerned TRICARE coverage of applied behavioral analysis therapy and the need for continued access to this treatment for military family members diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

Next, Cmdr. Hoegel briefly outlined two policy changes occurring since the last council session. In August 2014, the Navy published NAVADMIN 194/14 “Establishment of the Navy Gold Star Program,” which announced the establishment of the Navy Gold Star program launched Oct. 1, 2014 and provides long-term casualty assistance for surviving families of deceased service members. The second policy update, also published by the Navy, was OPNAV Instruction 1750.1G Change Transmittal 2 “Navy Family Ombudsman Program,” which updated the instruction to streamline the ombudsman registration process, clarify ombudsman reporting requirements, update the Family Advocacy Program and provide additional guidance for completing the DD2793 Volunteer Agreement.

Cmdr. Hoegel continued by reiterating the council’s four focus areas; the council focus areas and the meeting in which they were discussed are as follows:

- Review of the state of the Exceptional Family Member Program — briefed at the June 25, 2014 meeting
- Review of the network of family programs supporting the Guard and reserve — briefed at the June 25, 2014 meeting
- Review of transition programs — briefed at the Aug. 18, 2014 meeting
- Review of programs supporting military spouses — briefed at the Aug. 18, 2014 meeting

Finally, Cmdr. Hoegel closed the old business review discussion with an overview of the Aug. 18, 2014 meeting activities. These activities included updates on spouse support programs and service member transition, a caregiver support panel and the discussion of future focus areas. He reminded council members they needed to formalize their recommendations for 2014 during the day’s session and that recommendations do not need to be based exclusively on briefs received at council meetings.

Briefs to the council

Ms. Katherine Robertson – DoD Family Advocacy Program: Prevention of and Coordinated Community Response to Child Abuse and Neglect and Domestic Violence Integrated Project Team

Cmdr. Hoegel turned the podium over to Ms. Kathy Robertson, LCSW for an update brief on the DoD FAP. The key points of her comments were as follows:

- In September 2013, the undersecretary of defense (Personnel and Readiness) directed a top-level rapid review with a focus on prevention as part of an ongoing, proactive approach to improve prevention and coordinated community response of child abuse and neglect and domestic violence. The review is being conducted in three phases.
- During phase one, conducted during fiscal year 2014, two lean six sigma rapid improvement events were conducted to assess current procedures and recommend improvements. The events generated 84 preliminary ideas to strengthen prevention and response, and these ideas are under review by senior leadership for potential implementation.
- Phase two, to be conducted during FY15, will include the convening of an integrated project team responsible for vetting the rapid improvement event preliminary ideas, generating a master list of final recommendations and associated action plans and creating a tracking mechanism to monitor the implementation of recommendations. The team will meet in the fall of 2014 for the first time and then quarterly for the year to follow.
- Phase three will include the tracking of the implementation of final recommendations.

Discussion of Ms. Robertson's brief:

Discussion of Ms. Robertson's brief, at the request of Ms. Tillman, highlighted the difficulties and successes of the Family Advocacy Program. The rapid review revealed that FAP staffers were very good at response activities; everyone knew their job and did it well. However, prevention roles and responsibilities were less clear. For example, law enforcement did not believe that they had a role in prevention activities, but they do. There is more to learn in relation to roles and responsibilities in preparedness. Ultimately, there are many best practices out there, and Ms. Robertson's team wants to capitalize on those.

Council recommendations

Before deliberating and voting on 2014 recommendations, Cmdr. Hoegel provided a review of the 2013 council recommendations which included:

- Recommendation 1: Recommend that the Office of the Secretary of Defense Health Affairs Working Group preparing the report to Congress required by section 735 of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2013, consider and review reports submitted by the Children's Hospital Association and the Military Special Needs Network.
 - Action taken: A working group was established within the Office of the Secretary of Defense Health Affairs to conduct a study in response to section 735 reporting requirements. The working group prepared and issued the report in collaboration with subject matter experts and stakeholders within and outside the Department of Defense, including reviewing the aforementioned external reports.
- Recommendation 2: Recommend the continued focus on standardization and consistency of Exceptional Family Member Program policies across all military services as service

members transition between installations and transition from service to civilian life, to include collaboration and continuity with community resources.

- Action taken: The DoD continues to improve standardization of EFMP services across the services. A multi-phased functional analysis is being conducted to provide an in-depth analysis of the current EFMP policies, business processes, forms and databases in each service. Status briefed at the June 25, 2014 council meeting.
- Recommendation 3: Recommend that the DoD improve communication of existing services to service members and families and further analyze how end-users within the Reserve Component, geographically dispersed and active-duty service members, and families who live on and off installations learn about services available to military members and their families.
 - Action taken: The DoD is implementing multiple outreach initiatives to improve communication of existing services to service members and families, in particular militaryennials, using a wide array of delivery methods with emphasis on digital media. Transformation of Military OneSource is underway to enhance the ability of DoD to reach the military community. The National Guard Bureau briefed at the June 25, 2014 council meeting, and briefs were conducted on spouse support programs and caregiver support programs at the Aug. 18, 2014 council meeting.

Next Cmdr. Hoegel reviewed the 2014 council briefings. In 2014, the council discussed:

- Support to military families with special needs
- Family programs and initiatives supporting the National Guard
- Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff second term strategic direction to the joint force
- Programs supporting military spouses
- Transition support programs
- Support programs for military caregivers

He went on to reiterate that the council must formalize recommendations for FY14 at the current session and that recommendations do not need to be based exclusively on briefs received at council meetings. He then briefly outlined a few Marine Corps recommendations to the council which included strategic communication, accreditation and professionalism/credentialing of personnel and program evaluation. Cmdr. Hoegel turned the floor over to Ms. Barna and the council members to deliberate and vote on 2014 recommendations. The recommendations and an overview of the discussion leading to each recommendation are as follows.

Recommendation #1

Recommend that the DoD continue to improve communication and awareness of existing services to service members and families and continue to improve how end users within the

Reserve Component, geographically dispersed and active-duty service members, and military families who live on and off installations learn about them

Discussion of recommendation #1:

The council began by discussing the difficulty faced by member organizations in raising awareness of available services and with a review of the many forms of digital communication used to share such information. Members agreed Military OneSource was an excellent platform for sharing data, though there was room for improvement of the Military OneSource page and with the methods used to get people to Military OneSource. Google Analytics was deemed to be a great tool, helping to scientifically explain where military personnel live, thrive and meet online. Such data would greatly assist member organizations with distributing their information and pointing their target audiences to Military OneSource.

Taking the above into account, the members discussed the need to reiterate last year's recommendation #3 in order to ensure continued focus on improving communication and raising awareness of existing services. Additionally, there was a lengthy discussion as to the appropriate list of target personnel to include in the recommendation, as well as the appropriateness of highlighting Military OneSource specifically in the recommendation. The group determined to leave the target population the same as the previous year and to leave the information sharing platform generic, not specifically identifying Military OneSource by name.

Ms. Vine requested a brief in a future session from Ms. Williams about her work with Google Analytics.

Vote: Recommendation #1 was unanimously approved.

Recommendation #2

Recommend that DoD focus on transitioning military families and highlight availability of existing programs

Discussion of recommendation #2:

Two members brought forth the need for a recommendation focused on providing services to family members during their transition from military to civilian life. Family members are impacted by transition and thus need to receive services geared toward their unique needs. A discussion ensued as to the feasibility of recommending DoD adapt transition programs to make them more useful or available to spouses. However, great concern over fiduciary realities kept adaptation of current programs out of the final recommendation.

Vote: Recommendation #2 was unanimously approved.

Recommendation #3

Recommend DoD continue the transformation of Military OneSource to enhance DoD's ability to reach all elements of the military community.

Discussion of recommendation #3:

Military OneSource is currently in a process of transformation and council members wished to continue that process in order to better reach military and spouse leaders at all levels. This recommendation was viewed as separate from the need to develop a specific engagement strategy primarily because of its focus on Military OneSource.

Vote: Recommendation #3 was unanimously approved.

Recommendation #4

Recommend DoD develop a tool kit to educate and inform military family and civilian leaders on total military family DoD engagement strategies.

Discussion of recommendation #4:

Members discussed this recommendation along with the first recommendation, recognizing that the two were closely linked. Recommendation #4 takes the idea of information sharing one step further, however, by requesting that the DoD develop engagement strategies that would articulate how to use social media, emails, websites and other emerging technologies in order to stay relevant and appropriately share information with the target audience. Specifically, council members expressed the need for the development of a tool kit which would provide resources and standardized communication strategies for military family and civilian leaders. Such a tool kit would decrease redundancy and increase access to available resources.

Vote: Recommendation #4 was unanimously approved.

Recommendation #5

Recommend DoD explore and leverage, where applicable and appropriate, public-private partnerships to support military families.

Discussion of recommendation #5:

This recommendation was approved without altering the originally proposed language.

Vote: Recommendation #5 was unanimously approved.

Next meeting

The next Military Family Readiness Council meeting will take place on either Feb. 6 or Feb. 11, 2015 at the Pentagon Conference Center, room B6.

Closing remarks

Mrs. Barna asked that Ms. Chandler, Ms. Vine, Ms. Tillman and Ms. Moakler send their exact recommendation verbiage to Cmdr. Hoegel. Ms. Barna thanked the entire group for their time and attendance, particularly those who would be leaving the council, whereupon she concluded the meeting at 3:45 p.m.