

Military Spouses Statement for the Record

Disclaimer: Employees who are communicating publicly in their personal capacity on matters of Departmental concern must include a disclaimer indicating that the views expressed are their own and not necessarily those of the U.S. Government.

We encourage the House Oversight Committee to embrace a flexible, adaptable workplace which allows military spouses to retain their jobs. Food insecurity currently impacts one in four U.S. service members and their families according to a [2023 RAND study](#).ⁱ Other quality of life issues, such as a lack of military housing and child care, can be alleviated by families having two incomes. These issues, which the Department of Defense and Congress are contemplating addressing with additional appropriations, can be significantly relieved with flexible telework and remote work policies to support federal military spouse employment retention.

Military spouse employment is a serious national security issue. During [testimony to Congress](#), the President of the Military Officers Association stated that more than a third of military families cite spouse employment challenges as a reason for leaving active-duty service.ⁱⁱ Soldiers in a [2021 Army study](#) cited impact to their spouse's career as their number one reason for leaving military service.ⁱⁱⁱ While a myriad of attempts to solve military retention issues have resulted in mixed results, it would be far more effective for the federal government and Congress to institutionalize workplace flexibilities to support military families and encourage private sector employers to do the same. A [2020 Deloitte study](#) found that more than half of military spouses are stationed at military bases with a negative availability of jobs, i.e. fewer jobs available than there are job seekers.^{iv} This is often the case at remote military bases such as Fort Liberty, North Carolina (the largest military base in North America).

Despite direction in the FY19-FY22 NDAs to report on military spouse employment, the Federal Government still does not have a clear picture of the number of federally-employed military spouses. Telework and remote work are critical retention tools for the military spouse community that experiences unemployment at a rate of seven times the national average and make up what is believed to be less than one percent of the federal workforce.^v

The [FY22 NDAA, section 6202](#) directed each Federal department and agency to establish a policy enumerating the circumstances under which employees may be permitted to temporarily perform work from approved overseas locations known as Domestic Employee Teleworking Overseas (DETO).^{vi} Despite this Congressional directive, many agencies still lack DETO policies nearly two-years later. In addition, a memorandum of understanding between the Department of States and Defense to govern DoD sponsored DETOs is still unfinished over one year later with no timeline for completion.

Congressional statements about return to work policies and return to pre-pandemic telework and remote work levels are already having a negative impact on military families. The Social Security Administration (SSA), which has faced Congressional scrutiny for staffing and support levels, terminated a nine-year employee in July after his spouse received orders to Japan. He requested a DETO, the ability to transfer to the SSA office in Tokyo, or leave without pay to allow him time to find another federal job; all of his requests, including an appeal to Commissioner Kijakazi, were denied because SSA lacked a policy. This military family's income has now been cut in half.

Flexible work policies like telework and remote work represent a win-win for employees, their families, and federal agencies. Remote work, especially when performed overseas, can extend an office's work hours and productivity, providing greater support and reducing response times across multiple time zones. This extra coverage often helps to alleviate after hours or overtime work for already overburdened offices. Remote workers can also help save costs on travel and office space and extend the reach of offices into areas that are more costly to service from a headquarters location in D.C.

Congress should encourage military family cohesion instead of forcing military families into the difficult choice between family separation and loss of income. Expanding opportunities for telework and remote work is absolutely essential. At a minimum, creating purposeful carve-outs and exceptions to any telework or remote work policies that may exist is imperative to the financial health and well-being of these families. Further, we request the House Oversight Committee direct the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to establish a military spouse coordinator position to provide support and guidance to agencies and spouses across the federal government and work with the House Appropriations Committee to appropriate funds to OPM in support.

[Submitted by the military spouses belonging to employee organizations across the interagency to include Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of Education, Department of Agriculture, and Department of Veterans Affairs. These views are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. government].

ⁱ https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RBA1230-1.html

ⁱⁱ <https://www.kaine.senate.gov/press-releases/kaine-boozman-hassan-and-rounds-introduce-bipartisan-legislation-to-boost-hiring-of-military-spouses>

ⁱⁱⁱ

https://www.army.mil/article/252098/new_survey_examines_why_soldiers_decide_to_stay_in_or_leave_the_army#:~:text=The%20effects%20of%20Army%20life,for%20potentially%20leaving%20the%20Army

^{iv} <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/public-sector/military-spouse-unemployment.html>

^v <https://www.hiringourheroes.org/resources/hidden-financial-costs-military-spouse-unemployment/>

^{vi} <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1605/text>