



## Congress of the United States House of Representatives

August 6, 2020

The Honorable Mark T. Esper  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense, Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Esper,

We write concerning childcare options for our military and DoD civilian families that could impact the Department's readiness posture. This fall many schools around the country will not reopen in a traditional fashion. Many schools will be operating through virtual learning or a hybrid of both virtual and in-person learning. In light of the COVID-19 related school closures, approximately 1.2 million children under the age of 13 in military families will now require childcare.<sup>1</sup> While the DoD has an extensive network of Child Development Centers that provide low cost and subsidized options for military families, approximately 18,000 military children remain on waitlists nationwide, a number which does not account for the surge of school age children that will require childcare this fall.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, 40% of our Active Duty forces may be in desperate need of childcare beginning this fall.<sup>3</sup> Many of these families have reached out to us asking for support in navigating this complex problem. Single military parents and dual military couples with children face added challenges given their essential roles at work and no additional help at home. Military-civilian couples fear the civilian spouse may be forced to quit their job to take care of their children, jeopardizing the financial stability of those families. Under normal circumstances, military families can rely on their 'Family Care Plans' for long term childcare. However, 'Family Care

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<sup>1</sup>“2018 Demographics,” by Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, pg. 133 at <http://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2018-demographics-report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> “Military Child Development Program: Background and Issues” by Congressional Research Service, pg. 31 at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R45288.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>“2018 Demographics,” by Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, pg. 122 at <http://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2018-demographics-report.pdf>

Plans' did not anticipate the infection risks travel poses for older relatives or those with underlying health conditions under the current COVID-19 pandemic.

This childcare dilemma impacts our national security in unique and challenging ways. DoD officials have indicated the primary reason for providing childcare services is to ensure and enhance force readiness by supporting “the mission readiness, retention, and morale of the total force during peacetime, overseas contingency operations, periods of force structure change, relocation of military units, base realignment and closure, and other emergency situations.”<sup>4</sup> Further, research shows insufficient childcare options for military families impacts readiness and retention decisions as those with newborns and pre-school-age children report they are likely to miss duty and leave the military due to inadequate childcare.<sup>5</sup>

We urge you to work with community leaders, veteran service organizations, and state and local governments to develop and implement creative solutions. Further, we ask that renewed guidance encouraging creative scheduling and maximizing teleworking be provided to commanders at all levels. We are proud of the Department’s continued efforts to quell the coronavirus battle in our communities and across the nation. With gratitude for our military families, we remain eager and ready to assist with additional resources or authorities as required to provide for their well-being. Please keep us informed on your policies and efforts to address the childcare crisis.


Sincerely,



Deb Haaland  
Member of Congress



Michael Waltz  
Member of Congress



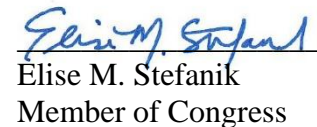
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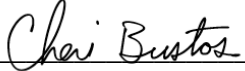



Elise M. Stefanik  
Member of Congress

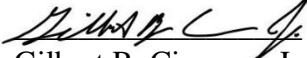
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<sup>4</sup> “Military Child Development Program: Background and Issues” by Congressional Research Service, pg.2 at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R45288.pdf>

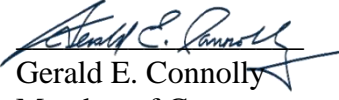
<sup>5</sup> “Military Child Development Program: Background and Issues” by Congressional Research Service, pg. 3 at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R45288.pdf>

  
Cheri Bustos  
Member of Congress

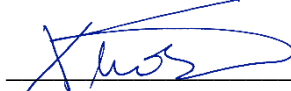
  
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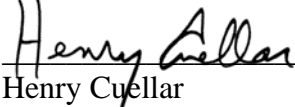
  
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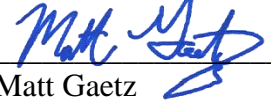
  
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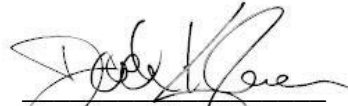
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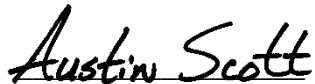
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Anthony Brindisi  
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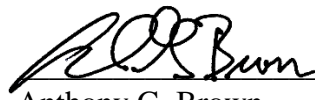
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Member of Congress

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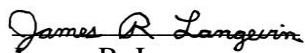
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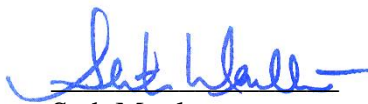
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Denny Heck  
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Seth Moulton  
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**Endorsed By:**

MOAA

National Military Family Association (NMFA)

Blue Star Families

Service Women's Action Network (SWAN)

Association of the United States Navy

TREA: The Enlisted Association

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)

Partners In PROMISE

Military Family Advisory Network (MFAN)

United States Army Warrant Officers Association (USAWOA)