



U.S. House Committee on Rules

“Military & Veteran Family Hunger”

Testimony of Kathy Roth-Douquet
CEO & Co-Founder
Blue Star Families

May 27, 2021

Chairman McGovern, Ranking Member Cole, and distinguished Members of the House Committee on Rules, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Kathy Roth-Douquet, and I am the Chief Executive Officer and Co-Founder of Blue Star Families (BSF)—a national non-profit organization dedicated to supporting military and veteran families from all ranks and services. With over 150,000 members, BSF is the nation’s largest grass-roots military family support organization, and touches more than 1.5 million military family members every year. By cultivating innovative programs and partnerships, BSF seeks to ensure that our military and veteran families always feel connected, supported, and empowered to thrive.

BSF’s groundbreaking research calls attention to the unique experiences and challenges faced by military and veteran families. Our annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey (aMFLS)—developed in partnership with the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF)—is the largest annual comprehensive survey of military and veteran families, and is widely regarded as the gold standard among military family surveys. Data from the aMFLS has been used at every level of government to help inform those tasked with making policy decisions that impact our military-connected communities.

Military & Veteran Family Food Insecurity Findings

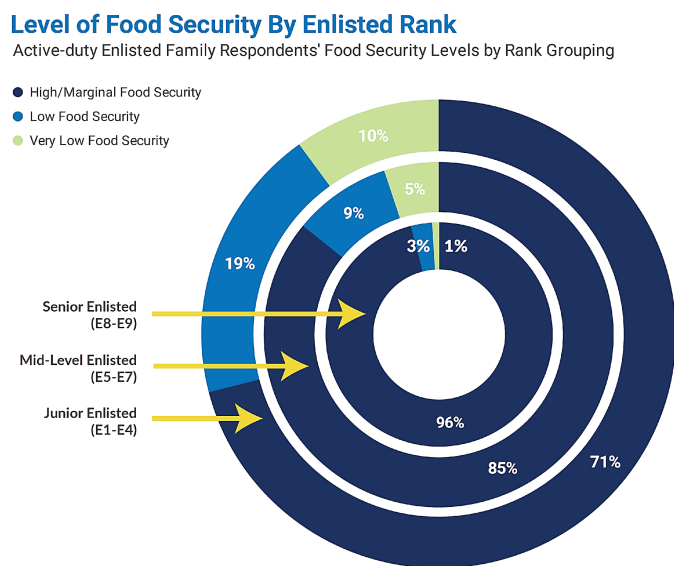
Blue Star Families’ research has revealed alarming rates of food insecurity¹ among military and veteran families. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 7% of active duty family respondents and 12% of veteran family respondents to the 2018 MFLS answered “yes” to the question “Has anyone in your household faced food insecurity (the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food) within the past year?” Similarly, 9% of active duty family respondents and 18% of veteran family respondents answered “yes” to the question “Has any member of your household sought emergency food assistance through a food bank, food pantry, or

¹ Food insecurity and hunger are distinct concepts. According to the USDA, food insecurity is defined as a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. Hunger is defined as an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity. [U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Definitions of Food Security,” Economic Research Service, September 9, 2020, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx>.]

charitable organization?”² Due to an oversampling of senior enlisted and officer families in the 2018 MFLS, it is possible that the actual percentage of military and veteran families experiencing food insecurity pre-pandemic was higher than this data suggests.³

Blue Star Families uses a non-scientific, convenience sampling method in our surveys. As such, we are unable to track statistically-significant changes within the same population over time. That said, we posit (on the basis of our own data and that of civilian research) that the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated military and veteran family food insecurity in the United States. In our 2020 MFLS, one in ten (9%) active-duty family respondents reported that they had experienced food insecurity (low⁴ or very low food security⁵) in the 12 months preceding the survey’s September-October fielding.

That figure rose to 14% for enlisted active-duty family respondents. While a greater proportion (29%) of junior enlisted (E1-E4) family respondents reported food insecurity, this issue was not limited to junior enlisted ranks: 16% of mid-grade enlisted (E5-E6) and 8% of senior enlisted (E8-E9) respondents reported low or very low food security. Meanwhile, 12% of veteran family respondents in the 2020 MFLS reported that they had experienced food insecurity.



Underlying Causes of Active-Duty Family Financial Stress and Food Insecurity

In the 2020 MFLS, 39% of active-duty families reported “financial issues” as a top stressor during their time affiliated with the military. Respondents reported intersecting challenges as top contributors to their financial stress, including: high rates of un/underemployment among military spouses, limited availability and high costs of child care, and out-of-pocket housing and relocation expenses. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated each of these underlying factors.

² Blue Star Families, “2018 Military Family Lifestyle Survey,”

<https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2018MFLS-ComprehensiveReport-DIGITAL-FINAL.pdf>.

³ For example, the Military Family Advisory Network (MFAN) has reported that one in eight military family respondents to their survey on the subject (pre-pandemic) was food insecure. [Military Family Advisory Network, “Military Family Food Insecurity,” Accessed on March 4, 2021, https://militaryfamilyadvisorynetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/MFAN-117-Food-Insecurity-One-Page-pf-1.3-002_LA.pdf.

⁴ “Low food security (old label=Food insecurity without hunger): reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake.” [U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Definitions of Food Security,” Economic Research Service, September 9, 2020, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx>.]

⁵ “Very low food security (old label=Food insecurity with hunger): reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.” [Ibid.]

High Rates of Un/underemployment Among Military Spouses

Spouse employment has been identified as one of the top concerns for active-duty families since the inception of the aMFLS in 2009. Despite multiple cross-sector hiring efforts, the military spouse unemployment rate has not decreased significantly since 2012,⁶ and was nearly seven times the rate of the national unemployment rate pre-pandemic (22%⁷ vs. 3.5%⁸).

In the 2020 MFLS, more than half (52%) of active-duty spouse respondents and a third (31%) of active-duty service member respondents listed military spouse employment as a top issue of concern. While nearly half of active-duty military spouse respondents were employed, either full time (30%) or part time (17%), two-thirds of employed active-duty spouse respondents (68%) reported they were underemployed in some way (indicating their current employment did not match their desires, education, or experience). Furthermore, 35% of active-duty spouse respondents reported they were not employed but needed or wanted to work.

Our research revealed an association between spouse unemployment and food insecurity. In the 2020 MFLS, 10% of enlisted active-duty spouse respondents who were employed were food insecure (with low or very low food security), compared to 20% of those who were not working but needed or wanted to work. The Department of Defense likewise reports slightly higher rates of food pantry usage (pre-pandemic) by military spouses who were unemployed in 2019 (7%) or not in the labor force (6%), when compared to employed military spouses (4%).⁹

While the causes of military spouse un/underemployment are myriad and complex, military spouse respondents report a lack of affordable child care, the unpredictability of service-member day-to-day job demands, hiring/promotion discrimination, and frequent Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves as key barriers to employment.¹⁰ Other important, but less common factors include state licensure barriers and gaps in resumes due to frequent PCS moves.

⁶ Office of People Analytics, "2012 Survey of Active Duty Spouses,"

<https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Surveys/ADSS1201-Briefing-Support-Deployment-Reintegration-PCS-WellBeing-Education-Employment.pdf>.

⁷ Office of People Analytics, "2019 Survey of Active Duty Spouses," December 2, 2020,

https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Surveys/ADSS1901_MOS-Briefing-508-Revised.pdf.

⁸ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Civilian Unemployment Rate," December 2020,

<https://www.bls.gov/charts/employment-situation/civilian-unemployment-rate.htm>.

⁹ Office of People Analytics, DoD (2020). 2019 Survey of Active-Duty Spouses. Unpublished email correspondence.

¹⁰ "Active-duty spouse respondents who are not in the labor force most often reported they are not working because of the difficulty of balancing household and work obligations, such as homeschooling or supervising children's education (35%), or that their service member's day-to-day work schedule is too unpredictable (33%) or too long to balance work and home demands (30%). An additional but related barrier is the cost of child care (34%), which may quickly overwhelm a spouse's take-home pay, particularly if they are underemployed, resulting in a situation in which active-duty spouses can't afford to work... The lack of affordable, available child care is not new nor unique to active-duty families, but it is exacerbated by families' frequent relocation, which may disrupt both the spouse's employment and existing child care arrangements... Spouses who seek work often perceive reluctance from employers. More than half of active-duty spouse respondents (51%) agreed their military affiliation prevented them from receiving a promotion at some point in their career." [Blue Star Families, "2020 Military Family Lifestyle Survey: Finding 13,"

https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BSF_MFLS_CompReport_FULLL.pdf]

Limited Availability and High Costs of Child Care

According to the Department of Defense, 37.8% of military children are five years old or younger.¹¹ The DoD recognizes that childcare is a “workforce issue that directly impacts the efficiency, readiness, retention, and lethality of the Total Force,” which is one of the reasons it is the largest employer-sponsored child care provider in the United States.¹² Yet, challenges obtaining affordable child care in a timely manner continue to have cascading impacts on military family financial well-being.

Many military families have trouble finding child care that meets their needs. In the 2020 MFLS, most active-duty family respondents had children under the age of 18 (80%) at home, and among those, 65% needed child care at least some of the time. Of those with a need, 23% reported always being able to find child care that works for their situation; however, that number fell to 19% for respondents with a child who has special needs.

In addition to limited availability, child care affordability continues to be a major concern for military families. Among active-duty family respondents to the 2020 MFLS who reported being financially stressed and having a need for child care, “out-of-pocket child care costs” were the most commonly reported contributor to their financial stress (31%). Unfortunately, having a higher level of income did not seem to completely resolve this issue. Although active-duty military family respondents in lower income brackets had greater difficulty finding affordable child care, respondents across all income levels reported child care as being a need that was often out of reach.

Child care expenses likewise remain a top barrier to military spouse employment with 34% of active-duty spouse respondents to the 2020 MFLS who were not working but needed/wanted to work stating “child care is too expensive.” Similarly, in the 2019 MFLS, 54% of service member respondents with children reported that the lack of affordable child care negatively impacted their pursuit of employment and/or education post-service. (Female service members, in particular, were particularly affected by the lack of affordable child care, with 62% of female service member respondents saying that childcare “moderately” to “completely” prevented their pursuit of education compared to 51% of their male counterparts.)

Out-of-Pocket Housing and Relocation Expenses

Most active-duty family respondents in the 2020 MFLS (64%) live off installation and use their basic allowance for housing (BAH) to rent (27%) or purchase (37%) housing. Starting in 2015, BAH¹³ was incrementally reduced to 95% of local area rent,¹⁴ making it a matter of policy for military families to

¹¹ Department of Defense, “2018 Demographics Report: Profile of the Military Community,” <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2018-demographics-report.pdf>.

¹² Congressional Research Service, “Military Child Development Program: Background and Issues,” March 19, 2020, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R45288.pdf>.

¹³ Congressional Budget Office, “Reduce the Basic Allowance for Housing to 80 Percent of Average Housing Costs,” December 13, 2018, <https://www.cbo.gov/budget-options/2018/54767>.

¹⁴ Ryan Guina, “BAH Rate Cuts: 95% BAH – The New Reality & The Future of BAH,” *The Military Wallet*, April 21, 2019, <https://themilitarywallet.com/bah-rate-cuts/>.

pay out-of-pocket for quality housing, though they rarely have full control over where they are stationed or when they move. According to the Department of Defense, the 5% of housing cost that military families are expected to cover out-of-pocket should range from \$70 to \$158 per month in 2021.¹⁵ Yet, of those active-duty family respondents who reported paying out-of-pocket housing expenses (83%), more than three quarters (77%) reported the costs exceeded the anticipated range (\geq \$200).

All of these factors – out-of-pocket expenses, the lack of affordable childcare, military spouse un/underemployment, and others – can contribute to food insecurity among active duty military families. Unfortunately, this food insecurity does not end when service members leave the military. To the contrary, the financial difficulties of many military families can be further compounded by transition-related challenges—thereby leading to veteran family hunger.

Financial Inequity

There is reason to believe that military families of color might be struggling with food insecurity at higher rates than their white peers. In the 2020 MFLS, 15% of active duty family members of color reported low or very low food security, compared to only 7% of white, non-Hispanic active duty family members.¹⁶ Furthermore, in line with civilian research which finds that Black and Hispanic/Latinx families have fewer financial resources to navigate uncertain financial times than white families,¹⁷ data from the COVID-19 Military Support Initiative (CMSI) Pain Points Poll¹⁸ indicates that Black and Hispanic/Latinx military families may be in greater need of financial assistance than their white peers. On average, 40% of Black and 33% of Hispanic/Latinx active-duty family respondents reported relying on savings or credit cards during the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to 29% of white active-duty family respondents. As one Black military spouse told CMSI:

I [took on] a loan to fly home to bury my mother-in-law in New Orleans. I'm using credit cards to stock up on food, paper goods, etc... [and all of our] bills are going up to keep the house running.

These findings align with existing research around wealth inequality in the United States. According to the Pew Research Center (April 2020), 73% of Black and 70% of Hispanic Americans reported they did not have enough savings to cover expenses for three months of financial hardship.¹⁹ When we consider that the net worth of a typical white family is nearly ten times greater than that of a Black

¹⁵ Department of Defense. (2020, December 15). DOD Releases 2021 Basic Allowance for Housing Rates.

<https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2447343/dod-releases-2021-basic-allowancefor-housing-rates>

¹⁶ Please contact Blue Star Families for more information: survey@bluestarfam.org.

¹⁷ Elise Gould and Valerie Wilson, "Black workers face two of the most lethal preexisting conditions for coronavirus—racism and economic inequality," Economic Policy Institute, June 1, 2020, <https://www.epi.org/publication/black-workers-covid/>.

¹⁸ The CMSI Pain Points Poll garnered 7,421 respondents from March 18 to May 26, 2020. [COVID-19 Military Support Initiative, "Pain Points Poll Deep Dive: Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on Black and Hispanic/Latinx Families," July 2020, <https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/BDG-PPP-DeepDive-Black-Hispanic-Respondents.pdf>.]

¹⁹ Pew Research Center, "Hispanic and black Americans have been hardest hit in COVID-19 wage, job losses; most do not have rainy day funds," May 5, 2020,

https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/05/05/financial-and-health-impacts-of-covid-19-vary-widely-by-race-and-ethnicity/ft_2020-05-05_covidrace_01/.

family,²⁰ it is unsurprising that Black and Hispanic/Latinx families are more reliant on savings and credit cards to pay expenses than their white counterparts.

To make matters worse, the CMSI Pain Points Poll suggests that Black and Hispanic/Latinx military family respondents may not be receiving effective communication about available community resources. “Communication about resources/services available” was the second most commonly cited “unmet local community need” among Black (25%) and Hispanic/Latinx (20%) respondents – and both groups reported this need at higher rates than their white peers (16%). Similarly, in CMSI’s Resilience Under Stress Study (RUSS), only 46% of Black military family respondents felt as though they could easily locate information about local resources, compared to 67% of white, non-Hispanic military family respondents who said the same.²¹ These findings might suggest that some military families of color are less aware of and/or connected to resources that might help alleviate their financial difficulties.

Barriers to Help-Seeking

Bureaucratic

While 14% of active-duty enlisted family respondents to the 2020 MFLS reported some level of food insecurity in the past year, only 2% of active-duty enlisted family respondents reported utilizing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits within the 12 months preceding the survey’s fielding. One reason might be that bureaucratic barriers are currently preventing food insecure military families from accessing SNAP.

As detailed in a 2016 report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), service members’ BAH is currently treated as income for the purpose of determining eligibility for SNAP benefits.²² Meanwhile, housing vouchers for low-income civilians are not treated as income for the purposes of determining SNAP eligibility.²³ Current eligibility policy for SNAP thus establishes an unnecessary and harmful barrier to nutrition assistance for struggling military families.

Psychological

In Blue Star Families’ November 2020 Pulse Check poll of active-duty and veteran families’ financial needs, respondents were asked in an open-ended question “what barriers, if any, would prevent [them] from seeking financial assistance in the event that [they] required it.” Among those who provided a response, the greatest proportion – 28% of active-duty family respondents and 27% of veteran family respondents – wrote that emotional barriers, such as shame and embarrassment, would prevent them from seeking support. In Blue Star Families’ March 2021 poll, this same question

²⁰ Kriston McIntosh, Emily Moss, Ryan Nunn, and Jay Shambaugh, “Examining the Black-white wealth gap,” Brookings Institution, February 27, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/02/27/examining-the-black-white-wealth-gap/>.

²¹ COVID-19 Military Support Initiative, “Resilience Under Stress Study” (Blue Star Families, 2020), https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/RUSS-Report-11.4.20_FINAL.pdf.

²² Government Accountability Officer, “DOD Needs More Complete Data on Active-Duty Servicemembers’ Use of Food Assistance Programs,” Report to Congressional Committees, July 2016, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-16-561.pdf>.

²³ Cornell Law School, “7 CFR § 273.9 - Income and deductions,” https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/7/273.9#c_1.

was included with a multiple choice response. Roughly the same proportion of respondents selected “pride, shame, or embarrassment” as a barrier (25% of active-duty, 23% of veteran, and 22% of National Guard family respondents).²⁴

Additional barriers to help-seeking reported in the November 2020 and March 2021 polls include: the desire to avoid chain of command involvement, an incohesive assistance network, confusing application processes, and qualification requirements that can make it difficult to justify the effort required to apply.²⁵

What Congress Can Do To Help

Upstream Solutions

Food insecurity is a real, but preventable, experience for many military and veteran families. As a society, we must collectively work to destigmatize help-seeking behavior—among those seeking help and those who facilitate it. The federal government must also work to expand its data collection around military and veteran family food insecurity, so as to better inform policy responses to these issues.

In the long term, we must also work to relieve financial inequity and address the underlying causes of military family financial insecurity (outlined above). One way to do this is by implementing policies that align with a Total Family Force model.²⁶ For example, Congress could:

- Work with the Department of Defense to ensure military families have more control over their careers—including when and where they relocate. This would allow them to make decisions that support their families’ financial stability, and may necessitate a reconsideration of current “up-or-out” talent management policies.²⁷
- Support a fixed period of federal student loan deferment for military spouses who leave a job in order to relocate due to military orders.²⁸

²⁴ Blue Star Families, “Pulse Check: Military and Veteran Families’ Financial Needs,” March 2021, https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/BSF_PulseCheck_Report_Mar2021.pdf.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ To ensure optimal mission readiness, resilience, and retention, the military ought to adopt a “Total Family Force” model. This is an extension of the “Total Force” concept that the military pioneered in the 1970s, which was designed to break down barriers between service branches to create one “total” force with similar goals and objectives. Blue Star Families wants to build upon this concept to acknowledge the fact that military family well-being is inextricably linked to mission readiness, and that military personnel policies ought to reflect that reality.

²⁷ See, for example: Bipartisan Policy Center, “Building a F.A.S.T. Force: A Flexible Personnel System for a Modern Military, Recommendations from the Task Force on Defense Personnel,” March 2017, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/building-a-fast-force/>.

²⁸ In the 116th Congress, Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-NY) introduced the Military Spouse Student Loan Deferment Act of 2020 (H.R.7433). This bill would have allowed certain military spouses to defer payment on their federal student loans for 90 days. Specifically, borrowers would be eligible to receive this deferment if (1) their spouse is an active duty service member of the Armed Forces, (2) they lost their employment due to a permanent change of station move, and (3) they could provide certain documentation to the Department of Education. Loan interest would not accrue during the deferment period. Blue Star Families supported this proposal. [Blue Star Families, “2020 Military Family Lifestyle Survey: Finding 13,” https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BSF_MFLS_CompReport_FINDING_13.pdf.]

- Support incentives for employers to make retirement savings plans more accessible and portable for military spouses.²⁹
- Commission a report on discrimination against military spouses in employment, housing, and public accommodations due to their military affiliation. The report should include an assessment of the viability of policy solutions to prevent such discrimination (e.g. expanding USERRA to cover military spouses, making military spouses a protect class, etc.).³⁰
- Enhance and expand access to fee assistance programs. For example, direct the Services to expand fee assistance eligibility under the Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood (MCCYN) program to military families who wish to enroll their child in a childcare facility that is state licensed, even if it is not accredited.³¹
- Commission a report on the demand for various child care options among military families, and to assess the pros/cons of requiring families to first seek care at their local CDC before being authorized to use MCCYN fee assistance.³²
- Standardize, expedite, and simplify the Career Intermision Program (CIP) application process for service members who are unable to implement their family care plans due to an unexpected extended emergency (such as virtual schooling during a pandemic).³³
- Explore different ways to calculate BAH to reduce out-of-pocket costs, such as pegging it to the median rent/housing cost in the best local school district and/or restoring payments to 100% of local area rent.³⁴

Downstream Solutions

It is no doubt critical that we work to address financial inequity and alleviate the underlying causes of military family food insecurity (by reducing out-of-pocket expenses, increasing the availability of affordable child care, and improving spouse employment outcomes). However, these issues are persistent and will take time to resolve. In the interim, Congress can tackle military food insecurity and hunger downstream by removing a legislative barrier that prevents many military families from qualifying for federal nutrition assistance, despite being food insecure.

²⁹ In the 116th Congress, Rep. Jason Crowe (D-CO) introduced the Military Spouse Retirement Security Act of 2020 (H.R.7927). This bill would have allowed a small business employer to take a tax credit for each of their employees who is a military spouse and is eligible to participate in the employer's defined contribution retirement plan. Blue Star Families supported this proposal. [Ibid.]

³⁰ Blue Star Families included a deep dive on this recommendation in our 2020 MFLS comprehensive report. [Blue Star Families, "2020 Military Family Lifestyle Survey: Recommendations," https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BSF_MFLS_CompReport_RECOMMENDATIONS.pdf.]

³¹ Blue Star Families, "2020 Military Family Lifestyle Survey: Finding 11," https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BSF_MFLS_CompReport_FINDING_11.pdf.

³² Blue Star Families included a deep dive on this recommendation in our 2020 MFLS comprehensive report. [Blue Star Families, "2020 Military Family Lifestyle Survey: Recommendations," https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BSF_MFLS_CompReport_RECOMMENDATIONS.pdf.]

³³ Blue Star Families included a deep dive on this recommendation in our 2020 MFLS comprehensive report. [Ibid.]

³⁴ Blue Star Families included a deep dive on this recommendation in our 2020 MFLS comprehensive report. [Ibid.]

In 2018, Blue Star Families endorsed an amendment to the farm bill which would have excluded BAH as counted income when calculating SNAP eligibility. That effort failed.³⁵ Undeterred, BSF then endorsed the Military Family Basic Needs Allowance (MFBNA),³⁶ which would have alleviated military family food insecurity by supplementing the base pay of military family members at or below 130% of the federal poverty line.³⁷ BAH would not have been treated as income when calculating eligibility for the Basic Needs Allowance. Moreover, the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) would have automatically notified service members of their eligibility—thereby removing the need to disclose one’s financial circumstances to command. The MFBNA was thus structured in a streamlined and efficient manner to eliminate common barriers to nutrition assistance, including shame, stigma, and fear of retribution. Unfortunately, the MFBNA was removed from the final versions of the FY20 and FY21 National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAA).

Support Currently-Proposed Legislation

We therefore call upon Congress to take immediate action to support the financial well-being of active-duty military families by:

- Passing the Military Hunger Prevention Act of 2021, which would create a basic needs allowance to provide temporary financial assistance to low-income military families. (Our data demonstrates the importance of making the MFBNA *rank neutral* and *means tested* for those living at or below 130% of the federal poverty line.)
- Passing the Military Child Care Expansion Act of 2021, which would direct the Department of Defense to conduct a pilot program on the expansion of public-private childcare partnerships between the DoD and private childcare providers.
- Passing the Jobs and Child Care for Military Families Act of 2021, which would amend the Internal Revenue Code to allow employers to take a work opportunity tax credit for hiring a qualified military spouse, and would require the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security to implement flexible spending arrangements (FSAs) to allow members of the Armed Forces to use pre-tax dollars to pay for their dependents’ childcare.

³⁵ Blue Star Families continues to support the exclusion of BAH as counted income from SNAP eligibility calculations in the next farm bill. [Blue Star Families, “2020 Military Family Lifestyle Survey: Recommendations,” https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BSF_MFLS_CompReport_RECOMMENDATIONS.pdf.]

³⁶ The 2018 farm bill amendment and military family basic needs allowance were also endorsed by MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, the National Military Families Association (NMFA) and many other military and veteran support organizations.

³⁷ Note that to qualify for SNAP, you must be at or below 130% of the federal poverty line.

I would again like to thank the distinguished Members of the Committee for their attention to this critical issue. Those who make significant sacrifices for our country should never struggle to put food on the table.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kathy Roth-Douquet". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kathy" being the most prominent.

Kathy Roth-Douquet
CEO & Co-Founder
Blue Star Families