



**OCJCS
WARRIOR AND
FAMILY SUPPORT
OFFICE**

A CALL TO ACTION: SUSTAINING THE GROUNDSWELL OF SUPPORT

30 November 2011
(Updated 6 July 2012)

OCJCS Warrior and Family Support Office



CALL TO ACTION: “Sustaining the Groundswell of Support”

“The willingness with which our young are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the Veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation.”

- George Washington, 1789

Introduction

There is a “Sea of Goodwill” in every community and neighborhood. The “Sea of Goodwill” is not a specific DoD initiative or government program, but rather a description of the desire across the country to support Service members, veterans, their families, and families of the fallen. We must “Sustain the Groundswell of Support” by encouraging and supporting initiatives that build public awareness, encourage community involvement, and promote community services for Service members, veterans, their families, and the families of the fallen.

“So we’ve got a transition that will occur on my watch that has to do with veterans. And I will take that on, and we’ll try to figure it out, and we’ll reach out to partners and stakeholders across the government and in industry to try to help with that transition.”

*-GEN Martin Dempsey,
18th Chairman of the
Joint Chiefs of Staff*

Why our heroes serve?

Simply, our Service members serve to defend the principles of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness that America freely enjoys. Our heroes fight for their families, friends, neighbors, and their communities – this is America. This willingness to sacrifice by so

few, for so much, and for so long is directly related to the trust our young heroes have in their Nation to take care of them.

What is the military community?

“And the last thing, of course, is he’s wearing a wedding band. And you know that that means that somewhere back in the middle of America, his spouse, probably his children, are trying to live something like a normal life. And we owe them the ability to do that.”

*-GEN Martin Dempsey,
18th Chairman of the
Joint Chiefs of Staff*

The military community is comprised of more than those who have put on the uniform. The community consists of:

- Veterans - individuals who have served in the US Armed Forces in Active, Reserve, or National Guard status in any branch of service, and in any war period or peacetime.
- Service members - individuals who currently serve in the U.S. Armed Forces in Active, Reserve, or National Guard status in any Service.
- Parents, spouses, significant others, children, and all extended family who form the support network for a veteran or Service member.

Why focus on the military community?

The military community is best thanked for its service through action, not words. Veterans and Service members are just like anyone else. Civic connectedness can provide additional support to family members as they adjust to having their loved ones back home. Veterans and Service members are untapped national assets, having acquired experiences and skills while serving in the military that have significant value in the workplace and communities.

What are our heroes and families going through?

Every day, about 3,000 Service members and their families transition from the Service to civilian life. Below are some important statistics related to their transition:

- At least 130,000 and as many as 250,000 U.S. veterans are homeless each night; 89 percent were discharged honorably and more than 7,000 are veterans of Iraq or Afghanistan.¹
- Every 80 minutes, a veteran commits suicide.²
- The unemployment rate for all veterans is 8.3 percent (overall 9.1 percent).³
 - Veterans that left service since 2001: 12.1 percent
 - Veterans, age 20–24: 27 percent
- Behavioral health issues are not just a post-9/11 service member's problem:
 - 11 percent of veterans aged 65+ years have a diagnosis of major depressive disorder (2 times that found in the general population of adults aged 65 and older).⁴
 - An adolescent whose parent is on a military deployment is more likely to have suicidal thoughts and feel depressed than the child of civilians.
- Women in the military have a significantly higher divorce rate than their male counterparts (7.7 percent for women compared to 3 percent among men).⁵

"The only way you can scale this to the tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands who are returning home is really through communities and community leadership. So I would hope that they would inspire local leaders to take the lead, work together, figure out what the challenges are locally, and how to try to make that work together.

- Admiral Mike Mullen (Ret.), 17th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Communities Responding

Communities across the Nation are responding through initiatives that reintegrate those who have served. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mullen coined this overwhelming response of goodwill by communities as the "Sea of Goodwill." Non-profits, for-profits, faith-based, business, education, and philanthropic organizations are collaborating, partnering, and participating in the effort to support our Service members, returning veterans, their families, and the families of the fallen.

Call to Action

Local, state, and national leaders should proactively respond to "Sustain the Groundswell of Support" by encouraging everyone to contribute. State and local governments can harness the good will of their communities by leveraging the inherent pride the American people have for those that have sacrificed so much for our Nation.

How can we encourage and "Sustain the Groundswell of Support" of the American people to support our Service members, veterans, their families, and families of the fallen?

Recommendations

These recommendations are intended to act as a catalyst for State and Local government, and are provided with the premise that needs and opportunities exist on a continuum. To meet these needs and take advantage of opportunities requires a holistic approach addressing education, employment, and access to health care.

Encouraging an Environment that can Sustain the Groundswell of Support

- Recognize that transition of our heroes includes their families and the family members of the fallen who also made sacrifices.
- Recognize the contributions of nonprofit organizations and the special roles they play in this reintegration effort.
- Optimize available resources from public and private sources through state and community-wide coordination.
- Mobilize the community to take part in the reintegration effort through public awareness campaigns.

Implement Best Practices in Education, Employment, Healthcare, and Civil Protections

Employment

- Recognize the professionalism of our veterans by translating their military experience and training into state licenses and national certifications for civilian occupations.
- Encourage businesses to recruit, accommodate, and retain veterans.
- Alleviate barriers to transferring state licenses for Service members when they separate from the military and spouses of Service members when they relocate.
- Allow eligibility for unemployment compensation to military spouses as a result of military duty moves.

Well-Being

- Promote the importance of TRICARE provider enrollment among local healthcare organizations.
- Ensure healthcare of veterans is included as an important requirement in state and local discussion of health care priorities.
- Enable initiatives that increase access to quality, affordable childcare for families of Service members, and transitioning veterans.

Education

- Allow all veterans and their families, regardless of their home of record, to attend schools at the in-state tuition rate.
- Minimize school disruption for military children during transition and deployment by adopting the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children.
- Establish Veteran Resource Centers at all colleges and universities.

Housing

- Increase or augment funding for HUD's homeless assistance programs.
- Coordinate state housing and services to streamline and coordinate existing programs.
- Lower barriers to subsidized housing programs.
- Create a simple renewable funding process for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to ensure permanent support housing.

Other

- Promote consumer protections and enforcement of the predatory lending regulation.
- Encourage the establishment of Veteran Treatment Courts.
- Ensure deployment separation does not determine child custody decisions.

Continuing the Discussion

The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for Warrior and Family Support, and the Joint Staff National Guard and Reserve Matters Office consists of several officers to assist:

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Sources

¹ National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, "Homeless Veterans Facts," <http://nchv.org/background.cfm#facts>.

² Department of Veterans Affairs, *Fact Sheet: VHA Suicide Prevention Program, Facts About Veteran Suicide (March 2010)*.

³ Rick Maze, "May jobs report shows market worsening for vets," *Army Times*. <http://www.armytimes.com/news/2011/06/may-jobs-report-market-worsening-vets-unemployment-060311> (3 June 2011).

⁴ Department of Veterans Affairs, *Late Life Depression (March 2011)*.

⁵ "Marriage and Divorce in the National Guard and Reserves: A Fact Sheet," *Brainline Military*. <http://www.brainlinemilitary.org/content/2011/04/marriage-and-divorce-in-the-national-guard-and-reserves-a-fact-sheet.html>.