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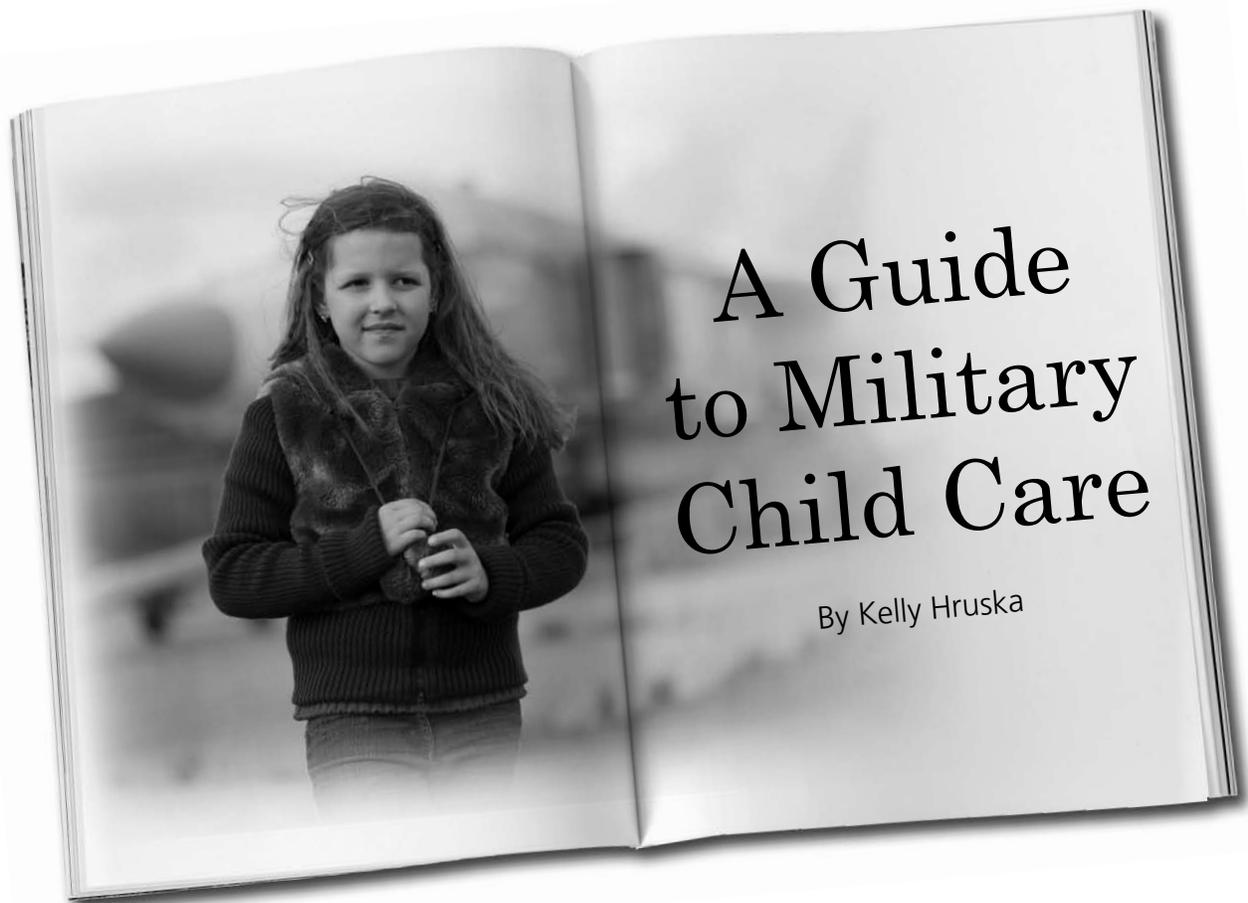
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LEGAL NEEDS OF MILITARY VETERANS, SERVICEMEMBERS, AND THEIR FAMILIES

Legal Services and Protections
Servicemembers Civil Relief Act
Military Service and Family Law
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Child care is a critical issue in maintaining the readiness of our military families. While the demand for military child care is high and spaces are limited, families often are unaware of additional child care resources available to them.

The U.S. Department of Defense is alleviating the shortage of care through several channels. Legislation has increased the number of spaces available over the past few years. New construction projects on bases and partnerships with respected partners “outside the gate” increase a military family’s chance of finding quality child care. The trick is knowing whom to ask and where these resources are.

When military families think of child care, they frequently consider only the child development center on the installation. The Defense Department operates eight hundred child development centers worldwide, where both military and Defense Department–connected civilian children receive care. Full-day, part-day, or hourly care in these centers generally is available for children six weeks old to 12 years old.

The Defense Department subsidizes fees, which are calculated on a tiered scale based on total family income. Military child development centers have become the industry standard of excellence, and nearly 93 percent are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The convenience and the quality of installation centers have resulted, at most locations, in waiting lists that are managed at the installation; local policies determine priority. When moving to a new duty station, families hoping to enroll a child at the child development center should expect to make alternate arrangements until a space opens.

Family Child Care, School-age Care

The Defense Department also operates family child care programs of in-home care by installation-certified providers. Such programs recently were expanded to include military families living in civilian communities; previously family child care provid-

ers were required to operate on base or from government-leased housing. Family child care providers must be licensed and pass comprehensive background checks; they receive training and support through the local Child and Youth Programs Office. Family child care providers also are encouraged to complete accreditation through the National Association for Family Child Care.

Many family child care providers are willing to fill needs for overnight or evening child care that traditional day care centers cannot meet. Family child care providers are self-employed and set their own rates; they can be an ideal solution for families who prefer to keep their children in a home environment.

Defense Department school-age care programs provide care for school-age children 6 to 12. These programs complement the regular school schedule and operate before and after school and on school holidays and summer break. School-age care programs generally transport children to and from the school or operate in school facilities. The programs offer safe, age-appropriate activities while promoting the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of children; they are accredited by the National After-School Association.

Fees for school-age care are set by the Defense Department according to a tiered scale based on total family income. Information about family and school-age programs in your neighborhood is available through your local Child and Youth Services Office.

Beyond On-Base Care

Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood and Operation: Military Child Care are programs sponsored by the Defense Department and managed by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies. These programs assist in finding and paying for affordable child care those military families who do not have access to Defense Department child development programs in their local communities.

The goal of Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood is to bring local child care fees in line with the fee scale established by the Defense Department for child development center programs. The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies refers families to participating local high-quality civilian care centers and assists in paying fees directly to civilian centers for military children enrolled in the program. Participating civilian centers must meet the same standards required of installation centers and must be accredited by national bodies such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Early Childhood Program Accreditation, or the National Association of Child Care Professionals. The program is open to active-duty families that cannot obtain care on a military installation or are assigned to remote locations. Service-specific guidelines and policies apply to the program, and families desiring care must meet the eligibility requirements for their particular service component.

Operation: Military Child Care is available to families of active-duty, National Guard, and Reserve servicemembers who are activated or deployed. Eligibility begins when the military parent receives deployment orders and ends sixty days after the parent returns. The program is also available to deployed active-duty families without access to military installation child care. This fee assistance program is intended to help support military spouses' employment, education, or special medical circumstances. It is also available, for up to sixty days, to spouses looking for employment.

Child Care Assistance for Families of Severely Injured Military Members

The Defense Department partners with the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies to provide child care services and fee assistance, for up to six months, to the families of severely injured servicemembers who are receiving inpatient or outpatient medical treatment. Assistance can be extended beyond six months on a case-by-case basis. For more information or

to access care, call Child Care Aware at 800.424.2246 or download the application at www.naccrra.org/MilitaryPrograms/severely_injured/.

Army Family Covenant

For families of deploying servicemembers, the Army Family Covenant provides respite care on installations, for up to sixteen hours per month for each child, from thirty days before deployment through sixty days after the parent returns. The program also provides respite care for families of wounded servicemembers for as long as care is needed and indefinitely to survivors. Contact your local Army Child and Youth Services office for additional information.

Navy and Marine Corps Respite Care

The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies is implementing Exceptional Family Member Program Respite Care for Navy and Marine Corps families in eight locations. This program, for families who have children identified as exceptional family members, helps Navy and Marine Corps families whose children have special needs by offering forty hours of respite

care per month so that family members can leave the house, go to an appointment, or just rest, knowing that their child is receiving good care. The program is free to qualified families; call Child Care Aware at 800.424.2246 or visit www.naccrra.org/MilitaryPrograms/EFMP/.



Finding quality accessible and affordable child care can prove challenging for uniformed services' families. Fortunately families are not alone in this endeavor. Resources such as the National Military Family Association (www.militaryfamilies.org), Military OneSource (www.militaryonesource.com), National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (www.naccrra.org/MilitaryPrograms/), the Child Care Aware hotline (800.424.2246) and Military Homefront (www.militaryhomefront.osd.mil) have links and information related to child care resources. Families on or near a military installation are encouraged to contact the local Child and Youth Programs Office to explore opportunities available in their communities.

[Editor's Note: A version of this article appeared in the Spring 2009 issue of *Military Money*.]

COMMENTS?

We invite you to fill out the comment form at www.povertylaw.org/reviewsurvey. Thank you.

—The Editors

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