

National Security Update: Military Quality of Life

Issue Summary:

In 2022, the National Security Division created the Base Assessment and Servicemember Experience (BASE) Program, with the goal of researching military quality of life challenges and advocating for solutions to these issues. Additionally, the BASE Program seeks to highlight best practices that are working well and advocate for their continued funding. To accomplish these goals, the National Security Division sends a delegation of staff and volunteers to installations across the globe to meet with servicemembers, families, commanders, and base support staff to gather feedback about their quality of life and advocate on their behalf.

Our research has shown that most quality-of-life issues do not exist in a vacuum and that one challenge can lead to problems in another area. For example, the rising cost of childcare can sometimes force military spouses to forego entering the workforce, contributing to higher spousal unemployment rates and families relying on a single income. Additionally, barracks facilities have made recent headlines, and a 2023 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report documented a myriad of issues plaguing these older facilities, such as mold, mildew, vermin infestations, and safety-related concerns. Meanwhile, family housing, which is managed by private housing companies, has seen similar mold and mildew issues and prompted Congress to enact more government regulations and reforms.

Actions taken:

- Wrote six white papers on various QOL topics to include: healthcare, housing, childcare, recruiting, access to healthcare for overseas military and families, and food insecurity.
- Hosted the military branch service senior enlisted leaders (SELs) or representative SELs during the 2023 National Convention.
- Completed the inaugural BASE Program visit to Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Arizona in October 2023.
- Attended (several virtual and in person) Military Quality of Life Panel hearings. Met with the University of Arizona staff to discuss research and shared observations involving QOL issues across DOD.
- Met with the Defense Health Agency (DHA) to discuss stateside and overseas medical access issues.
- Hosted the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps and VSOs leaders /veterans in February 2024.
- Met with departments to discuss potential BASE program visits to Alaska, Oregon, Texas, and Kansas.
- Met with multiple House and Senate staff members to discuss QOL program details.
- Hosted Congressman Don Bacon's National Security Policy Advisor during the 2024 Washington Conference to discuss findings from the military QOL Panel.
- Hosted officials from the Defense State Liaison Program to discuss QOL issues during Washington Conference 2024.

Applicable Resolutions:

Resolution No. 85: Support for Military Quality of Life Standards

Resolution No. 30: Modernization of the Armed Forces

What can Congress do:

Restore BAH payments to covering 100% of housing costs – up from the currently mandated 95 percent.

Recognize the importance military quality of life plays in an individuals' mental and physical wellbeing.

Increase funding for building new and renovating existing military barracks and family housing and safeguard tenants' rights of those who reside in privatized family housing.

Pass legislation that would expand financial assistance to servicemembers for childcare, increase access through new agreements with private and public childcare facilities and grant military construction authority for building new child-development centers.

Continue to fully fund and retain quality of life programs including, military commissaries and exchanges, MWR programs, educational benefits, spouse employment programs, career development programs, and housing improvements.