

September 18, 2023

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Chairman  
Senate Armed Services Committee  
S-728, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roger Wicker  
Ranking Member  
Senate Armed Services Committee  
S-425, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Rogers  
Chairman  
House Armed Services Committee  
2469 Rayburn  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith  
Ranking Member  
House Armed Services Committee  
2264 Rayburn  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Wicker, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith and members of the United States House and Senate Armed Services Committees:

As the House and Senate Armed Services Committees move towards a conference on the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), we encourage you to maintain Sections 1118 and 601 of the House-passed NDAA. Section 1118 is important legislative language<sup>1</sup> that will permit military service time to count towards the 12-month eligibility criteria required for Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) benefits. Section 601 would extend paid parental leave eligibility to fathers serving in the Reserves or National Guard - paid leave is currently only available to mothers in those branches. This expansion would allow both parents to be present in the first days and weeks after the birth or adoption of a new baby.

Paid leave is an issue with broad bipartisan support and facilitates family formation and strengthening, which is critical for the families of our men and women in uniform who serve on the front lines here and around the world. Members of the military and their families face unique challenges given the high stress environments in which they live and work. Although only one parent may have officially taken an oath to “preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States”, the entire family serves the country as they move frequently to fill needs within the broader military mission. Upon completion of military service, many men and women trade in their uniforms for civil service attire and continue serving in a new capacity.

Veterans comprise an essential portion of our civil service, with over half a million veterans employed in federal agencies across the globe. Approximately one quarter of the federal workforce are veterans. Compared to the private sector, the federal government hires three times as many veterans, and these numbers grow annually.<sup>2</sup>

Veterans who pursue ongoing federal service after their time in uniform should have their military service included in the calculation made for benefits like FMLA. The Section 1118

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<sup>1</sup> Found on page 650 of [full legislative text](#)

<sup>2</sup>In FY 2007 there were 462,744 veterans out of 1,811,459 total employees. In FY 2008, the number of veterans rose to 481,223 out of 1,886,720 total employees, and our most recent numbers show that the number of veterans rose to 512,671 out of 1,986,005 total employees in FY 2009. <sup>1</sup> . [THE STATUS OF VETERANS EMPLOYMENT \(opm.gov\)](#)

language places the eligibility requirements of FMLA on par with eligibility requirements for vacation days and retirement. The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that this reform would have minimal impact on the federal budget.

As pro-family advocates, we believe that we owe it to the men and women who have put their lives on the line for us to ensure that they have access to FMLA benefits if they choose to continue to serve the American people through public service. Additionally, we strongly advocate for policies like Section 601 that are designed to ensure that military families, whose daily life involves unique stresses and dangers, have access to the supports that demonstrably facilitate family formation and strengthening. Early bonding with parents is crucial for children's long-term physical and mental health. Consequently, paid leave provides life-long benefits for child development by facilitating early bonding between infants and parents.

Our military families sacrifice so much for our freedom and protection, and the public already supports the concept of paid leave. According to a March 2022 Echelon survey, paid leave now has broad backing that crosses party lines (71%), with support coming from conservatives (65%), moderates (68%), liberals (83%), and all ethnicities. Given these compelling numbers and the work of leaders across the aisle over the last five years, paid family leave is a bipartisan priority at its core.<sup>3</sup>

As leaders of the House and Senate Armed Services Committee in the 118th Congress, we urge you to ensure that the paid leave provisions currently included in the House Passed NDAA remain in the final version of the bill. These provisions provide essential benefits for the families who serve our nation on the front lines of conflict worldwide.

We know there are many urgent issues that come before you daily, but none are more important than policies that support our brave men and women in uniform, their families and the common good.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

**Rick Santorum**

Former U.S. Senator, Pennsylvania  
Chairman, Patriot Voices

**Kristan Hawkins, President**

Students for Life of America & Students for Life Action

**Samuel Rodriguez**

New Season-Lead Pastor, NHCLC President/CEO

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<sup>3</sup> More statistics, media coverage, and survey results are available in this [Paid Leave Legislative Toolkit](#).

**Bishop Dean Nelson**

Chairman, Douglass Leadership Institute

**Abby McCloskey**

Founder, McCoskey Policy LLC

**Terry Schilling**

Executive Director, American Principles Project

**Nadine Maenza**

Senior Advisor, Patriot Voices

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Editor, First Things

*\*Affiliations are for identification purposes only.*