

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

*A letter from Congressman Sanford Bishop and Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers,  
Chairs of the Congressional Military Family Caucus*

Military retention is a major component in the readiness of U.S. forces to fight and win the nation's wars. But recent news stories have highlighted factors impacting military families that could, in turn, hurt retention and readiness.

Those include the woeful condition of housing for military service members and their families, the quality of K-12 education received by service member children and difficulties military spouses endure trying to stay employed as they transfer their professional licenses from state to state.

The issues, along with the quality of mental health services for returning veterans, will be a major focus of our upcoming Caucus Summit in October at Fort Benning. The theme of the summit will be "home front readiness."

Concerning housing, members of Congress recently heard worrisome testimony from military spouses who described black mold, termite infestations, mice, rats, asbestos and lead paint.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, a survey by the Military Family Advisory Network found that more than 50 percent of military respondents had a negative experience with privatized housing, which comprises the bulk of housing for active-duty military.<sup>2</sup>

As for the quality of K-12 education received by the children of service members, there also is troubling anecdotal evidence about its impact on readiness. In one recent example, the Air Force is experiencing great difficulty recruiting faculty and Air Force families to take assignments at the Air University at Maxwell Air Force Base.<sup>3</sup>

The Department of Defense recognizes that these factors impacting a service member's family can have ripple effects and hurt retention. In a 2018 letter to the National Governor's Association, the service secretaries asked that the governors pay close attention to school quality and work licensure issues for spouses.

"We are often asked what communities can do to support those who serve," they wrote. "While focus on the mission is always our priority, the factors military families cite most frequently as drawbacks to military service include military dependent's difficulty assimilating into local school systems following a duty station transfer, the quality of schools available for their

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/19-02-13-current-condition-of-the-military-housing-privatization-initiative>

<sup>2</sup> <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/429899-military-families-in-private-housing-facing-numerous-safety-hazards-survey>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/education/2018/08/21/bad-schools-hurt-maxwell-air-force-base-general-montgomery-alabama-schools-families-live-apart/1053656002/>

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children, and the ability of spouses to obtain jobs and sustain careers for their children, and the ability of spouses to obtain jobs and sustain careers.”<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the direct impact on the quality of life of military families, our concern about the issues highlighted above is that they could directly impact overall military readiness by deflating retention and making recruiting that much harder.

As leaders of the Congressional Military Family Caucus, we are dedicated to drawing attention to the needs of military families and working with the Department of Defense to address them and mitigating their impact on military readiness.

We hope that you would consider our invitation to attend the Caucus Summit on October 9, 2019. Please see details regarding the event below:

Congressional Military Family Caucus Summit  
Wednesday, October 9, 2019  
National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center located in Columbus, Ga.  
8:30 AM

Sincerely,



Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.  
Member of Congress



Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Member of Congress

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<sup>4</sup> <https://dod.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/1449706/service-secretaries-say-quality-of-schools-reciprocity-of-licenses-should-be-co/>