

2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) EFMP Coalition Press Release



December 2021

Last year's National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) included unprecedented improvements to the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) and special education. While some encouraging updates have been included in the **2022 NDAA** with a **detailed summary**, the EFMP Coalition does not believe this year's inclusions maintain the momentum that is required to keep military EFMP families and inclusion at the forefront of the 2022 Department of Defense programming.

Despite seeing EFMP wins, Coalition members are concerned that provisions do not go far enough for military special needs families already struggling in a post-COVID environment. "EFM supports the independent review of the Autism Care Demonstration," said **Rebecca Emerson, Executive Director of Exceptional Families of the Military (EFM)**. "However, it provides no immediate help for military families. The changes should be halted and services in the community and school settings should be resumed pending the outcome of the review."

Another NDAA focus area that has the attention of the Coalition is accountability, a historical sore spot for special needs families, who often feel as though their concerns are overlooked. "While we applaud the efforts to improve the EFMP in the 2022 NDAA there is still a lack of accountability and transparency regarding the EFMP standardization process overall," said **Michelle Norman, Executive Director of Partners in PROMISE**. "For example, the expansion of the existing Advisory Council does not resolve the current Council's lack of an effective feedback mechanism or their track record of leaving out stakeholders such as DoDEA and DHA."

If the 2020 (and the 2021 NDAA) was the year of the EFMP family, it was inevitable that subsequent bills would feel anticlimactic for EFMP families. As a Coalition, we appreciate the Senate and House Armed Service Committees for taking the time to listen to EFMP families and implementing provisions that will lead to a greater quality of life for all families enrolled in EFMP.

The Coalition continues to closely monitor all issues that impact EFMP families with special attention being paid to:

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CONCERN	WHAT WE ARE HEARING	WHERE THINGS STAND	2022 NDAA
<p>Standardization of the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) across the service branches, provision of military special education attorneys, and assignment coordination. (NDAA 2021 Sec. 582(b))</p>	<p>PiP survey data report 76% of EFMP families (n=1,157) are not aware of the provision of special education attorneys. Those who are aware are not able to access the benefit.</p> <p>Support and services have stark differences across branches, inconsistent communication efforts, which is especially confusing for those at joint base locations. Services report difficulties due to the "unfunded standardization mandate"</p>	<p>The Office of Special Needs (OSN) has been tasked with overseeing standardization. DOD has not issued any official guidance on the progress of EFMP Standardization. We support a briefing on the provision of legal services provided by attorneys on special education regarding training, casework, implementation of IDEA, and costs associated with this program. Currently, all service branches deliver legal services differently within the EFMP program.</p>	<p>SEC. 569A. Briefing on Legal Services for Families Enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program</p>
<p>The reduction in uniformed military medical billets and transition from Military Treatment Facilities (MTF) to the Defense Health Agency (DHA)</p>	<p>Current civilian healthcare systems, especially specialty providers are not capable of accepting the volume of requests, exacerbating documented delays in care.</p>	<p>We support the continued delay for implementation of these cuts and a GAO Report on the analysis used to support any reduction or realignment of any medical billets. We are concerned EFMP families will be disproportionately impacted by these cuts and the EFMP process, in general, will have more delays due to the outsourcing of more military medical personnel.</p>	<p>SEC. 731. Modifications and Report Related to Reduction or Realignment of Military Medical Manning and Medical Billets</p>
<p>Tricare's proposed reduction of ABA services for autistic family members</p>	<p>Decisions are being made with flawed data, with cost-savings vs. family care as an outcome measurement</p>	<p>We support the independent review of the ACD and recommend the implementation of the policy changes should be put on hold pending the outcome of the independent review. Military families have already had therapy services disrupted and the changes may not survive the scrutiny of the review by NASEM.</p>	<p>SEC. 737. Independent Analysis of DOD Comprehensive Autism Care Demonstration Program</p>

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AREA OF CONCERN	WHAT WE ARE HEARING	WHERE THINGS STAND	2022 NDAA
Access to consistent healthcare for LGBTQ+ family members	Families are reporting unclear EFMP registration processes and standardization for transgender dependents and a lack of trans inclusive care and knowledgeable for medical and mental health providers.	EFMP Coalition member MMAA is working to address the ban on surgical intervention for transgender dependents. Although no provisions were included in the NDAA EMFP enrollment for LGBTQ+ dependents, specifically transgender dependents is being monitored by the Coalition	NONE
Improved family access to EFMP decision-makers	Decisions related to EFMP families are not well-communicated to family members	We support the expansion of the Advisory Council that provides a more diverse representation of EFMP family members. We believe further improvements are needed, including a feedback mechanism and strategic representation not included in the 2022 NDAA.	SEC. 562. Improvements to the Exceptional Family Member Program

While the 2022 NDAA officially remains unsigned, there are other provisions that may be relevant to EFMP families:

2022 NDAA PROVISION	EFMP COALITION STANCE
SEC. 734. Pilot program on assistance for mental health appointment scheduling at military medical treatment facilities	We support this pilot program to help military families access mental health services.
SEC. 701. Eating disorders treatment for certain members of the armed forces and dependents	We support provisions to improve military health and readiness by creating a plan for further identification, treatment and recovery from eating disorders, as well as expanding access to residential eating disorder care.
SEC. 601. Basic needs allowance for low-income regular members	We support this provision to combat food insecurity. EFMP families can face higher food costs related to specific diagnoses.
SEC. 562 Improvements to the Exceptional Family Member Program	EFMP Coalition member EFM has been working to address EFMP assignment issues and supports the DoD offering assignment options that provide EFMP family support.



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2022 NDAA PROVISION

SEC. 563. Continued Assistance to Schools with Significant Numbers of Military Dependent Students

EFMP COALITION STANCE

We support impact aid for school districts that support military children with additional funding for those who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Additional supports should include remote enrollment for all military students with IEPs and a provision to retain IEPs for up to six months after a PCS transition for schools that receive impact aid.

The EFMP Coalition, established in March 2021, was originally founded by Partners in PROMISE, Exceptional Families of the Military, Military Kids - Special Education Alliance, Military Special Needs Network and the Modern Military Association of America. Since this formation, the Coalition has welcomed Hands & Voices Military Project and the Network for Exceptional Military Families. The newly added organizations also are EFMP-focused nonprofits that are helping to advance the cause of military families enrolled in the program due to medical and/or education concerns.

To request an interview with a member of the EFMP Coalition or for additional information please email info@partnersinpromise.org.

Signed,
Partners in PROMISE
Exceptional Families of the Military
Military Kids - Special Needs Alliance
Modern Military Association of America
Network for Exceptional Military Families

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Press Kit: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1YC3zrDjuZOzKULkOPCGFwwGfAcvLj1im?usp=sharing>

Partners in PROMISE

Partners in PROMISE was founded in January 2020 by four mothers to Protect the Rights Of Military children In Special Education (PROMISE). Focusing on a strategy of educating and advocacy, Partners in PROMISE is the link between special needs families, established military service organizations, the Department of Defense, and legislators, working towards collaborative solutions to complex problems. Our primary vehicle is our storytelling via our annual special education survey that focuses on reporting statistically significant data to inform all our programming and recommendations.

Website: <https://thepromiseact.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/PartnersinPROMISE>

Twitter: @PartnersinPROM1 – <https://twitter.com/PartnersinPROM1>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/partners-in-promise>

Exceptional Families of the Military

Exceptional Families of the Military's (EFM) mission is to connect military families with Disabilities, Special Healthcare Needs, or additional Educational needs from all branches of the service in order to navigate within EFMP and identify areas of improvement that affect the families we represent. Using the data we collect while simultaneously assisting our families, we endeavor to create long-lasting systematic changes in the laws and regulations that affect EFMP families. EFM has 18 peer-to-peer support groups with approximately 7,000 members. EFM and Military Special Needs Network (MSNN) merged in 2021. Military Special Needs Network was founded in 2010 as a grassroots organization for families who have a dependent with an identified medical, educational, or behavioral need. Their mission continues under #EFMVoice.

Website: www.ExceptionalMilitaryFam.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ExceptionalFamiliesMilitary> & <https://www.facebook.com/MilitarySpecialNeedsNetwork>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/exceptional-families-of-the-military>

Instagram @EFMVoice: <https://www.instagram.com/efmvoice/>

Twitter: @EFMVoice: <https://twitter.com/efmvoice>

Military Kids - Special Education Alliance

Military Kids-Special Education Alliance was founded by a Military Kid with the mission of ensuring military-connected students with special needs have equal access to public education. Supporting military-connected students through education, advocacy, and homefront accountability.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/militarykidsspecialeducation>

Modern Military Association of America

The Modern Military Association of America (MMAA) is the nation's largest and oldest non-profit organization for LGBTQ service members, military spouses/partners, veterans, caregivers, and allies. Find out more at www.ModernMilitary.org

Facebook: @modernmilitary – <https://www.facebook.com/modernmilitary>

Instagram: @lgbtq_military – https://www.instagram.com/lgbtq_military

Twitter: @LGBTQ_Military – https://twitter.com/LGBTQ_Military

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/modernmilitary>

Hands and Voices Military Project

The Hands & Voices Military Project believes that together through awareness, collaboration, and support, we can aid in the timely support for active duty and the retired armed forces community. Active duty & retired families understand what it means to serve our country. In "Serving the families that serve our country!" our main objective is to offer awareness and provide support to Hands & Voices chapters across the United States, as well as in remote and distant locations. We strive to help local chapters understand the impact the transient military lifestyle has on the family so they can better support the military population.

Website: <https://www.handsandvoices.org/resources/military/index.html>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/HandsVoicesMilitarySupport>

Email: handsandvoicesmp@gmail.com

Network for Exceptional Military Families

The Network for Exceptional Military Families' mission is to support the wellbeing of military family members with exceptional needs, their caregivers, and families. Our purpose is to keep military families connected by providing programs and services that meet the needs of the individual and family; and advocate & raise awareness for inclusion in the military community.

Website: www.networkforexceptionalmilitaryfamilies.org

Facebook: [facebook.com/NetworkforExceptionalMilitaryFamilies](https://www.facebook.com/NetworkforExceptionalMilitaryFamilies)

Partners in PROMISE