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### Supporting Military Women and Families Through Policy

Cassidy Gordon

*Cal Poly Humboldt*, [cassidy.gordon.wbpj@gmail.com](mailto:cassidy.gordon.wbpj@gmail.com)

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# Supporting Military Women and Families Through Policy

Cassidy Gordon



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# Panetta Congressional Internship

- ❖ 13 week program facilitated by the Panetta Institute for Public Policy at CSU Monterey Bay
- ❖ Rigorous application process where you are ultimately nominated by the President of your CSU
- ❖ Meals and housing at CSUMB covered and you receive a living stipend once in Washington D.C.
- ❖ Common tasks: Answering constituent calls, assembling press clips every morning, write constituent form letters, attending hearings, running errands for the MOC, completing staff assignments
- ❖ What I learned: Insight into the Legislative process, ability to influence policy and make a difference, personal and professional connections, advanced communication skills, how to handle yourself in various situations

# Supporting Military Women and Families Through Policy: Demographics and History



- ❖ Over 2,500,000 family members (spouses, children, adult dependents)
- ❖ 1,620,000 military children in 2020
  - 0-5= 37%
  - 6-11= ~32.2%
  - 12-18= ~24.1%
  - 19-22= ~6.4%
- ❖ Women have served since the American Revolution (unofficially)
- ❖ 1948 President Harry Truman: *Women's Armed Services Integration Act*
  - Allowed women to officially serve, only 2% in each branch and less served as officers, discharged if they became pregnant, not allowed to command men or serve in combat roles
- ❖ During the Korea and Vietnam Era's, women gained more rights
- ❖ H.R. 2385 *Justice for Women Veterans Act*, Rep. Julia Brownley
  - Allow GAO to conduct a study looking into the women who were forcibly discharged from service due to pregnancy during the Korea and Vietnam years.



# Agenda Setting and Bills Put Forward

- ❖ Military women and families are not often talked about on a day-to-day basis because some of the challenges they face are invisible to the outside community.
- ❖ If it weren't seen as a gendered job and shared equally between both parents, this issue of childcare in the military would be seen as a greater issue.
- ❖ In November of 2021, the United States Marine Corps released an article stating the USMC will:
  - “seek to secure the necessary departmental and statutory authorities to increase the duration of parental leave for both primary and secondary caregivers. For the primary caregiver, we will seek an expansion of leave for up to one year in length.... Second, until those authorities are obtained, we will authorize primary and secondary caregivers to take additional parental leave when they agree to extend their service contracts.”
- ❖ Republican Bills: Education, H.Res. *Recognizing Military Spouses*
- ❖ Democrat Bills: Contraception, Parental Leave, Childcare Expansion, Equal Pay, Justice for Women Veterans



# Policy Options:

- ❖ Currently, hot topic issues like abortion, birth control, sexual assault, and childcare are tossed back and forth by both sides of the aisle while women suffer the consequences.
  - This is largely due to the polarization in partisan politics.
- ❖ The first step to adequately addressing the above issues is combining bills like H.R. 3792, Services and Trauma-informed Research Outcomes in Neighborhoods Grants for Support for Children Act of 2021 or STRONG Support for Children Act of 2021, introduced by Representative Ayanna Pressely.
- ❖ A second step would be to strengthen modernization and reform sections in the NDAA to include additional provisions to combat MST within the community, conduct research on the effects of trauma on multiple fronts (MST, discrimination, ACEs, and family separation), education, and healthcare. It is important to see all of these issues as interconnected rather than separate.
- ❖ In this Congress, the National Defense Authorization act for Fiscal Year 2022 (H.R.4350), introduced by Representative Adam Smith includes 10 key sections on women's issues, mainly surrounding sexual assault and 13 key sections on military children and families.





# Assessment of Efficacy:

- ❖ I found the best option would be to reinforce the National Defense Authorization Act to ensure that proper measure are being put in place to support and protect women as well as the larger military community by making sure its children are taken care of.
- ❖ Policy makers would be able to see that change is occurring when:
  - cases of MST are lowered, women have equal rights within the Armed Forces (cost of uniform), ability to serve in combat roles, access to all birth control options), women in the military stop getting killed for reporting harassment, children of military families are not struggling as severely with mental health challenges, school start actively supporting children in military families
- ❖ By combining bills and creating a section in the NDAA that heavily focuses on these policy issues rather than having them spaced out and likely to be removed as they are now there is a chance that real modernization can occur.



# The Impacts of Gender Discrimination in the Military: Sexism



- ❖ Better understand the relationship between gender and discrimination in the United States military
  - Sexism and Gender Bias, Sexual Violence, Family Planning and Childcare
- ❖ In a report written by the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) to Congressional Committees, it highlighted that the Department of Defense noticed disparities in the recruitment and retention of female enlisted service members.
  - In 2004, 15.1% of the military population throughout the ranks compared to the 84.9% male representation.
  - In 2018, the female representation only rose to 16.5% to the 83.5% male representation.
- ❖ In a paper titled Women, Regardless: Understanding Gender Bias in U.S. Military Integration the author conducted a survey to assess that common stereotypes against women became a physical reality, making it challenging for women to succeed.
- ❖ “As far as combat arms units go, there would be an extremely negative effect within units which are traditionally male. The things that go on there, the bonds, would be damaged. SHARPs [the Army’s Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention program] stuff would be through the roof. I would almost rather die before changing my demeanor within my unit. Standards need to be met and maintained, but we should all strive to exceed the standard”



# Violence Against Women:

- ❖ DoD FY2019: the Military Services received a total of 7,825 reports of sexual assault involving service members as either victims or subjects, a 3 percent increase from the 7,623 reports received in Fiscal Year 2018
- ❖ IPV: for the age range of 18 to 59 years (NISVS)
  - 40.3% of women in the general population experienced lifetime contact sexual violence
  - 36.3% of active-duty women and 32.8% of wives of active-duty men experienced contact sexual violence in their lifetime.
  - 39.7% of women in the general population experienced lifetime physical violence, rape, or stalking by an intimate partner
  - 31.5% of active duty women and 29.5% of wives of active duty men experienced lifetime physical violence, rape, or stalking by an intimate partner.
- ❖ The first theme is military service (entering and leaving). This theme includes coercion into entering the military, coercion to leave the military, effects on service/work performance, and the impact of survival strategies on career outcomes.
- ❖ The second theme centered around the military's responses to and coping with sexual violence and includes the subthemes of military sanction for perpetration, lack of accountability for military perpetrators and protection of service member perpetrators, military service as an opportunity to escape, and warrior identity as an obstacle to help-seeking.



# Family Planning and Childcare:

- ❖ The gender bias women face in the military can have multiple effects on childcare. The bias ultimately begins with access and education on contraceptives and comes to a head at the quality and accessibility of the Department of Defense's Child Development Centers (CDCs).
- ❖ In 2016, the Marine Corps eliminated mandatory education on contraceptives to female recruits. This left females to seek education and birth control access elsewhere on their own time.
  - One year prior to the 2016 elimination, unintended pregnancies were at 6.9%
  - as a result of the policy change there have been "an additional 67 deliveries a year, 5,601 days of postpartum leave, and 30,937 nondeployable days among female Marines, compared to the year before, according to the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology"
- ❖ The Department of Defense "considers childcare services a quality of life benefit and DOD officials have indicated that the primary reason for providing childcare services is to enhance force readiness".
- ❖ 2019 waitlist:
  - Navy reported ~9,000, Army reported 5,000, Air Force reported 3,200, Marines Corps reported 800
- ❖ Quality and safety disparities: The Stars and Stripes reported that a Congressional report found that 72 Air Force childcare facilities were either "failing" or "poor" in rating.
  - Air Force official stated in the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) hearing that they plan on utilizing \$20 million in funds to upgrade one facility in Texas.



# Conclusion:

- ❖ A lot of issues women face in the military can be eliminated if the patriarchal structure of the military was 'rewired' to view women and the challenges they face as a priority.
- ❖ Female representation, intimate partner violence, sexual assault and harassment (SASH), the reporting of sexual violence, family planning, and childcare are all issues in the military that negatively impacts women on a day-to-day basis.
  - Not only are these gendered issues, but they are military readiness issues.
- ❖ The poor quality and response to all of the issues addressed highlights the emergent need to change and restructuring in today's military through policy.



# Questions?



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