

Senate Testimony on Support for Military Family Programs

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The Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs have made the military family a high priority due to the significant role military families serve in supporting service members. This is good news for Blue Star Families; as a result of this recognition, the Senate Committee on Armed Services received testimony on Wednesday, June 3rd, 2009, to support military family programs, policies, and initiatives in review of the Defense Authorization Request for fiscal year 2010 and in the future. The Committee is made up of Senators Ben Nelson (Chairman), Kennedy, Lieberman, Akaka, Webb, McCaskill, Hagan, Begich, Burr, Graham (Ranking Member), Chambliss, Thune, Martinez, Wicker, Vitter, and Collins.

There were two panels established for the testimony. Serving on Panel I, Mrs. Sheila L. Casey, wife of General George W. Casey, Jr., Chief of Staff, US Army, spoke of her experience with 23 moves throughout her husband's career. Many of the other panelists mentioned moving around with young children and mental health issues for spouses and children as critical issues for military families. Some suggestions were made by the panelists, including mental health counseling outside of military hospitals, the creation of school voucher programs for military children, and the National Military Family Association's Operation Purple camps for military children.

Senator Akaka reiterated what he heard from the panel; that the critical issues of military families include comprehensive medical and mental health care, OPTEMPO, children's education, and sustained funding for continued support for military families.

What does this all mean for Blue Star Families? At a minimum, it means that military families are receiving the attention that we deserve, and the conversation around military families is becoming more inclusive and current. To this end, it is up to us to continue to inform our leaders and constituents of the needs of military families in a constructive and diplomatic manner. As we go forward, we should keep in mind that strategic and tactical military spouse empowerment is vital to the cause.