September 14, 2010

Education, Incentives and Employment Division

Ms. Deborah Kloeppel
President, Military Spouse Corporate Career Network
10 Stone Falcon Court
Lake St. Louis, MO 63367

Dear Ms. Kloeppel:

This letter is to reiterate the need for an employment program for National Guard Service members and Families to aid in reducing unemployment and the hardships associated with it. The Army National Guard has a 20 percent unemployment rate which is current as of August 2010. The Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), OSD, has been providing the Army National Guard Bureau’s (NGB) Army Personnel Division (ARP) with Soldier unemployment data since September 2009. NGB-ARP has been collecting Civilian Employment Information (CEI) from DMDC since FY 2005.

The National Guard is composed of Citizen Soldiers who maintain a dual status as military members and citizens in local communities who pursue a civilian career while remaining at the ready for deployments as we transition to an operational force. The state of the economy has negatively affected the National Guard population, particularly in light of past and future deployments. These challenges are unique to the National Guard and Reserve Component as members combine both a civilian and a military career in support of our country. Their Families provide support to the members of the Guard and Reserve and we acknowledge their sacrifice and contribution to the military mission as well as the need for continued support to empower our military Families as they live and contribute to communities all over the nation.

Our Military members have much to offer employers. These individuals are trained to lead – they know how to work as part of a team – they understand their contribution to the success of the team - they know how to take orders – they know how to carry out those instructions and follow through. They are part of an elite section of society who have been screened and welcomed into the military because of their abilities. We want employers to be able to reap the benefits of hiring National Guardsmen just as communities hit with disaster welcome the National Guard as they roll in to provide aid, rescue or supplies. The life experience spouses and family members have gained while supporting their military member during missions like this can make them excellent potential employees.
As a result of mobilizations, National Guard members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are experiencing a tremendous amount of stress when it comes to the prospect of lack of employment upon their return. For example, the 41st BCT Army National Guard out of Oregon returned from deployment in April 2010 and reported 969 out of app. 3000 Soldiers faced unemployment. This statistic, a staggering 34%, was obtained at the demobilization station before soldiers had even returned to home station. Once the unit is home for a short time the rate is expected to rise to as much as 54%. Also, many self-employed Army National Guard and Reserve Component small business owners are losing their businesses, experiencing financial loss, and being forced to file bankruptcy because they are not protected under USERRA. Current Army National Guard members number approximately 360,000 with 50 percent having spouses.

The importance of a Service Member and Family member employment portal through MSCCN cannot be overstated, along with the implementation of the Job Connection Education Program (JCEP). The purpose of JCEP is to improve National Guard force stability by improving its members' ability to seek, obtain and retain civilian employment through education and job search skills training such as resume writing, interview skills and translating military skills to civilian terminology. JCEP provides enhanced jobseeker training and services through one on one counseling and class instruction connecting traditional civilian Soldiers to new and existing, Federal, State and private sector resources resulting in improved employment and reemployment rates for Guard Soldiers helping to keep the Soldiers in their local communities and States. On a simpler level, it allows the Service Member to provide for their family in the most basic way: by providing food and shelter to spouse and children. It may also mitigate factors which contribute to the probability of divorce, child and domestic abuse and an increase in mental health issues which can arise from severe stress, especially immediately following a deployment. MSCCN will directly contribute to the success and deployment of this program and provide critical resources and technology as an integral part of the day to day workings of the program. There is a Memorandum of Understanding between the Army National Guard, MSCCN and DirectEmployers Association currently under review by the Army National Guard.

The ability of the spouse/family member of the Service Member to find employment is also critical to these Families. Reserve Component (RC) Service Members do not return to a guaranteed job as do their Active Duty (AD) counterparts. The AD Family is guaranteed at least one income. If an RC Service Member returns home to find they are unemployed; suddenly, that Family is dependent on a spouse income to put food on the table and provide shelter. The increase in homeless veterans with families is testament to this fact.

In addition, there have been 70 suicides of Army National Guard Soldiers from January 1 to August 31, 2010. Correlations have been made to financial struggles faced by some of those Soldiers. In a study of 38 cases data obtained by the National Guard (which includes an array of possible factors which contributed to the suicides in
2010) shows that up to 40 percent had job uncertainty, discord or dissatisfaction and of those, 20 percent were unemployed or had experienced job loss. These statistics do not indicate that the sole or even most significant reason for the suicide was due to employment issues but they are cited among all possible contributing factors.

The implementation of an employment program is of critical importance to National Guard families. MSCCN has committed its resources in support of this endeavor and we acknowledge their support of the military, military family members and the Army National Guard.

Thank you for your continued support of our Soldiers and Families. The point of contact is Lieutenant Colonel Timothy Rooney, Deputy Division Chief, Education, Incentives and Employment Division, at 703-607-9781 or timothy.rooney@us.army.mil.

Sincerely,

Deputy Division Chief Timothy Rooney
Lieutenant Colonel, US Army
Education, Incentives and Employment Division, Army National Guard