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Spaceports

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## PROGRAMS TO ASSIST AND SUPPORT FLORIDA'S MILITARY FAMILIES

### SUMMARY

*The military recruits individuals, but retains families.* This often repeated statement has never been more true than today. Currently, 55 percent of active-duty military personnel are married, and 60 percent have family responsibilities. Military service entails considerable sacrifice for both military personnel and their families. Recognizing the linkage between family well-being and force readiness and retention, the military has recently taken steps to address a number of quality of life concerns. Foremost among these concerns are compensation, health care, housing, education, and spouse employment.

The military is an integral part of Florida's past, present, and future. The state's commitment to the military is reflected in a variety of existing laws and programs that support military installations and their personnel. Nevertheless, there are additional policy options the state and local entities may wish to consider to enhance the quality of life for Florida's military families. Issues of particular concern include military student education, spouse employment, and housing programs. For example, by streamlining certain professional licensing requirements Florida could enable relocating military spouses to resume work faster, minimizing the interruption in income associated with moving. Similarly, there are a number of actions the state and local school districts could take to assist military students transitioning to Florida schools.

Addressing these quality of life issues not only signifies the state's appreciation for the sacrifices of military families, it also demonstrates to the military services and the 2005 BRAC Commission that Florida is adamantly committed to remaining a "military friendly" state.

### BACKGROUND

Military service often carries a high price for both the servicemember and his or her family. Frequent deployments, long separations, recurring relocations, inconsistent housing, and transient spousal employment are just a few of the unique hardships consistently faced by the families of those in uniform. Whether relocating to other cities or countries, experiencing separations when military personnel deploy, or making the transition to civilian life after service, military families face many challenges that generate stress, anxiety, and uncertainty. Factor in the various personal and financial challenges likely to confront any family, and it becomes easy to understand why support for military families is important.

#### The Military in Florida – An Overview

The United States military maintains a significant presence in Florida. The state currently hosts 21 active military installations and three joint commands. These facilities are distributed throughout 13 Florida counties. Almost 80,000 active-duty military personnel are stationed in Florida. Approximately 42,000 military spouses and 33,000 school-age dependents are associated with these active-duty personnel. An additional 35,000 civilians are employed at Florida's military installations. Indirect employment generated through these installations exceeds 150,000.<sup>1</sup>

Military installations directly contribute \$20 billion annually to Florida's economy. According to the Florida Defense Alliance, every \$100 invested in Florida's military bases generates \$113 in economic return. Defense-related industry and military retiree spending contribute an additional \$10 billion annually.

<sup>1</sup> Fishkind and Associates, *Economic Impact of Florida's Military Installations* (March 1998). The University of West Florida is currently preparing a revised estimate of the military's economic and employment impact in Florida.

With an overall annual economic impact of approximately \$32 billion, military-related spending represents the third largest sector of Florida's economy, following tourism (\$51 billion) and agriculture (\$50 billion). Florida currently ranks fourth among all states in terms of federal military appropriations.<sup>2</sup>

### Key Military Quality of Life Considerations

Increasingly, today's military is a military of families. According to the Department of Defense (DoD), about half of active-duty personnel are married by their fifth year of service, and three-fourths are married by their tenth year of service. There are currently 1.4 million children of active-duty parents, including more than 800,000 school-age dependents.<sup>3</sup> The DoD recognizes that in order to successfully recruit and retain high quality personnel in today's employment environment, the military services must address a range of quality of life concerns that impact military families.

The following discussion briefly identifies key military quality of life considerations and summarizes federal initiatives to address these issues. The "Findings" section of this report identifies actions the state has taken to address these same issues.

*"No aspect of our current defense posture is more worrisome than the decline in the standard of living of servicemembers and their families which has taken place in recent years. Reversing this trend and improving their quality of life is a principal priority of my Administration."*

- President George W. Bush, February 12, 2001

Compensation - Military pay has long been cited as one of the major disadvantages of military service. During the 1990's, sustained economic expansion, competition from private-sector employers, and the rise in college attendance by high school graduates created a challenging recruiting and retention environment for the military. In response, the 2000 Congress enacted a major pay increase for military personnel. The overall increase in military pay was 6.2 percent, the largest since 1982, and significantly greater than the 4.3 percent increase in the Employment Cost Index.

In 2002, the Ninth Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (9<sup>th</sup> QRMC) evaluated the effectiveness

of military compensation by comparing similar civilian-sector earnings. The 9<sup>th</sup> QRMC found that between 1982 and 2000 growth in basic military pay had fallen behind the increase in civilian pay by between 5.5 and 13.5 percent. The review recommended that the DoD supplement the 2000 pay increases with additional funding necessary to eliminate the military/civilian pay disparity by 2006. In addition to increasing basic pay, the review recommended the military evaluate alternative compensation tools (special and incentive pay options) that could provide the services greater management flexibility.

Health Care - High quality, accessible health care is a critical concern to servicemembers and their dependents. The Military Health System currently provides comprehensive health care services to 8.1 million potential beneficiaries.<sup>4</sup> The military's primary health care delivery system, TRICARE, provides services through 81 hospitals, 500 clinics, and a network of managed care contractors. Each of the 12 TRICARE regions relies on a commercial contractor to develop and manage a private-sector network of health care providers and services. TRICARE beneficiaries utilize this network when care is not readily available through a military medical facility.

While the military has significantly improved TRICARE since its introduction in the mid-1990's, a number of beneficiary concerns remain. For example, one continuing issue is beneficiary access to care. According to the National Military Family Association, many TRICARE beneficiaries are unable to obtain an appointment within the prescribed access standards. Similarly, beneficiaries have voiced concerns relating to staff shortages within certain military health care specialties and the adverse effect of overseas deployments of military health care providers on access. Recognizing the need for continued improvement, the DoD has a number of health care initiatives underway, including improving and standardizing appointment processes, improving access to care for those with special and extraordinary health needs, and improving claims processing.

Housing - An important element in attracting and retaining military personnel is the availability of affordable housing near military installations. Unfortunately, two critical problems have confronted military planners. First, the overall condition of

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Department of Defense, *A New Social Compact: A Reciprocal Partnership Between the Department of Defense, Service Members and Families* (July 2002).

<sup>4</sup> This total includes active and retired service personnel, and their spouses and dependents, as well as reserve component members and their families.

existing military housing is relatively poor. The DoD owns approximately 273,000 family housing units, both on and off base. The DoD estimates that 60 percent of these units need to be replaced or extensively renovated. Second, the majority of military personnel living in private-sector housing are enlisted personnel whose salaries are at the lower end of the military pay scale. These individuals often have difficulty finding quality, affordable family housing within reasonable commuting distance of bases.

The DoD has developed a number of strategies to address these housing problems. In 1996, Congress authorized the Department to implement a housing privatization initiative that enabled DoD to leverage its resources with private-sector capital and expertise. Under this authority the DoD is empowered to enter into loan and rental guarantees, convey or lease existing property and facilities, provide differential lease payments, invest in qualifying housing developments, and issue direct loans. In addition, the DoD has substantially increased (\$3 billion in 2002) the Basic Allowance for Housing and plans to reduce most servicemembers out-of-pocket costs for off-base housing to zero by 2005.<sup>5</sup>

Military Spouse Employment – A military spouse's ability to gain job skills and maintain a career contributes to the financial well-being of the family, spouse satisfaction with military life, and military retention and readiness. According to the DoD, approximately 70 percent of military spouses are in the labor force, including 87 percent of junior enlisted spouses. Unfortunately, the unemployment rate for military spouses is approximately 24 percent, four times higher than the civilian unemployment rate, and military spouse earnings are significantly lower than comparably educated civilian spouses.<sup>6</sup> An additional concern is the fact that in most states, including Florida, military spouses are not eligible to collect unemployment compensation when the family is forced to relocate as a result of the servicemember's change of duty location.

Military spouses can be found in nearly all occupations. The DoD's 1997 Survey of Spouses of Enlisted Personnel found that 20 percent were employed in professional, technical, managerial, or administrative occupations. Thirty-one percent worked in clerical

occupations, 14 percent in service occupations, and 8 percent in sales. Nine percent of enlisted spouses are childcare workers, and 13 percent are school teachers. Survey findings also indicate that state occupational licensing and professional registration requirements can present a significant barrier to obtaining employment upon transfer to a new location. Waiting periods, the lack of state-to-state reciprocity, and in some cases, significant fees can have a severe impact on this highly mobile segment of the workforce.

As the percentage of military spouses working has increased, the Federal Government has taken steps to improve employment opportunities for spouses. For example, Title 10, Section 1784 of the U.S. Code authorizes the Secretary of Defense to provide employment opportunities for military spouses in the same geographic area as their spouses' permanent duty station. Under this provision, qualified spouses receive a preference in hiring for civilian positions within the DoD. Since 2001, the Navy has partnered with Adecco, the world's largest staffing agency, to provide expanded employment opportunities for spouses. Public Law 107-107 (2002 National Defense Authorization Act), directed the DoD to report on the potential merit of direct financial assistance to spouses, and encourages expansion of inter-departmental and public/private job partnerships serving spouses. Finally, in 2003, the DoD and Department of Labor signed a memorandum of understanding to share information on job training and employment programs supporting military spouses.

Military Students/Education – Military service often presents a number of challenges for school-age children of military personnel. The average military child relocates every 2.9 years, three times more often than their civilian counterparts. From kindergarten to graduation, the average military child attends six to nine different schools, including two to three high school transitions.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the social and emotional challenges associated with new cities, schools, and classmates, transitioning military students often face a variety of academic and administrative hurdles. For example, graduation requirements vary considerably depending on the type of diploma, state mandates, local mandates, and special program considerations. The use of exit level testing for promotion/graduation has also created difficulties for some transitioning military children.

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<sup>5</sup> Department of Defense, *Annual Defense Report* (2002).

<sup>6</sup> James Hosek, Rand Corporation, *Married to the Military – The Employment and Earnings of Military Wives Compared to Those of Civilian Wives* (2002).

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<sup>7</sup> Military Child Education Coalition, available at <http://www.militarychild.org>.

A variety of military, governmental, and private-sector groups have developed strategies to address the unique educational needs of military students. For example, the Military Child Education Coalition has developed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that invites school districts serving military students to commit to a set of guiding principles designed to increase predictability for mobile students. Included among the guiding principles addressed in the MOA are the following goals: improve the timely transfer of records; develop systems to ease student transition during the first two weeks of enrollment; promote practices which foster access to extracurricular programs; and provide information concerning graduation requirements. Currently, three Florida school districts (Hillsborough, Miami-Dade, and Monroe) are participating in the MOA.

### Implications for BRAC

Improving the quality of life for Florida's military families has implications beyond military recruiting, retention, and readiness. As previously noted, the DoD is currently preparing for BRAC 2005. During the four previous BRAC rounds the Pentagon selected 97 major domestic bases for closure, 55 major bases for realignment, and 235 minor installations either to be closed or realigned. Florida lost four major installations during the previous BRAC rounds.<sup>8</sup> For the 2005 BRAC effort, the DoD intends to eliminate 25 percent of the nation's installation capacity. Analysts have estimated that this will translate into the closure of approximately 45 bases. The Pentagon maintains that unnecessary installations should be closed in order to free up funds for military transformation and homeland security initiatives.

The DoD is currently identifying criteria that will be utilized in the base closure deliberations. Chief among the 2005 BRAC criteria will be "military value". This term encompasses a range of considerations including the following: preservation of training areas suitable for ground/naval/air maneuvers; preservation of staging areas needed in homeland defense; and impacts on joint warfighting, training, and readiness. Other relevant considerations will include the economic impact on existing communities and the ability of communities to support forces, missions, and personnel.

<sup>8</sup> Florida lost the following major installations during previous BRAC rounds: Naval Aviation Depot Pensacola; Naval Aviation Station Cecil Field (Jacksonville); Naval Training Center Orlando; and Homestead Air Force Base.

*"...although a base's contribution to national defense would be the primary consideration in the base closure process, quality of life considerations will probably be a secondary consideration. Probably included will be how military friendly a community is with regards to issues such as spouse employment and the quality of schools for military children."*

- David Chu, Undersecretary for Defense for Personnel and Readiness

States and local communities that demonstrate to the military services and the BRAC Commission that they are proactively addressing military quality of life concerns will likely enjoy a competitive advantage relative to other jurisdictions. Not surprisingly, a number of states, including Florida, have taken steps to strengthen programs serving military personnel and their families.

## METHODOLOGY

This report examines state programs and policies that impact the quality of life of Florida's military families. In preparing this report, committee staff interviewed key governmental stakeholders, including representatives of the Agency for Workforce Innovation, the Department of Education, the Department of Health, and the Department of Business and Professional Regulation. In addition, committee staff interviewed numerous military and civilian representatives from military installations located in Florida. Staff also obtained input from military-support organizations such as the National Military Family Association and the Military Child Education Coalition. Finally, staff conducted an extensive literature review of published and electronic sources.

## FINDINGS

Florida has enacted a number of programs and policies to support military personnel and their families. These efforts have earned Florida a reputation as a "military friendly" state. Nevertheless, there are additional actions the state and local governments should consider to enhance the quality of life for Florida's military families. In addition to providing assistance to a substantial and deserving segment of Florida's population, these measures would demonstrate to the military services and BRAC Commission the state's continuing commitment to military personnel and installations. Recognizing the state has limited influence on certain quality of life issues (pay, health care), which are exclusively federal, the state and local

governments should evaluate opportunities to address concerns in the areas of spouse employment, military student education, affordable housing, and family-support programs.

### **Florida's Military-Related Laws and Programs**

In recognition of the unique demands that military service often entails, Florida has established numerous laws and programs to assist military families. For example, the 2003 Legislature significantly strengthened legal protections afforded military personnel through passage of SB 1098 ("Florida Uniformed Servicemembers Protection Act"). Florida is also regarded as a national leader in the development of partnerships between the state, local communities, and military bases. Through efforts such as the semiannual Base Commanders meetings and the Florida Defense Alliance, Florida has demonstrated its willingness to address the needs of military installations and their surrounding communities. The following discussion briefly summarizes some of the actions Florida has taken to address military-related quality of life concerns.

*Military Spouse Employment* – The Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI) is the primary state entity responsible for spouse employment services. Through AWI's network of One-Stop Career Centers military spouses can access a variety of employment services, including: job search and placement assistance; career planning and counseling; assistance with interviewing skills and resume preparation; and other career support services. In addition, each of the state's regional workforce boards with a military facility within its region coordinates the delivery of employment services with the appropriate base commander and Family Support Center Manager. The state's regional workforce boards also participate in Transition Assistance Participation workshops, which provide employability skills training and other career services to separating and retiring military personnel and their spouses.

While spouses of relocating military personnel are eligible for certain services as dislocated workers under Florida's Workforce Investment Act, they are not currently eligible for unemployment insurance. Section 443.101, F.S., provides that an individual is disqualified for benefits when he or she voluntarily terminates their employment. In 2001, AWI estimated that 1,500 individuals were denied unemployment benefits for voluntarily terminating employment to accompany their spouse as a result of a military

transfer. AWI estimated the fiscal impact of extending benefits to this population would be approximately \$6 million annually.<sup>9</sup>

*Military Students/Education* – Florida has established a number of programs to address the educational needs of military personnel and their families. At the state level, most of these provisions are directed at post-secondary education. For example, s. 1009.21, F.S., classifies active duty military personnel stationed in Florida as residents of the state for tuition purposes. Spouses and dependent children of active duty military personnel also qualify under this provision for in-state tuition. The Department of Education (DOE) also offers scholarships for children of deceased or disabled veterans. State law and DOE rules/policies also provide for tuition refunds and other financial and academic safeguards for students called to active military service.

At the local level, many of Florida's school districts have taken steps to address the challenges that confront Florida's 33,000 military-connected students. As previously noted, three Florida school districts are currently participating in the Military Child Education Coalition's Memorandum of Agreement which increases predictability for mobile students. Several Florida school districts that serve large military student populations are currently considering participation in this program. In addition, a number of school districts have established innovative partnerships with local military installations. For example, the MacDill Aeronautical Academy, a cooperative venture between the Hillsborough County School District and MacDill Air Force Base, serves high school students intending to pursue a career in aviation or the military.

To further address statewide concerns relating to military student education, the 2003 Legislature enacted SB 2802 (Ch. 2003-44, Laws of Florida). This bill directed DOE to assist in the transition of dependants of military personnel into the public school system. The bill incorporated most of the goals identified in the Military Child Education Coalition's Memorandum of Agreement, such as improving the timely transfer of records and promoting practices that foster access to extracurricular activities. The bill also directed DOE to issue a report by October 1, 2003, identifying efforts and strategies for assisting military-connected students in transitioning to the Florida school system, including the identification of

<sup>9</sup> Agency for Workforce Innovation, *Services for Military Members and Spouses* (March 2003).

acceptable equivalence for curriculum and graduation requirements. The DOE study, issued just prior to the completion of this report, concluded that most Florida school districts serving military facilities have developed collaborative partnerships to support transitioning military students.

***Housing*** – Although Florida has not established any housing programs specifically targeted toward military families, it has enacted a number of provisions protecting the housing rights of military personnel. For example, s. 83.67, F.S., prohibits a landlord from discriminating against any member of the United States Armed Forces in offering a dwelling unit for rent. Similarly, s. 83.682, F.S., provides conditions under which military personnel may terminate a rental agreement without being liable for liquidated damages. Section 689.27, F.S., establishes certain requirements and procedures governing the termination of an agreement to purchase real property by a service member.

Florida law also extends certain benefits relating to homestead exemption to military personnel. For example, s. 196.061, F.S., exempts qualifying military personnel from a statutory provision declaring that rental of a dwelling previously claimed as a homestead constitutes abandonment of such a claim. Similarly, s. 196.071, F.S., provides that if military personnel are unable to file a claim for homestead exemption in person due to military service, they may authorize another individual to file a claim in their absence.

***Other State Benefits*** – Florida law also provides a number of benefits to military personnel that ease some of the hardships associated with a highly mobile military career. For example, active duty personnel enjoy various benefits relating to driver licenses, hunting licenses, fishing licenses, and motor vehicle registration. State law also extends certain professional licensing benefits to military personnel and their spouses. Section 455.02, F.S., provides that military members who are in good standing with state professional boards at the time of activation are exempt from registration, testing, and fee requirements while on active duty and for a period of up to six months after discharge from active duty. This same section of law provides that military spouses are exempt from licensure renewal requirements while absent from the state because of their spouses' military duties.

***Partnerships*** – Florida's commitment to military families is also reflected in the partnerships and military support groups that have formed throughout

the state. Since 1998, the Florida Defense Alliance, a partnership of state, local, and military leaders, has worked to ensure that the concerns of Florida's military bases and their host communities are addressed. Similarly, in 1999, the Governor initiated semiannual meetings with Florida's base commanders to discuss issues of importance to their troops, installations, and communities. In 2001, the Florida Defense Alliance formed the Military Family Transition Working Group and the Military Spouse Working Group to specifically address two key quality of life issues impacting military families. At the local level, communities have established numerous support organizations to serve the needs of military families.

### **Analysis and Policy Options**

While Florida has implemented a number of policies and programs to assist military families, there are additional policy options the state and local governments may wish to address. In evaluating potential options, it must be recognized that two key military quality of life issues, compensation and health care, are largely outside the state's purview. Nevertheless, there are a number of issues relating to military student education, spouse employment, housing, and community support programs that should be evaluated. Many of these issues also have the potential to increase the attractiveness of Florida for relocations by non-military families and corporate entities.

**Options Relating to Military Students/Education** – Florida's military families have expressed two primary education-related concerns: the need to continue to improve the overall quality of Florida's schools; and the need for policies and procedures that support transitioning students. State and local school policies should ensure military students are not penalized as a result of their parents' highly mobile military career. Similarly, military students should have equal access to the range of educational experiences and opportunities.

***Encourage Memorandums of Agreement*** - Through the efforts of groups such as the Military Child Education Coalition, researchers have identified best practices that address the transition-related challenges that confront military-connected students. Florida should encourage increased participation by school districts in the Military Child Education Coalition's Memorandum of Agreement and similar cooperative efforts that support transitioning students. The DOE should facilitate the development and implementation of these agreements.

*Evaluate Interstate Reciprocity* - In a related concern, transferring military students often encounter problems due to the lack of reciprocity for course credits obtained in other jurisdictions. While Florida law currently establishes reciprocity for state schools, there is no corresponding provision for students transferring from one state to another. Recognizing that course requirements vary in each state, DOE should explore opportunities to participate in interstate reciprocity agreements that address equivalence for curriculum and graduation requirements.

*In-State Tuition for Foreign Liaison Officer* - As previously noted, Florida currently extends in-state tuition to active-duty military personnel and their spouses and dependent children. Similarly, s. 1009.21, F.S., extends in-state tuition to Canadian military personnel and their families stationed in Florida under the North American Air Defense Agreement. The military has requested that Florida grant the same benefit to foreign liaison officers and their families who are assigned to U.S. military commands located in Florida.

*Special Needs Students* - In a recent survey of Florida military families, several respondents indicated that the existing residency requirement for the John McKay Scholarships Program adversely impacts military dependents who would otherwise be eligible for this program. To address this concern, the Legislature may wish to revise existing residency requirements for otherwise qualifying military dependents applying for the McKay Scholarships Program.

**Options Relating to Military Spouse Employment** – In today's dual-income military family, spouse employment is a major concern. Policies that enable relocating military spouses to resume work with minimal delay and disruption in family income are of critical importance to military families.

*Streamline Licensing Requirements* – While military spouses are represented across nearly all occupational categories, a significant number of spouses are employed in the health care and teaching professions. Military representatives have requested that Florida explore opportunities to streamline licensing requirements governing these two professions. For example, through participation in the Nursing Licensure Compact, a multi-state mutual licensing agreement established by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, the state could reduce the costs and effort required to obtain nursing licensure in Florida. In considering this and similar regulatory policy

options, the Legislature should continue to ensure that public safety and welfare are the paramount concerns.

*Strengthen Employment Services for Spouses* – Although Florida's One-Stop Career Centers currently provide services to military spouses, there are opportunities to improve the delivery of employment assistance. For example, state and local workforce agencies should customize their services to address the unique needs/strengths of relocating military spouses and effectively market those services to the military community. Similarly, state and local agencies should pursue grants available through the U.S. Department of Labor and other sources that underwrite workforce services for military members and spouses.

*Military Liaison for Workforce Development Boards* – One specific option for improving the delivery of employment services to military spouses is to provide for the appointment of a military representative to the various regional workforce development boards that serve the state's military installations. This representative could directly communicate the concerns of military spouses to local workforce agencies.

*Unemployment Benefits for Military Spouses* – Eligibility for unemployment benefits is an issue that resonates strongly with military spouses. As previously discussed, spouses of relocating military personnel are not currently eligible for unemployment insurance under Florida law. Spouses' ineligibility for unemployment compensation often forces them to take any job available to avert financial hardship. Extending unemployment benefits to relocating military spouses would allow a well executed job search, resulting in better employment and higher earnings over the long term. Although changing Florida's unemployment compensation law to provide benefits for relocating spouses would result in a significant fiscal impact, it is an option that warrants further consideration.

**Options Relating to Military Housing** – Currently, two-thirds of military personnel reside in off-base housing. Military representatives indicated there is a need to improve both the supply and quality of family housing in close proximity to Florida's installations. Similarly, military housing officials agreed that housing problems are most acute for junior enlisted personnel. Finally, two recent DoD initiatives, housing

privatization and “homesteading”, may significantly impact military housing in Florida.<sup>10</sup>

*Conduct A Needs Assessment* – Pursuant to a request made during a 2002 Base Commanders Meeting, the Florida Housing Finance Corporation (FHFC) evaluated the feasibility of establishing a state-sponsored home ownership program for military personnel. The resulting analysis concluded that mortgage loan programs available through existing federal sources offered Florida’s military personnel superior terms to any mortgage product available through the state. While FHFC determined that a new state-sponsored homeownership initiative was not warranted, it noted the need for additional information on military housing, including the adequacy of rental markets. In order to obtain a better understanding of military housing in Florida, FHFC should conduct a detailed assessment of the housing needs of Florida’s military families.

*SHIP Funds for Military Families* - The State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) program provides funds to local governments as an incentive to create partnerships that produce and preserve affordable homeownership and multifamily housing. SHIP funds may be used for a variety of purposes, including funding of emergency repairs, new construction, rehabilitation, down payment and closing cost assistance, impact fees, construction and gap financing, mortgage buy-downs, matching dollars for federal housing grants and programs, and homeownership counseling. In some instances, local governments have targeted SHIP funds to specifically assist individuals in critical-need occupations, such as teachers, nurses, and law enforcement officers. Following this precedent, the state should encourage local governments to utilize SHIP funds to assist military families.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a number of actions the state and local governments should consider to improve the quality of life for Florida’s military families. The following represents a partial listing of policy options, and is intended to serve as a beginning for further discussion of issues of importance to Florida’s military families.

<sup>10</sup> Homesteading is a DoD effort to plan servicemembers’ career paths in ways that minimize the number of transfers, thereby encouraging personnel to settle more permanently in a general locale.

With regard to military students and related educational concerns, staff recommends:

- The Department of Education facilitate increased participation by school districts in the Military Child Education Coalition’s Memorandum of Agreement and similar collaborative efforts that support transitioning military students.
- The Department of Education pursue opportunities to participate in interstate reciprocity agreements that address equivalence for curriculum and graduation requirements.
- The Legislature extend in-state tuition to foreign liaison officers and their families who are assigned to U.S. military commands located in Florida.
- The Legislature evaluate residency requirements for otherwise qualifying military dependents applying for the McKay Scholarships Program.

With regard to military spouse employment, staff recommends:

- The Legislature and state regulatory agencies streamline certain professional licensing requirements that adversely impact relocating military spouses.
- The Agency for Workforce Innovation and local workforce agencies improve employment assistance services for military spouses.
- The Legislature authorize the appointment of a military representative to regional workforce development boards serving the state’s military installations.
- The Legislature evaluate Florida’s unemployment insurance laws with regard to relocating military spouses.

With regard to military housing in Florida, staff recommends:

- State housing agencies conduct a detailed assessment of the housing needs of Florida’s military families.
- State and local housing agencies evaluate the use of State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) funds and similar housing resources to assist Florida’s military families.

Finally, while the focus of this report is on Florida-based active duty military personnel and their families, the state and local entities should continue to recognize and address the needs of Florida’s Reserve and National Guard families.