UNDER SECRETARY OF WAR
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

President's Military Spouse Commission
Minutes of the First Meeting

Date / Time:	September 21, 2026, 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. EST
Location:	Public Virtual Livestream (Washington, D.C.)
Chairwoman:	Jennifer Hegseth
Designated Federal Officer:	Josie Beets

Background and Purpose

The President's Military Spouse Commission held its inaugural meeting on Monday, September 21, 2026, via a public virtual livestream originating from Washington, D.C. The meeting was conducted in alignment with and in furtherance of the Commission's charter, established under Executive Order 14417 and in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), 5 U.S.C. § 1009. The Commission was formed to identify and address systemic quality-of-life barriers affecting military spouses and families, including employment, housing, healthcare, education, and deployment-related support and to advise the President on actionable administrative solutions and policy reforms to strengthen military readiness. This synopsis captures the narrative highlights, individual presentations, public testimonies, and policy actions of the meeting.

Opening and Welcoming Remarks

Mrs. Josie Beets, the Designated Federal Officer (DFO), opened the meeting at 1:21 p.m. Eastern Time. She read the statutory Federal Advisory Committee Act statement and confirmed that a quorum of members were present. Mrs. Beets then formally transferred proceedings to the Commission Chair.

Chairwoman Jennifer Hegseth welcomed the members and outlined the opportunity before them. She detailed President Trump's support for the military community, emphasizing his first-term successes in occupational licensure reform, remote work flexibilities for military spouses who work for the Federal Government, and substantial pay raises for military service members as well as the 1776 Warrior Dividend. Mrs. Hegseth noted that the Commission will focus on big issues like employment, housing, healthcare, and education, as well as more micro issues. She also noted that each family, branch, and region has specific needs. She noted that some of the solutions will be new but some of them will be found as having been stuck in the bureaucracy. Mrs. Hegseth thanked the Commission members for being willing to serve.
Cabinet Secretary Megan Bauer welcomed the Commission members to the White House and thanked Mrs. Sayle for her efforts with building the Commission and Mrs. Hegseth for leading the Commission. She noted that military spouses serve as the essential backbone of the nation's

Armed Forces. She remarked that a strong home front is a strategic necessity for a strong military and a safer, more secure America. She stated that for the first time ever President Trump is addressing military family policy directly from the White House. She noted that the Commission members' experience is essential and stated that, at the direction of President Trump, Secretary Hegseth has rebuilt America's military and that strong military families help build a safer and more secure America. She then introduced Secretary Hegseth to the Commission.

The Honorable Pete Hegseth, Secretary of War, delivered the keynote address, focusing on the direct connection between military family stability and overall national security. Secretary Hegseth acknowledged Mrs. Sayle's long-standing commitment to establishing the Commission as what brought it to fruition. He thanked Mrs. Hegseth for her willingness to support the Commission and understand the issues the Commission is charged with addressing. Secretary Hegseth encouraged the Commission members to think about where there can be immediate solutions. He acknowledged that there have been ongoing efforts by many great Americans to address the challenges military families face, and he said his hope for this Commission is to bring solutions out of silos. Secretary Hegseth urged the Commission to reject standard bureaucratic inertia and "think outside the box" to formulate rapid solutions. He emphasized that the Department of War stands ready to execute immediate administrative adjustments without waiting for multi-year legislative cycles. As a concrete example of immediate opportunity, he highlighted TRICARE reimbursement rates, which currently lag at 80% of Medicare rates, as an area where immediate parity adjustments could expand local medical networks. Secretary Hegseth noted that there is opportunity to work on these issues in partnership with other agencies across the Federal Government. Following his remarks, Secretary Hegseth administered the oath of office to the Commission members.

Executive Director's Report and Roundtable Introductions

Executive Director Desiree Sayle thanked Secretary Hegseth and noted that his remarks captured what the Commission has been charged with by President Trump. Mrs. Sayle thanked and acknowledged Mrs. Hegseth's leadership and involvement with the Commission. Mrs. Sayle acknowledged that President Trump has created the first ever Military Spouse Commission. She then presented an operational briefing, noting that the Commission collectively represents 544 years and counting of active-duty military spouse experience. She noted that this is the first commission to directly connect military spouses' experience to the President. Mrs. Sayle noted that the Commission has an opportunity to address individual issues as well as larger, more systemic issues. She credited Mrs. Cindy Wilsbach, spouse of the Air Force Chief of Staff and current senior White House writer who has worked in three administrations, with originating the commission concept. Following Mrs. Sayle's remarks, the Commission members conducted a roundtable discussion, presenting observations and their individual experiences. Each member began by expressing their gratitude for the opportunity to serve on the Commission and to President Trump for his commitment to military families.

- Mrs. April Cao expressed that it was a "privilege to be in the company of these spouses working towards the improvement of the quality of life on behalf of the President of the United States." She detailed her experiences as a 23-year special operations spouse with five children. Mrs. Cao recognized the Navy's Fleet and Family Services personnel, noting that they are truly exceptional human beings who are working with less resources than they deserve. She announced that the Navy is committing an additional 100 Fleet and Family Services counselors in fleet concentration areas. Mrs. Cao noted the importance of housing for military families. She praised the Navy's aggressive actions under the Secretary of War's Barracks Task Force, highlighting unaccompanied housing overhauls in Hampton Roads and mold remediation at Joint Base San Antonio, expected to be completed in 2027.
- Mrs. Donna Caudle formally thanked President Trump "for his decisive action in establishing this meaningful Commission and for his commitment to addressing the challenges that our military families face every day." She noted that she has been a military spouse of 21 years and has experienced 11 PCS moves. Drawing on her licensed healthcare background, she focused her remarks on healthcare access, policies that reduce specialty and mental health appointment wait times, and improvement in care continuity.
- Mrs. Deborah Schiess expressed gratitude that the President prioritized military families by establishing this Commission. She noted that she has been a military spouse for 34 years, experiencing 18 PCS moves, a year-long deployment, and countless TDY assignments. She noted that she and her husband have two daughters and discussed raising the dependent healthcare eligibility age under TRICARE and called for federal legislation to allow mental health state-licensed military spouses to practice on federal installations. She noted that this would tackle two issues: mental health care access and spouse employment.
- Mrs. Shannon Nordhaus extended sincere gratitude to President Trump "for his impressive action to include the National Guard in this Commission." She noted that she is an Air Force and National Guard spouse of more than 37 years. She noted that she and her husband have 5 children and 6 grandchildren. She shared that she has experienced 12 PCS moves, 7 deployments, and a one-year unaccompanied assignment. She highlighted the unique challenges of geographically dispersed National Guard families and proposed a permanent, nationwide childcare benefit specifically covering drill weekends and other qualifying duty for Air National Guard and Army National Guard families.
- Mrs. Kimberly Weimer shared that she felt it was a "profound honor to be among all of these servant leaders to serve on this Commission" to advocate for the wellbeing of families. She noted that she and her husband have raised two daughters during the Global War on Terror (GWOT) time, and that her family has endured 19 combat deployments, not counting TDY and training exercise. She noted that she and her family have PCSd three times. She discussed finding solutions for a simplified specialty care referral system and a streamlined process for navigating between the Defense Health Agency (DHA) and TRICARE. She also noted the importance of spouse employment.
- Mrs. Angela Perryman thanked President Trump "for establishing this first-ever Military Spouse Commission." She noted that she has been a military spouse for 30 years and has navigated 10 PCS moves and 10 deployments. Mrs. Perryman noted that she was able to

build a career as a military spouse with the support of other spouses, engaged leaders, and employers who understood the realities of military life. She noted that one of the issues she intends to focus on is military spouse employment. Mrs. Perryman stated that she has been a full-time federal employee for almost 20 years as a licensed clinical social worker. She noted that the 2024 Active Duty Spouse Survey found that civilian military spouse unemployment is 20%. She also noted that the unemployment rate for military spouses is significantly higher for spouses after military-directed moves outside of the continental United States. She made the point that frequent military moves should be "career neutral" and called for robust interstate license reciprocity.

- Mrs. Catherine Bentivegna **e**xpressed sincere appreciation to the President for establishing the Commission. She noted that she has been a military spouse for more than 33 years. She noted the opportunities and challenges that come with being a military family. Mrs. Bentivegna stated that her remote work ability with her full-time job allows her to both maintain her career and support the Space Force. She urged the establishment of frameworks that allow professional spouses to retain seniority and advancement trajectories across frequent PCS cycles.
- Mrs. Krystal Waldron thanked President Trump "for allowing our voices to be heard finally." She noted that she has stopped counting PCS moves but that her daughter has attended 6 schools and her son has attended 8 schools. Mrs. Waldron highlighted that the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) formulas persistently lag behind real-market rental costs in remote, high-cost-of-living, and resort-area duty stations.
- Mrs. Mary Mahoney thanked President Trump for establishing the Commission. She shared that she has been a military spouse for more than 25 years and noted living through countless PCS moves and deployments, having a daughter being born during a deployment. She shared her experience navigating pediatric specialty care, noting that the referral processes for therapies and mental health and specialty services remain difficult.
- Mrs. Karen Raines **s**tated she was deeply honored to serve on the Commission and is thankful that enlisted families have an equal seat. She noted than she and her husband have been married for more than 37 years, living in seven states and Washington D.C., several deployments and a hardship duty tour. She noted that she has two children and four grandchildren. She proposed an automatic, premium-free TRICARE transitional bridge to prevent families from losing healthcare coverage when service members cycle between different duty statuses.
- Dr. Doniel Wolfe extended personal thanks to President Trump for making military families a top priority, ensuring enlisted families (representing over 80% of the force) have a clear voice in shaping solutions. Dr. Wolfe noted that she has been either dependent child, Active Duty service member, or military spouse for all but three years of her life. She noted that her family has PCSd 13 times and has 7 children. She stated she wants to focus on dependent education and children with special needs and Individualized Education Program (IEP) transitions. She also spoke about a universal, national definition for Purple Star Schools.
- Mrs. Andrea Ruiz thanked the President for establishing the Commission. She stated that she is a retired Marine who served for 22 years. She noted that during her service, she was a single parent and now has a blended family. She looks forward to bringing this

perspective to the Commission. Mrs. Ruiz addressed base-isolated childcare shortages and discussed challenges during PCS moves as a priority.

- Mrs. Katrina Isom thanked President Trump for placing his confidence in the Commission. She stated that her husband has been serving for 39 years with dozens of moves. She stressed that challenges associated with BAH and increasing costs of housing. As a member of the commission she looks forward to ensuring the housing needs of military families are adequately met.
- Mrs. LyndaLee Lunday stated that she was very thankful that the President included the Coast Guard on the Commission. She stated that she has been a military spouse for 37 years. She noted the challenges of being a healthcare provider during her time as a military spouse. She detailed healthcare access challenges faced by Coast Guard families in remote locations, noting dental and medical (to include mental) healthcare access specifically. Mrs. Lunday noted the challenging dynamic of having to change insurance providers when moving from one side of the country to the other and how this impacts continuity of care. She noted that Coast Guard families also do not have access to military treatment facilities.
- Mrs. Cindy Wilsbach expressed gratitude to the President for his vision. She noted that her military spouse journey began 41 years ago and that she and her husband have moved 26 times, have experienced multiple deployments, and countless TDYs. She expressed gratitude to Mrs. Sayle for her support of her as an employee in multiple administrations. Mrs. Wilsbach shared that she has visited dorms and houses and that there is a need to better support military families with regard to housing. She shared personal experiences with mold, water damage, and pest infestation in housing within the last five years. She also spoke to the need for better deployment readiness support.
- Mrs. Jean Meink **e**xtended appreciation to President Trump for establishing the Commission. Mrs. Meink shared that she served 21 years in the Air Force, and that she chose to serve in the Air Force Nurse Corps to mitigate spouse unemployment challenges (loss of retirement benefits and career seniority) and subsequently spent ten years apart from her husband due to a lack of joint spouse assignments available. Mrs. Meink shared that one of the issues she is concerned about is military families not having their own family support systems nearby. She identified trustworthy and accessible childcare as an important element of force retention and military spouse employment.

Administrative Break / Recess

Following the formal swearing-in ceremony of the newly appointed members and their roundtable introductions, Mrs. Sayle announced the Commission would have a brief recess and noted that Mrs. Kimberly LaNeve was also listening in. Prior to adjourning for recess, Secretary Hegseth noted that listening to the Commission members' introductions and backgrounds was a privilege. He acknowledged the topics that the members discussed and shared that he was "ready to run through walls" to address the challenges and thanked the Commission for their work. The Commission formally entered into a recess.

Public Testimonies and Regulatory Policies

Mrs. Sayle opened the meeting after the recess and noted that the President's Military Spouse Commission has received thousands of messages from the American people, 95% of them being from Active Duty military spouses. She noted that the White House has reviewed each message and organized the concerns into the Commission's five priority areas. Mrs. Sayle shared that education and childcare emerged as the most frequently raised issue, appearing in nearly four out of every ten messages. She noted that the White House has identified nearly a hundred cases that could potentially be addressed by an appropriate federal agency. These cases are considered hardship instances, and the White House has referred them for further assistance. Mrs. Sayle shared that more than half of these cases were referred back to the Department of War and that Veterans Affairs, the Office of Personnel Management, State Department, and the Department of Homeland Security were the top agencies that the White House worked with to address the concerns of the individuals writing in with the hardship.

The Commission heard video testimony from an Air Force spouse at Langley Air Force Base, who detailed how local housing costs far exceed their BAH, forcing her family to choose between financial deficit or moving to base housing with documented mold issues. She noted that military families should not struggle with food or housing costs while serving. Mrs. Sayle highlighted the President’s targeted FY 2027 budget proposal includes pay raises, including a 7% increase for ranks E-5 and below, 6% for E-6 to O-3, and 5% for ranks O-4 and above. Mrs. Hegseth added that the FY 2027 Budget requests $62.2 million in new family construction projects, and the Barracks Task Force announced a $1.2 billion plan for new housing projects with $400 million in immediate renovations.

Mrs. Cao spoke and discussed efforts that the Navy is taking to address housing challenges, noting that the Navy is expecting almost 8,000 additional housing units in Hampton Roads and has officially signed the memorandum of agreement with GMH Communities to advance the Military Housing Commercialization Initiative. Mrs. Cao also noted that the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Energy, Installations and Environment successfully negotiated the Hampton Roads Unaccompanied Housing Project Phase II with Hunt Military Communities.

Mrs. Sayle introduced the video testimony from a Marine Corps spouse, who outlined the complex system transitions families encounter upon retirement. Executive Director Sayle announced that President Trump signed Executive Order 14426, noting that the EO will help ensure families receive the benefits and services that they have earned when their service member leaves Active Duty by facilitating and modernizing the transfer of records and personnel data from the Department of War to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Mrs. Sayle noted that healthcare appeared in about 350 messages to the Commission. The Commission then heard video testimony from an Army spouse caring for a combat-wounded soldier with serious injuries, including a traumatic brain injury (TBI). She stated that when a service member returns home with injuries, recovery does not happen all alone and spouses often become the primary caregiver, transportation provider, advocate, scheduler, and emotional

support system. She noted that investing in military spouses as caregivers would improve veterans' access to treatment, reduce financial hardship, strengthen families, and ultimately improve long term outcomes for those who have sacrificed so much in service to our country. Chairwoman Hegseth announced that at the request of the Commission, DHA issued a new policy, Memorandum 26056, which officially mandates that all military clinics accommodate a patient's request to have their spouse present during clinical visits, correcting widespread misinterpretations of privacy rules. Mrs. Hegseth also addressed a question from the Commission regarding the Mature Minor Policy. She shared that changes to the Mature Minor Policy would require legislation. Ms. Hegseth shared that DOW has issued guidance that all parents should go into appointments with their children who are under the age of 18 unless the state expressly prohibits it.

Mrs. Sayle introduced video testimony regarding childcare, sharing that nearly 40% of all of the incoming messages to the Commission related to education and childcare. Mrs. Sayle shared some of the unique challenges and nuances military families face related to childcare.
A former Active Duty service member, current Army reservist, and spouse of an Active Duty Army soldier provided video testimony that childcare is the fundamental infrastructure enabling spousal employment and force readiness.

Mrs. Hegseth shared that the DOW, at the urging of the Military Spouse Commission, is launching a five-location pilot program that extends existing fee assistance funds to faith-based childcare providers. The five-site pilot program is operating in Arlington, Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Naval Base Kitsap, and Naval Base Point Loma. Taking a question from the Commission about whether or not Coast Guard families are able to access the pilot, Mrs. Hegseth shared that is something the DOW is looking into. Mrs. Sayle also noted that the President signed a working families tax cut, which is a dollar-for-dollar tax credit and funds K-12 education scholarships and launches nationwide on January 1, 2027.

Mrs. Cao noted that the way the Navy is approaching childcare challenges is by recognizing that the challenges are not isolated to military families. She noted that the Navy has increased minimum pay for all entry-level positions above the new OSW minimum. She also stated that the Navy is improving compensation with updated pay structures and offering recruitment incentives and enhanced training for workers. Mrs. Cao shared that the Navy has also implemented annual retention incentives for two or more years of service with Navy Child and Youth Programs. She also stated that the Navy is extending childcare capacity beyond the gate by maximizing the Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood (MCCYN) Program, noting that the fee assistance program is going to provide immediate relief in areas with the longest wait lists. She the shared that the Navy has approved eight CDCs for the Navy and two for the Marine Corp in fleet concentration areas. Mrs. Cao stated that the Navy has made substantial headway in reducing childcare wait lists, reducing the total unmet need by over 27% since the beginning of fiscal year 2025. Mrs. Sayle noted that the Navy's work is the type of best practices needed.
Mrs. Sayle noted that deployment-related support is a top concern, and she introduced Ms. Jane Horton to speak to the Commission.

Special Gold Star Briefing

Ms. Jane Horton, Vice Co-Chair of the Gold Star Advisory Council, Chair of the Casualty Assistance and Survivor Task Force, and the Chair of the Executive Steering Committee briefed the Commission. Ms. Horton is the widow of Army Specialist Christopher Horton. She briefed the Commission on efforts to improve Casualty Assistance Officer training and establish a modern database to maintain long-term support for surviving families. She spoke about the "Love Lives On Act," explaining that current statutory rules that remove benefits from surviving spouses if they remarry. Following her brief, Executive Director Sayle announced that, at the formal advisory request of the Commission, the President has officially called on Congress to immediately pass the Love Lives On Act and that he looks forward to signing the bill either as a standalone piece of legislation or in a larger bill.

Adjournment and Next Steps

Mrs. Sayle reaffirmed the Commission's operational cadence to hold monthly meetings to prepare the Commission's "State of the Spouse" report for delivery to the President in November 2026. Designated Federal Officer Josie Beets confirmed that the proceedings had met all statutory FACA requirements and officially adjourned the meeting at 3:19 p.m. Eastern Time.

Certification of Minutes

As required by the Federal Advisory Committee Act, the President's Military Spouse Commission Chairwoman Jennifer Hegseth certifies these minutes by her signature below.

Jennifer Hegseth

Jennifer Hegseth
President's Military Spouse Commission

October 3, 2026
Date