



Transcript

National Guard Bureau Public Affairs

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NATIONAL GUARD ON-THE-RECORD TELEPHONIC MEDIA ROUNDTABLE

SEPTEMBER 9, 2022

TOPIC	SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS
Weekend Drill Child Care Pilot	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Army Maj. Gen. Eric K. Little National Guard Bureau Manpower and Personnel (J1)• Ms. Nadine Moore Family readiness branch chief.

Introduction:

Thank you for joining us today. My name is Catalina Carrasco, I am the public affairs officer for the National Guard bureau. I want I will ask everyone to make sure that your phones or your sound is muted unless you're speaking. So, again, thank you for joining us today for this media roundtable focusing on the Army National Guard pilot program to provide childcare during drill weekends to eligible service members. Our host before I before we begin, I want to remind that everything that this event is being recorded and everything is considered on the record. Our host today is He is joined by Ms. Nadine More the family readiness branch. Sir, today the reporters that are joining us today are Miss Rose Thayer with Stars and Stripes, Mr. Steve Beynon with Military.com and Mr. Kari Williams with the Reserve and National Guard magazine. The roundtable will last approximately. We have about 45 minutes for this, beginning with opening remarks with General Little. So being respectful of time we ask the media to stick to rules will begin with just one question and a brief follow up, and then we'll allow for additional questions full time permit, obviously. it we are unable to answer your question, or your question is not related to the weekend drill childcare pilot. We will take a note and work to give you an answer as soon as possible. And with that general Little. I'll turn it over to you, sir.

Opening Statement:

Thank you very much and good morning to all and thank you so much for taking time today. This is our pretty excited about this particular pilot we're doing here to help out our soldiers and families out there. So, again, thanks for taking the time today. Thanks for all your interest out there in covering this new initiative. And I say initiative and pilot out there because this is this is the pilot we hope to learn from this. And we're going to slowly, slowly do this and then adjust as



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needed. But we do know this taking care of our soldiers, that our number one priority and that we can child care continues to be a a topic of discussion by our soldiers and their families and we are hoping by providing this is going to provide some peace of mind that their soldiers can attend drills without having the stress of worrying about their kids and how the kids are being take care of and where they're at. This initial pilot year is going to involve six states Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Virginia and Washington. And also this program will provide spaces at in-home daycares or daycares or regular daycares during their drill weekend. And we're focusing on just the drill weekend right now. The eligible soldier population now is only is for both single and married soldiers with children ages of six weeks to 12 year old who are in good standing with the Army Guard. Their spouse. Significant other or responsible adult living in the home is scheduled to work during that drill weekend. So you can't just be a weekend off. It's got to be either working or it's a dual member, etc. there. There's also this just childcare will be available at no cost to the member and up to a maximum rate of 12 hours. So again drill weekends are about during the days about 12 hours we're hoping that covers that and then probably most importantly that these this program will we're going to childcare facilities that are accredited have been certified so we're not just that's got to be there is our process to use that being home daycare or whatever childcare facilities out there. But they do have to meet all all the requirements similar to the Department of Defense. Okay. So it's kind of how I want to see how we got there. So we looked at I do want to go ahead and address that now. So we looked at various regions. We know the USAR is doing a pilot, so as is my team went back and looked at how we did this. We looked at what the USAR was doing the pilots, where we were doing pilots. It was important that we got kind of across country. I know it's only six states, but as you can count, we kind of did a sprouting of what states to do. So that's kind of how we got to that point. And we're also was important that states already had we picked states that already had license or registration for family care providers and they conduct annual child care inspections. So we're kind of already meeting the requirements there because we know that's going to be a challenge and is a challenge in the DOD currently. So that's currently a quick overview of where the program is and where we're taking the program. This program kicks off kicked off one September. This pilot did so it just kicked off. We haven't even had a drill weekend yet, so we don't have much data on usage yet or who signed up yet because we haven't even had a weekend yet. But it goes from one September and it'll go we're going to run it about six months and then see how it's going. And then we our plan is to add additional states if we get the data that we need moving forward. Ok ma'am, pending your question, that's where I'm at right now for opening statements



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Dialogue:

Catalina Carrasco Thank you, sir. Appreciate it. So we are going to start with Steve Beynon? go ahead with your question.

Steve Beynon Awesome. Thank you all for doing this. General, if you. Could talk to me a little Bit about the actual mechanics of how this works. If I'm a soldier in the Ohio Guard and I need to find a daycare. How do I know what's approved to get my kid to? And the soldier? Do they pay upfront and are they reimbursed? How? How does that work?

MG Little: So I'll start off and then I'll turn over to an Ms. Nadine Moore for me. She'll get to the mechanics, but generally speaking, if you're a soldier. So we have so we're in partnership with the Army, HQDA army. They have a provider that that manages this program for them. So if you're a soldier that wants this, wants this, there's training that. So the unit commander says, the soldier says, yes, I want we can child care. There's a there's materials that have shown them how to do this. I want we can child care. They go to the commander. The commander says, yep, they're authorized. Yeah, they have drill this weekend and yet they meet the requirements. Then they would contact the for the company that's doing this and the company would go look for go look for a child care provider. It does not come at any cost to them. So they don't have to do any upfront costs or anything like that. And then they get signed up and then they go. And then on the back end, the commander has to certify that they actually want to drill, for example. So it is pretty. It is pretty. Again, there is no cost to the soldier And that was one thing that we're trying to keep back from or keep making sure it did not happen. We'll have to kind of work to how it's currently being used again right now by the Army. Yeah.

Steve Beynon: Sorry, just really quick. When you said they call the company? Who are they calling? Like, who's actually facilitating that?

MG Little: Is Child Care of America is Who AMCOM, The Army has contracted with. Nadine jump in here If I'm missing or I'm off.

Nadine Moore: So child care Aware of America, is a third party administrator for all of the DOD community based Child Care Fee Assistance Program. And so this pilot is nested under the Army's, army fee assistance contract with child care aware of America. So the systems that have been set up to support the full time child care program are the same systems that we're utilizing, to support our pilot. So for a soldier, when they're interested in, when they learn about and are interested in accessing, uh, weekend drill child care. They'll go to the child care aware of



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America website, pull down an enrollment form package, which will have, an application, a commander's verification form, a spouse employment verification form if they're a married soldier. and then they will fill those, fill those forms out. the enrollment packet requires a discussion with their commander. The commander will counsel the soldier on the program rules, um, including the no show and cancelation policy and the commander will also have a discussion with the soldier to validate that they're eligible, that their spouse works on the weekend. They'll look at the paperwork, the application and the employment verification form and sign off and then those pieces, encompass the enrollment packet for the soldier. The soldier will submit that enrollment packet to child care Aware of America, child care aware of America will validate that all the pieces are completely filled out. And then they will notify the soldier within ten days that they are enrolled in the program. And then once they're enrolled, the soldier can, reserve submit a reservation for care request also at the Child Care Aware of America website. One day they can reserve care for up to the next three drills. So the next three months, um, if they need whatever drills they need care for. the commander verification form has to be redone each quarter so that we can. Uh, so the commander is validating that the soldier is still eligible, uh, still has a working spouse, um, is still in good standing with the unit. Um. So for the initial enrollment, the verification form that they've submitted with their, uh, enrollment, um, meets that requirement for the first three months and then for the next three months, they just have to get a new verification form with their, with their commander and submit that with their reservation and then childcare aware of America.

MG Little: Okay. Hopefully. See that answer your question. I mean, how much detail, question or detailed answer does that answer?

Steve Beynon: Yes, no, that's great. Just a quick follow up. I mean, this is a very. Like no brainer thing to do. I I think every guardsman would be appreciated this, especially once it goes nationwide. But, you know, the guard's not a new thing. Soldiers have been drilling for a long time. What brought this on now? is it was just the right person that a meeting brought it up or something like that?

MG Little: So, General Hokanson, our chief of the National Guard bureau, travels all over the country and meets with TAGs on a regional basis often. And a lot of the feedback he was getting and concerns from the adjutants general was, that there was a need for this. The other thing is our, we have family support groups or family readiness groups and family readiness personnel across all 54 who we communicate with. Nadine And her team communicate with often. I meet with on a quarterly basis and this is a constant and has been a constant concern for the families over the last several years. So we're actually more than that, for that matter. And so from all that



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feedback, that's when this we went back and started looking at initial pilot and that's how that really came about is from feedback from that from the 54 states and territories in District one.

Catalina Carrasco: Okay. We're going to go ahead and move on to Ms. Kari Williams. Kari you have a question for the general?

Kari Williams: Yeah, because I know some other kind of coverage related to me to this initiative has mentioned about how short soldier retention is a big part of why you wanted to kind of make this happen in this current timeframe. So I guess what statistics or maybe anecdotal evidence have you seen over the years that really speak to the need of weekend drill child care, relate as it relates to soldier retention?

MG Little: So statistics other than what we know, we have around 36,000 single soldiers out there. That's a statistic. I think we use the baseline and there's about 166 children out there with our out there, too. So, we know that there's a requirement just based off single soldiers, also dual serving soldiers out there. A lot of this is through surveys. A lot of this, as I said earlier, from the feedback that we got that we get back from our family, our family are full time family readiness personnel, or the family readiness groups and spouses. So, we also meet with spouses of the senior leaders too who meet with the families to get that feedback to a lot of this again, is through that through that channels of the one on one communication that we're having with our senior leaders across the 54, which is then fed back up to us. But again, there are some services out there, but we also know that there is also just straight up, 36,000 kids out there that are then with single families or that are single, that we know the drill weekend is a challenge for them and it relates to retention. I mean, so the biggest challenge, you know, even when I was a commander, the biggest challenge out there is if you're an even a single, single, single parent or if you're even a married, married parents it's just a challenge. I mean, being gone for drill weekend, typically your nowadays your drilling location is not close to your home of record anymore, is it, as it used to be back in the day just for various reasons. So that stress there, do I stay home or do I miss this or we can take care of the kids? That at least eliminates a stress so they can focus on the readiness that's required to be ready for whatever the nation needs.

Catalina Carrasco: All right. Okay. Let's move on to Ms. Rose Thayer with Stars and Stripes.

Rose Thayer: Hey, good morning. Just to piggyback off what Kari asked, do you have any statistics on how often soldiers were missing drill weekend for this reason of childcare?



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MG Little: I don't have any specifics. Maybe I'm going to jump in. I'm going to jump over to Nadine. Nadine, do you have any specifics to answer that question? I don't think we do, but.

Nadine Moore: No, we don't have statistics on missing drill periods specific to childcare challenges.

Rose Thayer: Ok. Do you all have a projected cost for the pilot program. And is this coming from federal dollars or states chipping in on this, too?

MG Little: So this, yes, I do. So we are going to be approximately a budget of \$3.6 million for this for this for this for this first wave of pilots. And this is all federally appropriated funds in the family program world. States are not contributing to this directly, but it is. So, it is appropriate funds in about \$3.6 million.

Rose Thayer: Okay. And then I just had one sort of clarification question. You mentioned earlier you chose the States because they had licensing programs already set up. Did you mean like the states are already licensing child care providers or the DOD is already licensing in that state? Or sort of. Can you just explain that?

MG Little: Yeah. So, the states, they already use some type of accreditation, some type of licensure and some type of certified community based child care. And so they already have some type of accreditation program, not all states do. So we focus on the states that already had something established, not necessarily with the DOD, but they did have some type of accreditation that would get them closer to make sure that we meet the DoD standards.

Rose Thayer: Okay. Thank you.

MG Little: Yes, ma'am.

Catalina Carrasco: Okay. So I'm just going to go back in order. Steve, did you have any follow up questions?

Steve Beynon: I got a pretty basic one, general. We're looking at children, anyone Talking about like dog boarding or anything like that? I know. I've heard that concern kind of brought up a couple of times.



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MG Little: No, no, we're not now. We're not looking at that yet. We got to get through the initial and I know in a no offense to dog owners, I have lots of dogs, too, but I know that is somewhat of a concern. But no, we are not looking at that right now. We are only looking at child or children. So good question.

Steve Beynon ... I just thought of that appreciate it.

Catalina Carrasco: Kari

Kari Williams: you know, you kind of sections a little bit already, but just obviously this is just a few days in right now. But I guess just in these few days, what kind of interest have you seen obviously with not having a drill weekend yet, but just has there been a lot of interest, people trying to figure out how to go through this process or kind of where what's that that early indicator like the pilot program's going?

MG Little: So the states that the states that are the six states, we think they've already had interest a family on the family side. They've already they already have interest from the family side. So, I know out there now there has been we've been conducting training for the last 30 days with the states on this and with some of the commanders out there. But again, this officially didn't get out until around one September with all the materials that what Nadine described earlier as far as the process goes. And again, what we should know more after this upcoming weekend, because this will be a big drill weekend for everyone, because obviously we'll be in drill last weekend. So this weekend and the following week. And we'll probably have a better indication of really, really how much true soldier M-Day soldier interest will we get. Again, lots of interest from as we were training people but we will see is what happens under a weekend and if someone actually signs up. Nadine. Do you have anything more to add to that part?

Nadine Moore: Yeah, I would just. Add to. That. Thank you, sir. I would just add that, um, the, the implementation guide and all the messaging that we've sent out has really been to, um, to the headquarters level. And that is translated down to the commanders through, through the state. So, we expect that during September drills is when as soldiers will largely, um, get educated about, uh, the existence of the pilot and the process by which they can apply from their commanders. Um, so after not just this drill weekend, but, you know, throughout all the drills, um, in September, we expect to start to receive enrollment packet. Well, we expect that enrollment packets will start to be submitted to childcare Aware of America. Um, once the implementation guidance went out, though, there was, uh, there were several questions, um, some rounds of questions that we got from the States and then, uh, childcare Aware of America



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also indicated that they got a lot of calls about the pilot, um, and, and questions. There's certainly interest, um, where that is and the level of that, you know, will, that will start to evidence over the next probably quarter, I would expect.

MG Little: [00:20:21] We're hoping there's lots of interest.

Steve Beynon: I have one more question.

Catalina Carrasco: [00:20:26] Go ahead, Steve.

Steve Beynon: [00:20:30] Uh, yeah General, just kind of, I guess about something broader. I mean, the National Guard. In the last couple of years have has definitely been through a Stress Test domestically, though, you know, benefits, accrual and pay. And a couple of it is with some of those mechanics that popped up, you got to maybe try to solve that with childcare for, for example. Is there anything else the National Guard bureau is looking at that stuff, any kind of lessons learned from all these activations of any like benefits or pay or any quality-of-life issues you guys think you can improve over the next couple of years?

MG Little: So our chief, Gen. Hokanson, one of his main lines of effort is is coming trying to come up with some type of health care, health care for basically health care for all. Some type of health care right now is right now, when you're on duty status, you're covered. But when you come off duty status, you're not covered. So as you mentioned, during COVID, go to drill, you go in through all these multiple statuses, which messes with your health care. So one of the things we're looking at is, is trying to provide some type of health care for all, something similar to TRICARE or something similar. So that'd be one effort that we're looking at doing because we know that, again, we did do domestic operation here, we do whatever, whatever. Then we go to go cross overseas somewhere. We do some type of deployment so that in and out of types of health care is causing some some a little bit of an issue there. So we are looking at that. The department is looking at duty status reform, trying to make some parity on benefits and have some simplicity to benefits out there. And that's all being looked at. But that's a lot of that's also very complicated and also in some cases, very expensive. And those are some some of the other things that we are taking a look at.

Catalina Carrasco: Thanks Steve. Rose do you have any more follow up questions.



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Rose Thayer: Yeah, I just wanted to circle back to retention and ask I mean, do you all know I mean, I don't know if you'll do like exit interviews and people leave the service how often like family or, you know, child care issues come up as a reason for leaving the guard?

MG Little: So there is a survey that's done every couple of years. COVID kind of messed up the last one. But so there's a survey kind of answers your question. It is a survey. It's a just so we watched it. There's a survey done over a couple of years to do some that do look at those things. What's challenging families? And the last one we did, the Status of Forces survey, that's what it's called. And I haven't we haven't done one since 2019 because of COVID and other one, I think is in the process right now to answer some of those, to ask some of those questions again. And there is feedback coming commanders do out when they when they some commanders when they leave they do out process and kind of have some of those kind of questions. Again a lot of this we get back from is our full time family personnel because their job is to make sure they're connected and hear what those concerns are. And then the commanders obviously are well invested in to what the concerns are from the families. It is a common thing. It is challenging in today's world because the Guard is so, so used so much now that you're you are going to be called it's not one weekend a month and two weeks a year anymore hasn't been that way for many years. So that's really the feedback. That survey will help us do that. It tells us some of the challenges, some of that health care that I was talking about as it came from that came from that survey, too. So I'll be curious to see what the new results of the survey are here in the next I think the next couple months, we actually get those.

Rose Thayer Thank you. Catalina, could you help me get access to that or find it online?

Catalina Carrasco: Sure, I'll make a note of that and see what I can get you. Yeah. All right. Do we have any other questions from the media? Okay. It doesn't seem to we don't seem to have any more questions. Thank you so much for joining us. Sir, Would you like to have any comments?

MG Little: I want to make sure, Nadine do you have any closing comments before I wrap this up?

Nadine Moore: No, sir. I'm good. Thank you.

MG Little: Okay. Good. Thank you. Again, I want to tell you all thank you for the time and interest, because your interest does a keep us keep us grounded and also be your hub promoting what the National Guard needs and our members out there. So, again, I do want to thank all of you. Just I mean, these questions alone, help us make sure we're hit, make sure we're doing the



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right thing. So for our for our members, that's at the end of the day. So we don't, we look forward to this. We're hoping this program is successful. We know there's going to be challenges because, you know, as the Guard, the Army Guard especially is so geographically dispersed, there's going to be some challenges. We know in the middle of think of state. I'm not picking on North Dakota, but you can pick North Dakota, for example. There's probably not a bunch of childcare facilities there. So and then they need to be accredited for the right reasons. So we're working very closely with DOD on that too, because it's expensive to be accredited. So we're trying to figure out, is that going to be the challenge if it is. So we're hoping to learn a lot from this pilot, but we do think it's important that we can at least offer this because it is a families, not a stressor, but families are a stressor because we again, if you don't know your family's good while you're away, you drill, AT, deployments then then as a soldier, trust me, it is very stressful. So we're trying to eliminate that and also be used as a retention tool. So again, thank you for your time today and I really appreciate your interest in this.

Catalina Carrasco: All right. Thank you, General Little. Thank you, everyone, for joining us today. If you have any additional questions afterward feel free to email them to us or our media team and we'll get you the responses as soon as possible. So thank you all very much.

Steve Beynon: Thank you so much.

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