

Hearing on Military Families

Bill Number: Oversight

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Witness:

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Fort Campbell, TN

Testimony:

Good afternoon. I'm Josie Fees, Program Operations Specialist and I am here today to speak to you on behalf of Ft Campbell's Child and Youth Services Program. I am pleased to say I am a military family member for over 33 years and with Child and Youth Services for 15 years.

I have been with Ft Campbell's Child and Youth Services for 3 years and I speak to you with a tremendous sense of pride. I first noticed Child and Youth Service's commitment to quality and high standards for families because the Child and Youth Services programs obtain national accreditation status – and that includes the Family Child Care homes. I then witnessed the overwhelming kindness on 9-11 when the U.S. was under attack and the installation immediately went into action to protect soldiers, their families and the civilian workforce.

It was very difficult to get on or off the installation that day. Without hesitation, the Child and Youth Services staff volunteered to stay and to do whatever necessary to ensure that all the children were safe and that their needs were met until parents could pick them up. The School Age Services staff gathered the children who were remaining at the schools because parents not able to pick them up at the scheduled time in order to allow the teachers to go home. All the children were fed and involved in fun activities until the last child was safely picked up. Child and Youth Services staff stayed past midnight and arrived back at 5 in the morning to receive the children. The staff never once complained. There is a saying that "the Army takes care of their own." Ft Campbell has proven that to me time and time again. I will share the one that really touched me.

My husband left for the Sinai in January and his commander, CPT Himes told me before James left that if ever I need them just call. Just because James is gone we will still be here for you. To my surprise I received a call in February from CPT Himes letting me know he was deploying but wanted to give me the POC and number in his absence in case I needed anything. I know as a commander he had a lot going on due to the deployment yet he remembered about a family member who was no longer in his unit. It was such a wonderful feeling to be apart of such a great installation. Now with the division deployed how has Child and Youth Services supported deployed families? Beginning with the mobilization phase, a parent notified the Child and Youth Services Manager on Feb 10, 2003 that they had a need for extended childcare due to the mobilization mission requirements. Extended care was established immediately the same day. Child and Youth Services offered extended care evening weekends and holiday at no cost to the parent so that the soldiers could focus on their mission requirements. Since the deployment Child and Youth Services continue to provide contingency services so that soldiers and family members are at ease knowing their child care needs are met. Child and Youth Services provided on-site childcare for Family Readiness Group

meetings both during the mobilization and the deployment. We also provided many evening briefings to explain childcare options available to family members. Child and Youth Services provided training for units that want to do their own childcare through a program called Volunteer Child Care Unit Setting. We offer respite care to family members due to deployment issues. The Family Assistance Center offers childcare that is being provided by Child and Youth Services staff. Family Child Care provides emergency care for military families due to deployment issues. Social Work Services will coordinate placement of children with a provider designated to providing emergency care. Emergency care providers are available 24 hours a day. All programs are allowing parents the flexibility to withdraw children and take vacations as needed without the parent having to pay to hold their slot.

Child and Youth Services provided many family services in April during the Month of the Military Child including a "Pamper the Parent" day where parents were treated to free facials, haircuts, and manicures. Child and Youth Services participate in Fort Campbell's Family Fun Fairs. School Age Services sponsored the Americas Kids Run held 17 May 2003. The free event was a huge success for children and families at Fort Campbell. There was an essay contest titled "I am a Military Child". Winners received special prizes and were invited to read their essays at the Volunteer of the Month Ceremony at the Eagle Conference Center. School Age Services have implemented a program to help children with deployed parents stay connected by setting up maps at all 6 satellite sites so that the children can map where their parent are around the world. The staff at the childcare centers is helping the children put together scrapbooks so the parents will have pictures of the events they missed out on while they were deployed. The teen program has taken an active lead on mentoring the younger children and volunteering in the community in support of deployed families.

Sports and Fitness program depends largely on volunteer coaches and since many of them are soldiers the deployment has caused a shortage of coaches for the children/youth. Fortunately spouses along with some Child and Youth Services staff stepped up and volunteered to coach the children/youth sports. This ensured no interruption in the youth sports program. These are just a few of many examples of the partnerships with Child and Youth Services and other Community Activity Based Centers strong sense of commitment and dedication to our military families during this deployment.

Child and Youth Services is a large employer of family members. We recognize that the support internal as well as external is very important during deployments and I have to say Ft Campbell has does a fantastic job. We provide training for the staff so they can recognize and understand the affects deployment has on children. We provide stress training for staff since many are family members facing the same deployment issues themselves. Many such as myself who have been a spouse during Desert Storm/Desert Shield and Just Cause, are able to support the younger family members going through it the first time. We understand the unique challenges that come with deployments.

What can Child and Youth Services do better to meet the need of our deployed families and what type of support does Child and Youth Services need in order meet their needs? Because the Child and Youth Services program has a mobilization and contingency plan in place, we are able to implement it as soon as the need for need for extended child care arises. With even more advanced notice from the command of the mobilization of the

division, we can implement sooner rather than later if parents express a need for the extended hours care.

We appreciate the support Congress has provided to the Child and Youth Service Program and we will continue to maintain our “model for the nation” status with your support. We continue to be able to provide a safe, healthy nurturing program for young children and offer our youth a safe place with fun activities to go to instead of being home alone.

In closing I would like to say as a very proud Ft Campbell family member and representative of Child and Youth Services thank you for allowing us the opportunity to tell you about our outstanding installation and some of the things we do to show families come first. As well as what we need to do to improve the quality of life for military families during deployments. The genuine concern that congress has for our military communities means more than I can express.