



New legislation seeks to reform military housing



Army secretary Ryan McCarthy, right, tours housing and speaks with soldiers and family members at Fort Carson, Colorado, in November. (U.S. ARMY/SGT. JAMES HARVEY)

Congress has approved sweeping legislation to reform privatized military housing, including creating a chief housing officer in the Pentagon responsible for establishing a Tenant Bill of Rights and setting other housing policies.

Lawmakers hope some change happens quickly. The Tenant Bill of Rights included in the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act would include minimum health and environmental standards, a promise of being able to report housing problems without fear of reprisal, and the creation of a formal dispute resolution process in which a military tenant could recoup some of the basic allowance for housing forfeited by residing in privatized housing.

The Army and the other services have been working on their own Tenant Bill of Rights in response to complaints from housing residents, but Congress wants to see a draft agree-

ment before it takes effect.

Every military installation with privatized housing units would need to establish a formal dispute resolution process, with military residents afforded aid from a military legal assistance attorney or housing advocate.

Passed by the House on Dec. 11 and the Senate on Tuesday, the measure includes a long list of other requirements, with special attention to how maintenance and repair requests are handled by the housing contractors and their staff.

President Donald Trump is expected to sign the bill on Friday.

A database of complaints and how they are handled would become publicly available, under terms of the bill.

This would allow prospective tenants to review how a housing area has been managed, lawmakers said in a report on the bill.

See **Housing**, Page 3

IN THIS ISSUE

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 33

DECEMBER 19, 2019

Family Readiness

Suicide prevention resources

3

Post services expand access

4

Chapter Highlights

Capital District of New York

Rock Island Arsenal

7

Membership vote on bylaws revisions

The Association of the U.S. Army's Council of Trustees is recommending several bylaws changes, subject to a general membership vote.

A vote by AUSA's general membership to ratify bylaws changes is required by Article XI of the existing bylaws.

To vote, click [here](#) before Jan. 10. Review the draft bylaws [here](#).

The changes were recommended by the Advisory Board of Directors' Standing Bylaws Committee.

The recommended revisions are:

- Convert the Council of Trustees into a board of directors.
- Limit the size of the board to between 11 and 15 people.
- The board chairman and deputy chairman would be elected from the board of directors by their fellow directors.
- The president of the association and region presidents will serve during their terms as ex officio, non-voting members of the board of directors.
- References to state organizations will be removed from the bylaws, and other sections of the bylaws will be edited and updated.

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Reach out, take care of each other this holiday season

By Patty Barron

If you are like many Americans, the holiday season gives you a chance to reconnect with family and friends.

For many years now, we have been told to look in on friends who might not enjoy this season for several reasons, and stories in the news or on social media repeat an often-quoted idea that suicide risk increases during the holidays.

A blog post titled “Holiday Suicides: Fact or Myth?” from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says this idea is false and not backed by data.

The CDC writes, “The Annenberg Public Policy Center has been tracking media reports on suicide since 2000.

Family Readiness

An analysis found that 50% of articles written during the 2009–2010 holiday season perpetuated the myth. CDC’s National Center for Health Statistics reports that the suicide rate is, in fact, the lowest in December.”

The report continues, “The rate peaks in the spring and the fall. This pattern has not changed in recent years. The holiday suicide myth supports misinformation about suicide that might ultimately hamper prevention efforts.”

That said, suicide is indeed a major public health issue, and according to the CDC is the 10th leading cause of death among Americans.

Keeping an eye on your family and friends is important all year long, and that includes the holiday season.

Many resources have been created to help the average citizen do just that.

For example, Psych Armor is a non-



Sgt. Rebecca Landry and Spc. Asia Jones, 529th Support Battalion, assist with suicide prevention/intervention photos taken at Camp Taji, Iraq. (U.S. ARMY/ROGER JACKSON)

profit dedicated to offering critical resources to the American public to promote effective engagement with the military and veteran community.

They provide free online training videos delivered by experts committed to educating the civilian community on military culture.

One section in particular, “Courses for Suicide Prevention, Intervention, & Postvention,” is an informative collection of videos and resources aimed at healthcare providers, service members, veterans, families, caregivers and the community-at-large.

Titles such as “Helping Others Hold On” and “S.A.V.E. (Signs, Ask, Validate, Encourage/Expedite)” walk you through a variety of steps and scenarios that can provide you with the information you need to support someone struggling with suicidal ideation.

The Department of Veterans Affairs also offers a wide assortment of suicide prevention resources and a 24/7 Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255.

Suicide prevention is on everyone’s mind. The military’s suicide numbers

are starting to slowly creep back up, and both the Defense and Veterans Affairs departments are doubling down on efforts to reduce deaths by suicide.

Ultimately, though, people who are in contact with those struggling with suicidal ideation can be the first responders.

The VA suggests knowing the warning signs, and warns that the following signs require immediate attention:

- Thinking about hurting or killing yourself.
- Looking for ways to kill yourself.
- Talking about death, dying, or suicide.
- Self-destructive behavior such as drug misuse, carelessly handling weapons, etc.

Whether a spike in suicide occurs during the holidays is irrelevant, and one death by suicide is one too many.

Enjoy the season’s celebrations, but don’t forget to check in with each other and know the warning signs.

Patty Barron is AUSA’s Family Readiness Director.

Housing

From Page 1

Performance on fixing problems would become a new requirement for renewing an existing housing contract or entering into a new contract.

The bill also includes many practi-

cal changes to improve the quality of housing. For example, every family housing unit must now have a working carbon monoxide detector.

Better preventive measures are required to prevent children from falling out of windows in housing units.

Vacancies in installation housing offices can be filled with direct hires, a faster hiring process, and every installation with privatized housing would be required to create a military housing council to identify and resolve problems.

Commissaries, post exchanges open to more customers beginning Jan. 1



Before using the new privileges, which begin Jan. 1, customers are encouraged go to the visitors' center on an installation to register their credentials. (U.S. ARMY PHOTO)

The Defense and Veterans Affairs departments have announced that commissary and post exchange services will be opened to a greater number of patrons beginning Jan. 1—a move supported by the Association of the U.S. Army.

On that date, Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war, all service-connected disabled veterans regardless of rating, and caregivers enrolled in the VA's Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers program can shop at available locations on post.

They will also have access to Morale, Welfare and Recreation activities such as entertainment, clubs, recreational lodging and resorts, special interest activities, bowling, golf, restaurants and more.

Eligible veterans must present their Veterans Health Identification Card in order to access the new privileges.

For information regarding eligibility for the VHIC and the application process, please click [here](#).

"It is an honor to welcome home these heroes to their exchange," said Tom Shull, Army & Air Force Exchange Service director and CEO.

Newly eligible veterans and caregivers will have added costs on their purchases, as mandated by the fiscal year 2019 National Defense Authorization Act.

These costs include a standard 5% surcharge for purchases, a 1.9% fee for credit cards and a 0.5% fee for debit cards.

Before using the new privileges, customers are encouraged go to the visitors' center on an installation to register their credentials.

They will also be required to pass a background check.

Veterans must bring their Veteran Health Identification Card and caregivers must bring their eligibility letter, which will be mailed by the VA.

"They fought for us. They sacrificed for us," Shull said. "They deserve this benefit. It is a truly a privilege to serve them once again."

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PERK OF THE WEEK

Hotel savings for members

While you're planning your holiday travel, check out AUSA's exclusive wholesale hotel rates. Almost all hotel brands participate—more than 600,000 worldwide—with savings as high as 60%. To learn more, visit www.ausa.org/hotelclub. Pets stay for free at Red Roof, and the AUSA discount is 20%, one of the best discounts they offer. Visit www.ausa.org/red for more information. Choice Hotels provides members savings up to 25% at www.ausa.org/Choice.

Three installations selected for quality of life assessments

The Army has selected three installations for quality of life assessments to determine how it can improve services and increase the readiness and morale of soldiers and their families.

While the Army is “focused on quality of life at every installation,” it is “conducting initial assessments at three installations: Fort Wainwright, Alaska; Fort Polk, Louisiana; and Fort Irwin, California,” Army spokeswoman Lt. Col. Crystal Boring said in an email.

She said the goal is to make each of the Army’s installations an “installation of choice” for soldiers and families.

There is no set timeline for completion of the assessments, she said.

Senior Army leaders, as part of their focus on people and talent management, earlier this year identified five priorities to improve quality of life for



The Army’s five quality of life priorities are housing, health care, child care, spouse employment and permanent change-of-station moves. (U.S. ARMY PHOTO)

soldiers, veterans and their families.

They are housing, health care, child care, spouse employment and permanent change-of-station moves.

“One of the things, when you’re talking about people, is recognizing the type of force that we have,” Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville said in October.

More than 50% of soldiers are married, and a little more than that have children, he said. Many soldiers have spouses who have careers and want to continue their employment.

By taking care of soldiers, leaders are confident that they will “perform better, stay longer, and they will make our Army stronger,” McConville said.

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Chapter helps bring Christmas trees to military families

New York National Guard soldiers and airmen on Dec. 9 joined members of the Association of the U.S. Army's Capital District of New York chapter to load 125 donated Christmas trees for military families into a delivery truck at the Ellms Family Farm in Ballston Spa, New York.

Volunteering to load trees reminds troops of their connections to home for the holidays, said retired Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Van Pelt, the chapter's first vice president.

"There's something special about the holidays, and getting the chance to help out and share in this is what our support for troops is all about," Van Pelt said.

The event was part of the Trees for Troops program, organized by the farm's owner, Chip Ellms.

"Honestly, when I started this, I never realized it would grow and last as much as it has," said Ellms, who organizes the events on behalf of various tree growers in upstate New York.

The charitable organization collects donated farm-grown Christmas trees and, in partnership with FedEx, delivers them to military members and their families across all branches of the military.

Troops and families receiving the donated trees will also receive handmade decorations and ornaments donated by Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake schools.

The Trees for Troops program was launched in 2005, and it has delivered more than 225,000 trees to service members and their families worldwide.

"They get a tree when they are away from home," Ellms said. "This is just a great show of our appreciation."



Volunteers help load Christmas trees that will be sent to military bases around the country to support troops and military families this holiday season. (NEW YORK NATIONAL GUARD/COL. RICHARD GOLDENBERG)

Iowa soldiers receive thanks on Annual Day of Giving

The Association of the U.S. Army's Rock Island Arsenal chapter held its second annual Day of Giving on Nov. 24 in Bettendorf, Iowa.

"This was a tremendous effort for my team, and it's truly one of the biggest events of the year for us," said Julie Johnson, the chapter president.

During the event, just days before Thanksgiving, the chapter provided 126 \$100 gift cards and turkeys, courtesy of Schnucks Fresh Foods, to veterans, soldiers in the Regular Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserve, and their families.

The event wouldn't have been possible without the generous support of Russell Construction & Development and Schnucks as major sponsors, in addition to the chapter's Community Partners and those who contributed their time and attention to the event, Johnson said.



The chapter provided 126 \$100 gift cards and turkeys, courtesy of Schnucks Fresh Foods, to soldiers, veterans and their families. (AUSA PHOTO)

With the help of Richard Hurst, the new director of region outreach, the chapter plans to expand the event in 2020 into areas that were previously unserved.

"We want to thank soldiers and vet-

erans for saying yes to service, even when it's hard and inconvenient and means you to have to be away from those you love during holidays like these," Johnson said. "We appreciate you."

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