

Military leads way on family-friendly policies

Serving in the military and raising a family haven't always been compatible, especially during times of international conflict and repeat deployments overseas.

But that's changing after a dramatic overhaul of benefits for active duty military announced Jan. 28 by Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter.

Effective immediately, active duty military women are eligible for 12 weeks of paid maternity leave. Previously, military moms had only six weeks to recover from childbirth and bond with their babies.

Carter also proposed breastfeeding rooms in facilities where at least 50 women are stationed.

In addition to the increased maternity leave, Carter announced that new fathers now have 14 days of leave when a child is born, up from the previous 10.

Carter also announced a plan to offer enhanced fertility and in vitro fertilization options at military medical centers.

The military will now also give service members with children the option to continue being stationed at the same military installation for family-related reasons, such as allowing a child to complete high school or remain near relatives who provide care or need it.

Service members requesting this option, subject to a post or base commander's approval, must agree to extend their military obligation.

Child-care centers on military bases, already subsidized, will now be open 14 hours a day, in response to complaints that previous operating hours often did not correspond to military work schedules. In the past, many service members had to make other child-care arrangements after on-base centers closed.

The moves are intended to increase the Defense Department's ability to retain skilled service members by helping them balance career and family obligations.

Final note: Other employers may feel the impact of these policy changes. Private-sector employers hoping to attract veterans to their workforces may have to up their family-friendly benefits game.