



# MILITARY FAMILIES NEED ★★★

# PAID LEAVE

13 MILITARY FAMILIES SHARE THEIR PAID LEAVE STORIES



Elizabeth Dole Foundation  
CARING FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

# Military Families Need Paid Leave



It's no secret that members of the military, veterans and their family members make enormous sacrifices on behalf of our country. Day in and day out, they balance the challenges posed by deployments, service-connected injuries and living far away from the support of family members and loved ones. These challenges are exacerbated by a lack of access to paid family and medical leave among military spouses and family members.

Like so many Americans, military family members can be left crippled by financial struggle when they have to take unpaid time off to care for a family member or care for themselves. Given the challenges military families face, it is vital they be able to take time away from work to care for themselves or their loved one without sacrificing their paycheck.

A comprehensive, national paid family and medical leave program would ensure that military families are able to take time away from work to care for themselves, a sick or injured loved one or a new child.

Military families face layered challenges. Lawmakers can help them balance the toll military service takes on families by passing a national, comprehensive paid family and medical leave policy. This would ensure military spouses and family members can care for their families without sacrificing their paychecks. The stories below illustrate that paid family and medical leave is a pro-family, pro-military policy that will provide vital relief to military families.

## Aaron's Story

Aaron is the father of an amazing seven-year-old daughter, a veteran of the United States Army- serving his country through two deployments to Afghanistan, and a school board member of Phoenix Union school district.

Aaron also founded a veteran-led mobilization and voter outreach organization, Vets Forward. From his time deployed, Aaron understands the burdens placed upon military families and the sacrifices they make. Day in and day out, the challenges of deployment and separation from family persist for all deployed servicemembers. Often overlooked is the toll of deployment on military spouses and family members, only to be made worse without access to paid family and medical leave.

As an officer, Aaron saw firsthand how the weight of preparing for a deployment, managing during, and reintegration take a toll on military families. Often, the most challenging burdens of the recovery process fall to their families and caretakers when servicemembers get wounded in combat.

To Aaron, passing comprehensive paid family and medical leave is one way to honor our military families, especially for reserve families like his. When Aaron started VetsForward, it was to uplift the voices of veterans and use their natural skills as communicators to engage voters in meaningful conversations about the values they fought for and defend democracy at home. Aaron believes giving military families the ability to care for their injured, spend time with their spouse before deployments, and ensuring no military family suffers for putting their needs first are a part of those values.



*"Thinking back on the sacrifices my family made, the stress, the uncertainty, and the fear they and so many other military families felt, paid family and medical leave would have been an immense relief while deployed. This policy could be a real difference-maker in the lives of our men and women who serve. I know it would have been for my family, especially before my father passed away from bone marrow cancer. Providing paid medical and family leave for military families would be a powerful way to honor those who served."*

*- Aaron*

## David's Story

David Lucier comes from a strong family tradition of military service. He was proud to follow in the footsteps of his father and mother, both World War II veterans, and become a Green Beret. When he returned from Vietnam in 1969, he was greeted by his large military family with an airport reunion — complete with “welcome home” signs, bear hugs and tears of joy.

Tragically, the years that followed David’s homecoming were some of the most difficult of his life. While his injuries were not visible, they loomed for years. He self-medicated with alcohol on the weekends, much to the dismay of the wife he met after he returned. Decades after his homecoming, at the urging of his sister, David sought help and treatment for PTSD. It was then that the warning signs that had plagued him since his return, nightmares and a deep sense of restlessness, finally made sense.

David knows that the burdens of military life, from caring for families during deployment to tending to the seen and unseen wounds that service members return from deployment with, often fall to spouses and other loved ones. He advocates for paid family and medical leave because he knows what a difference it would make in the lives of military families.



*“A service member’s deployment is often disruptive to their family’s emotional and economic stability. It requires enormous sacrifice by spouses, friends and other loved ones to cope with the challenges of deployment. Inevitably, employed military spouses shoulder the weight of preparing for and managing daily life, including juggling household tasks, finances and child care. And when a service member returns from deployment wounded, physically or mentally injured, or ill, family members often take on the role of caregiver ... navigating their loved one’s recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration without adequate support systems.”*

*- David*

## Karla's Story

Karla is a US Army Veteran, and in the spring of 2019 was working as an over the road truck driver. Karla put herself through truck driving school, completed her training, and had finally earned her own truck when her mother needed surgery. Her mother's story is familiar to many in this country-- she was the sole caregiver to Karla's stepfather, and with the need for surgery could no longer take care of herself or her husband. Karla decided to step in and help. She would need at least three months off from work to caregive for her mother and stepfather full time; however, when she informed her employer of the situation, she was forced to quit her job after working so hard to get to where she was. In the end, her mother required an additional operation, and her stepfather ended up passing away. What was originally three months of care turned into 18, and by that time, Karla had completely depleted her savings.



*"I do not regret my decision, it was an honor and a privilege to have been able to be present for my stepfather and for my mother during the most physically and emotionally difficult time of their lives. I consider myself very fortunate, I did not have any large bills like student debt, a car payment, or a mortgage, though I had planned to use my savings to put a down payment on a home. Caring for a loved one should not come with the fear of financial ruin, these times in themselves bring with them so much uncertainty and anxiety for all involved. My mother spent a good deal of her recovery and grieving process worrying about how she was financially "draining" me. I can't help but wonder the amount of stress that could have been avoided and how her energy could have been directed at herself if that wasn't in the picture.*

*- Karla*

# Janessa Goldbeck

San Diego, CA

## Janessa's Story

A Marine Corps veteran, Janessa previously led teams overseas as a Combat Engineer Officer, managing engineering, logistics, and explosive ordnance disposal missions. She deployed in support of NATO operations and served as a Uniformed Victim Advocate, providing essential support and care to service members who had experienced sexual assault. She rose to the rank of Captain and was twice awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal. Janessa is also the primary caregiver for her mom.

*"A few years ago, my mom was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. She was in California, while I was stationed on the East Coast. My next set of orders were to Quantico, Virginia. I was so stressed out about how I would manage caring for her from across the country. I'm an only child and my mom lived alone at the time. Thankfully, I was able to petition the Marine Corps for Humanitarian Orders. This allowed me to modify my orders to a unit in San Diego, with full pay and benefits, where I was able to care for my mom while getting her set up properly in a long-term care facility. That process on its own took months. If I had not been allowed to return home to care for her, I don't know what we would have done. No family should have to go through that, ever."*

*- Janessa*



## Ryan's Story

Ryan, a military veteran, teacher, and former State Representative has experienced the need for paid family and medical leave personally and related to the care of his wife and father, both of whom also are veterans. His father spent the last six months of his life unable to get himself up from a chair. He was left each day with a remote, a cooler of food and drink, and an empty bottle to relieve himself in as he couldn't get to the bathroom without assistance. Everyday, his father would hope his mother would make it home before the bottle filled.

When Ryan's wife gave birth to their first child, he worked as a retail store manager. He contracted food poisoning a couple of weeks before his wife gave birth and used all of his sick time to recover. He was unable to be home to help his wife during recovery from her c-section so his mother-in-law flew to their home to care for his wife and newborn while he worked.



*"My father, a man that served his country his whole adult life, spent his last days suffering alone on his couch, unable to move around his house, restricted by the illness that would ultimately take his life. My mother was unable to stay home with him because she had used all of her paid time off and emergency unpaid leave for the numerous emergency room visits and hospital stays. Paid leave is necessary for all working families, at all points of life."*

*- Ryan*

## Molly's Story

Molly and her husband welcomed their first child at the very beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Her husband is an engineer and a Navy reservist. He is currently serving a ten month deployment in the Middle East. She feels lucky she has access to paid leave now through her employer but understands first hand families often are not so lucky. In 2010, when she was 20 years old she needed to leave school for a semester to care for her mother. Her father was unable to take the time away from work to ensure her mother could spend her last months cared for at home while she battled the colon cancer that ultimately took her life.

She is happy she was in a position to be there for her mother but believes we need a national paid leave program to ensure it isn't left to chance whether someone can take time off to care for a dying loved one or manage a spouse's deployment.



*"I was almost hospitalized with the flu last spring, while pregnant, and was away from work for two weeks. In my previous job, those two weeks would have encompassed the entirety of my yearly paid leave and I would have returned to work with zero days of paid maternity leave and no leave available for doctors' appointments, an illness like COVID-19, or time with family before or after my husband's ten months away. Most military spouses in New Hampshire approach a deployment without access to any paid sick time or a partner to help."*

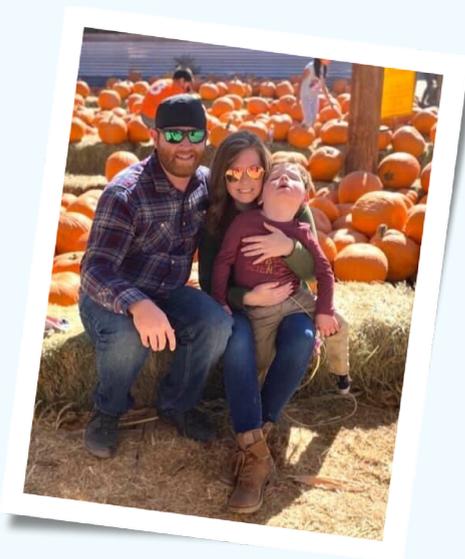
*- Molly*

## Jessica's Story

Samuel is an Army combat veteran who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Due to PTSD and other injuries, in 2011, he medically retired from the military. Five years later, Samuel and his wife Jessica had a son who was born with profound disabilities. Jessica took months of unpaid leave from her job to care for Rafe while Samuel finished his undergraduate degree and worked part-time. Without the paid leave they needed, their new family was nearly completely reliant upon relatives for financial stability until Samuel graduated and began his career.

In 2018, Rafe's stomach became paralyzed. He developed major feeding difficulties, epilepsy and chronic pain that required frequent hospitalizations. When Rafe needed care 2,000 miles from home, Samuel burned through the very limited sick and personal leave he had accrued in his short time teaching. He filed for Family and Medical Leave (unpaid) to guarantee that he could return to his job. Jessica and Samuel filed for mortgage assistance to ensure they could pay their bills while Rafe was hospitalized.

With limited leave options, Samuel is limited in the ways he can support his family through the grueling medical treatments and hospital stays to come—nor can he stay home from work when he is sick. Jessica, who entered graduate school just before Rafe's stomach paralysis, delayed her graduation and has been unable to work as she cares for Rafe.



*"My husband put his life on the line for this country and paid the price with his mental and physical health. He continues to sacrifice a lot for me and our medically fragile son. He never gets to call in sick when his war injuries are bothering him because he saves every day of leave for our son's surgeries and emergencies. Paid family and medical leave would greatly increase our family's quality of life!"*

*- Jessica*

## Eileen's Story

Eileen is a US Air Force veteran. After leaving the military she continued to give back to her community and became a Child Protective Services Social Worker for the State of Nevada. This past March, she suffered from respiratory and kidney failure, and was in a coma for two weeks. She woke up on Easter, but needed to take an additional month off of work to recover. Unfortunately, she did not have enough paid leave to cover the time off that was needed, and had to take time off without pay for several weeks.

Upon hearing about Eileen's medical and financial troubles, her co-workers came together to donate Catastrophic Leave, and she was able to get paid for the time off that she had to take to recover from her medical emergency. Without enough paid medical leave, Eileen was left to rely on others to ensure that she could recover from her medical crises, without putting her in a financial one.



*"Veterans like me shouldn't have to count on the generosity of their coworkers to deal with a medical crisis. A Paid Family Medical Leave program would allow veterans to take care of themselves and their families after they have separated from the service. I was fortunate that due to the kindness of others I did not have to worry about not getting paid (or my medical benefits lapsing due to leave without pay) but not all service members are as fortunate."*

*- Eileen*

## Maggie's Story

Maggie Seymour was called to join the Marines after her cousin was killed in Iraq. Now a US Marine Corps veteran, Maggie successfully completed tours in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kuwait as an active duty intelligence officer. Afterwards, she transferred into the reserves and joined the State Department as a Foreign Service Officer, moving from Beaufort, South Carolina to Montreal.

This past February, after Maggie delivered her first baby, she was able to take 12 weeks of paid family leave from the Department of State. During that time she was able to bond with her baby, establish sleep and eating habits, work out a routine with her partner and step-daughter, and generally make the transition for their growing family a smooth one. She was able to return back to work feeling confident and at ease knowing that she took the time she needed to ensure that her family was well taken care of and settled.



*"That time was essential for all of us personally, but also for me professionally. The time to establish that foundation meant that I was able to complete my training and arrive to my first post as rested and ready as possible. My son is well adjusted, resilient, healthy (yay breastfeeding), and flexible, allowing me to focus fully on work during work hours and enjoy family time in the off hours. None of this would have been possible without paid family and medical leave - it's like any thing, building a strong foundation in the beginning is essential to success. In complete honesty, I'm not sure I would have joined the foreign service (at least not at this time) without the program."*

*-Maggie*

## Grant's Story

Grant Khanbalinov spent 13 years in the Navy before being medically retired. In 2019 he had surgery that removed parts of his colon and intestines. The doctors released him with an ostomy bag and instructions not to lift anything heavier than a pencil for eight weeks. But Grant's wife had no paid family leave.

Grant has also become an advocate for mental health and suicide awareness among service members. Those individuals need treatment, and they also need a trusted loved one at their side. "Having that family member there can definitely be a life or death situation."



*"Our kids had to continue to go to school that we paid for, and the lights had to stay on," says Grant. "We could not afford for my wife not to get paid. I had to lay in bed hoping my bag would not pop while my stomach muscles recovered. Access to paid leave would have made a huge difference."*

*- Grant*

## Dan's Story

During his time in active duty -- which included tours in Iraq, Afghanistan, and South Korea -- Dan saw firsthand the toll that deployments take not just on service members but also on their families. A soldier torn between duty to family and duty to country runs the risk of meeting neither set of responsibilities well.

Today, too many military families across Virginia and across our nation, face that strain, struggling to balance obligations. Military families need paid leave so they have the ability to meet the needs of their families while serving their country. There needs to be mechanisms in place to empower military spouses with the flexibility to take the time they need for their families.



*"As a soldier, I've seen first hand how the lives of family members are impacted when a loved one is injured through their service or in war. I've also seen spouses struggle with finding new work after a move required by the military because of a lack of child care options. Paid Family and Medical Leave and affordable childcare are not just pro-family, they are pro-veteran."*

*- Dan*

## Cate's Story

In late summer 2019, Cate Weiss was placed on bedrest for the remainder of her pregnancy, but with two other children, bedrest was a near impossibility. Cate was grateful when her Navy husband's command allowed him augmented working hours so that he could assume the majority of household work as they waited for their baby's birth. But Cate worked as an inpatient pulmonary/critical care nurse practitioner at one of the region's largest hospitals. Because of challenges in finding the child care that Jack needed, Cate had an hourly position without benefits, including paid leave. Every day she was in bed, hoping to facilitate her daughter's best chance at a healthy life, was another day she was not getting paid.

Lucy was born healthy, and 12 weeks later, Cate's husband deployed as planned. Needing another paycheck, Cate returned to work. When the pandemic hit, Cate was on the front lines, caring for COVID-19 patients, coping with the unending demands of that work and the fear that she would bring the virus home to her family. School became virtual, and child care closed. While others could take paid leave to support their children, Cate could not. One night, Cate called her mother in tears and begged her to come live with them during the deployment. Cate says that she could not have survived this time without her help.



*"My husband and I have unique skill sets that take years to hone. We both got called heroes and were thanked for our work. While I appreciate that recognition, the harsh reality is that families do not have the supports they need. I can care for the very sickest members of the community, but I cannot afford to care for myself or my children. The lack of paid family leave has left us with undue financial and emotional stress. We can, and we must, do better."*

*- Cate*

# Anthony Valentino

Buckhannon, WV

## Anthony's Story

Anthony is a 10 year navy veteran. He and his wife decided a few years ago to become foster parents. Their first placement was a 5 year old boy, an 8 year old girl, and a 16 year old girl. Any parent knows that it takes a lot of time to bond with their new child, enroll them into school, and find the right doctor to care for them. Anthony and his wife had to do all of this at once, all while working full time.

To make matters even more difficult, they had to spend hours trying to track down old health documents and records from their kids' past. The first six weeks were a critical time, and they had to take an enormous amount of time off to ensure that their family was taken care of. While they were luckier than some, the experience highlighted for them the financial and emotional toll that caring for a new family can be without the alleviation of paid family and medical leave.



*"In our specific situation we realized how important paid family leave is, and not just with traditional families, but also those outside of the social norm. We were very fortunate to make this work, but it came at a high financial cost and with the stress that creates. It also brought up a tough reality, that even though West Virginia has a foster child crisis right now, without paid family leave for many working families fostering is just unworkable."*

*- Anthony*

# About Us



## **Campaign for a Family Friendly Economy**

The Campaign for a Family Friendly Economy (CFFE) is working to build a better future for working people by fighting for policies that make it possible for everyone to meet work and family responsibilities, including paid family and medical leave and affordable elder and childcare. These are policies that will ensure our economy and communities thrive. CFFE has active campaigns in Virginia, New Hampshire, Wisconsin and Arizona.

## **VoteVets Action Fund**

Backed by over 1.5 million Veterans, military family members and their supporters, VoteVets Action Fund uses public issue campaigns to elevate the voices of Veterans on matters of national security, Veterans' care, and everyday issues that affect the lives of those who served, their families, and the country.

## **Family Values at Work**

Family Values @ Work is a movement network of grassroots coalitions in more than two dozen states working to win paid family and medical leave, earned sick and safe days, and affordable, high-quality childcare at the state and national levels.

## **ZERO TO THREE**

ZERO TO THREE works to ensure all babies and toddlers benefit from the family and community connections critical to their well-being and development. Since 1977, the organization has advanced the proven power of nurturing relationships by transforming the science of early childhood into helpful resources, practical tools, and responsive policies for millions of parents, professionals and policymakers.

## **Elizabeth Dole Foundation**

The Elizabeth Dole Foundation is the preeminent organization empowering, supporting, and honoring our nation's 5.5 million military caregivers; the spouses, parents, family members, and friends who care for America's wounded, ill, or injured veterans. Founded by Senator Elizabeth Dole in 2012, the Foundation adopts a comprehensive approach in its advocacy, working with leaders in the public, private, nonprofit and faith communities to recognize military caregivers' service and promote their well-being.