



MANPOWER AND
RESERVE AFFAIRS

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. RON JARMIN, ACTING DIRECTOR, UNITED STATES CENSUS BUREAU

SUBJECT: Emergency Waiver of the Paperwork Reduction Act

The Department of Defense (DoD) requests that the Census Bureau pursue an emergency waiver from OMB for the public notice and comment requirements imposed by the Paperwork Reduction Act to revise the Household Pulse Survey, as described in 5 CFR 1320.13. This revision will allow for the inclusion of demographic screener questions to identify Service members and military spouses in the sample as soon as possible (March rather than June). The DoD would greatly benefit from having data three months earlier to respond to the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The DoD will work with the Bureau to explore a joint project agreement to continue collecting data past FY21.

While the DoD has a robust survey program of both Service members and spouses, we do not have a rapid pulse capability. DoD surveys often take a year or longer to design, administer, analyze, and brief-out the results. The Office of People Analytics (OPA) submitted a proposal last year for Congressional legislation to allow DoD to conduct a pilot survey panel and pay incentives to members to participate. While various levels of DoD leadership supported the proposed legislation, it ultimately did not make it into the FY21 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). OPA will likely submit the proposal again, but in the short-term, the Household Pulse Survey would provide the DoD with essential information that it currently does not collect.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a Force Health Protection issue that has impacted all areas related to the Department's personnel and readiness. Military Community and Family Policy (MC&FP) provides policies and programs that advance the well-being of Service members, their families, survivors, and other eligible members of the military community. Service delivery is designed to be agile, efficient, and flexible; allowing immediate response to real-world issues while providing consistent information and increased access to programs that serve 1.3 million active duty Service members and their 1.6 million family members, 807 thousand Guard and Reservists and their 1 million family members, and their survivors worldwide. Data from the Household Pulse Survey will allow the Department to enhance services and target resources to help alleviate the impact of the pandemic on Service members and their families.

Data on disruptions to military spouse employment (Qs 9- 14b) and education plans (Qs PS1-PS4) would inform how the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program addresses the high unemployment rate among civilian military spouses whose career plans are disrupted by military moves and deployments.

Time-sensitive questions on financial stress and mental well-being (Qs 32- 35), as well as access to counseling services (Qs 38b, 38c), would inform a tailored approach to the non-medical counseling services that DoD provides at no cost to Service members and families. Additional information on levels and sources of stress would allow for focused training for Military and Family Life Counselors that could be deployed in real-time to address financial insecurity or elevated levels of stress. Our Military OneSource consultants provide 24/7 access to counselors

who identify resources in communities. The more we know about how COVID-19 complicates financial and family life, the better we can train consultants on how to link individuals to resources – whether they be educational, legal, housing, or health care resources.

DoD values the ability to understand our population in the context of civilian communities. DoD is often asked by Congress how the issues impacting the military population are comparable to those impacting civilian communities. MC&FP currently has no way of knowing if military life is protective, or exaggerates the risks, of COVID-19 impacts. Military members and their families move on average every three years; they may not have access to extended family or long-term social connections to help buffer some of the impacts of the pandemic. This may have implications for DoD child care, and other programs Service members and their families depend on.

We have limited information as to whether military spouses are more or less likely to take the vaccine; questions V1-V6 on vaccine hesitancy and access have implications for Service member military readiness. If data indicates that military spouses are resistant to getting vaccinated, we can develop targeted educational materials on vaccines this spring and share them on the Military OneSource website, the widely used DoD platform to communicate with the military community at large.

The DoD is currently conducting a series of engagements with the First Lady's staff to discuss Military Community and Family programs. Key portfolio items highlighted that would benefit from data collected in the Household Pulse Survey include spouse education and employment, non-medical counseling, family support/policy, and child care/youth programs.

This request aligns with the FY21 NDAA, S.597, "Study on financial impacts of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 on members of the Armed Forces and best practices to prevent future financial hardships," which requires the Department to conduct a study within 180 days to examine the financial hardships members of the Armed Forces experience as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic. Specific areas the Household Pulse Survey questions address include: loss of household or spousal income (Q9, Q10), school closures (Q43, QPS1-PS4), loss of childcare, and any additional financial stressors (Q19a, Q19c, Q20, Q24, Q24a, Q26, Q27, Q27a, Q41, Q41a, Q41b).

This request also aligns with the FY21 NDAA, S.581, "Military Family Readiness and Dependents' Education," which requires a review of current programs, policies, services and resources, and practices of the Department for military families, and a report that details how to improve such programs, policies, services, and resources. To best accomplish this task, the DoD needs to know how military family well-being, readiness, and resiliency are being impacted by COVID-19. The Household Pulse survey would help meet these requirements.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. My point of contact for this matter is Dr. Cathy Flynn, Resources and Oversight, at cathy.a.flynn.civ@mail.mil.



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