

The National Academies of
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DIVISION OF BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES AND EDUCATION

The Board on Children, Youth, and Families

A Dialogue on *Strengthening the Military Family Readiness System for a Changing American Society*

Keck Center | 500 Fifth St, NW, Washington, D.C. | E Street Conference Room

AGENDA

Thursday, September 12, 2019

- 1:00 p.m. **Welcome and Introductions**
Suzanne Le Menestrel, *National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*

Kenneth W. Kizer, *Atlas Research (Committee Chair)*
- 1:05 p.m. **Overview of Key Messages from *Strengthening the Military Family Readiness System for a Changing American Society***
Kenneth W. Kizer, *Atlas Research (Committee Chair)*

1:20 p.m.

I. Expanding Data and the Definition of Families

Since World War II, family structures in the U.S. have become substantially more diverse due in part to increases in cohabitation, in the prevalence of shared child custody following divorce, and in the number of couples who do not live together, same-sex couples, and mixed-immigration-status families. The ability to understand increases in family diversity and complexity is limited by how families are defined for the purposes of tabulation. Across DoD, the term “military family” typically refers to service members and their spouses and/or children. Thus, there may be a large and rising number of families that are invisible because they are neither tabulated nor targeted in family readiness efforts. Given that half of the military force is unmarried—a portion of which is certainly in committed relationships—this risk could be substantial. Rising family diversity and complexity have several implications for DoD including increased difficulty of creating military policies, programs, and practices that adequately support families in the performance of military duties. In this session committee members and a military spouse will discuss the report recommendations around defining families and family wellbeing and the data collection around families as they are defined by service members followed by audience dialogue.

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Kenneth W. Kizer, *Atlas Research, Moderator*

Panelists:

Laura Miller, *RAND Corporation (Committee Member)*

Shelley MacDermid Wadsworth, *Purdue University (Committee Member)*

Ashley Broadway-Mack, *Modern Military Association of America (Discussant)*

Kathy Roth-Douquet, *Blue Star Families (Discussant)*

2:20 p.m.

II. Resilience in Military Children and Families

Military families face particular experiences associated with military service, including family relocations and separations that lead to transitions in communities, jobs, childcare, health care, and schools. Certain military family challenges create levels of stress and burden that can overwhelm families and undermine the healthy resilience processes that support family functioning, leading to reduced well-being. For example, physical injury and psychological traumatic stress are important examples of defining events that can complicate a military family's well-being, lead to problems within the family, affect the functioning of marital and parenting relationships and, in turn, undermine the individual and collective well-being of adults and children. There are consistent findings that the effects of severe stressors can be prevented and ameliorated with evidence-based interventions focused on strengthening the caregiving, parenting, and family environment. Several elements of the military support system, particularly for families living on or near installations may help support children's resilience including social and parenting support and services such as early childcare. However there is a dearth of research focused on examining the correlates of resilience in military children. In this session committee members will discuss what is known about resilience well-being in military families and children and what can be learned from evidence-based interventions highlighted in the report followed by remarks from a military spouse.

Kenneth W. Kizer, *Atlas Research, Moderator*

Panelists:

Daniel Perkins, *The Pennsylvania State University (Committee Member)*

Tracy Neal-Walden, *Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Easterseals (Committee Member)*

Julia Yeary, *Zero to Three (Discussant)*

3:30 p.m.

BREAK

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3:40 p.m.

III. The Military Family Readiness System Today and Tomorrow

The aim of the MFRS is to provide a support infrastructure that promotes family well-being and thereby fosters family readiness, which in turn enhances service members' readiness. The vast array of social supports available to service members and their families is organized and provided at various levels—the DoD level, the service branch level, and in many cases the installation level. Many installations offer their own services, which may or may not coordinate directly with their branch or DoD counterparts. There are also nonprofit organizations operating across branches or focused on specific branches. Thus, there are many sources of support and information about support. What is unclear, though, is the extent to which service providers at the various levels of organization are aware of one another, and whether they can or do coordinate service provision. Moreover, the vast majority of policies, programs, services, and resources offered have not been evaluated for effectiveness. In this session committee members will discuss actionable steps that could transform the MFRS into a coherent, comprehensive, complex, and adaptive support system designed for military families and the specific supports needed to implement an effective system.

Kenneth W. Kizer, *Atlas Research, Moderator*

Panelists:

Patricia Lester, *University of California, Los Angeles (Committee Member)*
Ashish Vazirani, *National Military Family Association (Committee Member)*
Mary Keller, *Military Child Education Coalition (Committee Member)*
Ivan Walks, *Ivan Walks and Associates (Committee Member)*

4:55 p.m.

Closing Comments

Kenneth W. Kizer, *Atlas Research (Committee Chair)*

5:00 p.m.

ADJOURN