



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF PROFESSIONAL & TECHNICAL ENGINEERS AFL-CIO & CLC

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February 22, 2019

Hon. Adam Smith, Chairman
Armed Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Mac Thornberry, Ranking Member
Armed Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2340 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith & Ranking Member Thornberry:

On behalf of the 90,000 represented members of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE), including the thousands employed by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), we are writing regarding the Department of Army's recent decision to end the Civilians in the Army Fee Assistance Program for anyone not currently enrolled as of February 28th. This is a critically important program, as it provides childcare subsidies to Army employees who have children under that age of 13.

The Army outlined their reasoning for ending this program in a January 23rd, 2019 letter, stating that the department had to, "prioritize resources to Soldiers and their Families." While IFPTE is fully supportive of providing for our fighting men and women and their families, we find it objectionable that civilian workers and their families are forced to lose a critically important benefit as a result. Last year the United States Congress appropriated nearly \$182 billion in Fiscal Year 2019 (FY19) resources for the Army, representing a \$13 billion increase in funding over FY18 levels. It is truly puzzling as to why the Army would even contemplate ending such an important program for their employees.

As an example of the true, real life impact the elimination of this program will have on employees, you can look no further than the Army Corps of Engineers New York District, where IFPTE Local 98 represents impacted workers. As you might imagine, the high cost of child care all over the nation, particularly in this region is already a hardship on employees. Fed Kids, the child care center at 26 Federal Plaza, currently charges between \$21,840 to \$25,548 per year for one child enrolled in their program. When you multiply that by the number of children a family may have it quickly becomes evident that, based on current Federal salaries, it will be uneconomical for workers with children to continue working at the District.

Not only will this benefit cut harm Army civilian families and civilian family readiness, it will also further impede agencies like the Army Corps of Engineers ability to recruit and retain a qualified workforce, especially in competitive and high cost areas like New York, San Francisco, and the D.C. metro area where thousands of Army civilians are stationed. Undermining the Army civilian workforce pay and benefits even further after the Army budget was increased is a step in the wrong direction and will impact mission performance by an already understaffed workforce. This cut threatens the very effectiveness of the Army due to the critical role that civilians play in supporting the military.

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There will also be other repercussions. For example, the clause in the new policy that exempts children currently enrolled in the program as of February 28th will constrain the ability of employees to perform temporary assignments. While seemingly well-intentioned, this provision will force workers to pass up career development opportunities (and potentially, temporary promotions) that also help other organizations within the agency/Army during a time of unprecedented turnover because an employee risks losing the benefit if they move their kids even temporarily to a new duty location. In addition, if an employee has to permanently relocate in the future, they are less motivated to stay with the Corps because the subsidy at the new location will be lost.

Army civilians support Army war and peace time efforts abroad and domestically with technical expertise, and often through deployments which carry risk to safety and human life. These civilian employees fill critical roles in emergency response efforts and ensuring that the Army remains ready. Like our active duty Army military personnel, these civilian families also need and deserve the critical family readiness programs that the Army provides. As the leaders of the House Armed Services Committee, please urge the Army to reverse course on this misguided effort.

Thank you for your consideration. Should you have any questions please feel free to contact either of us at (202) 239-4880.

Sincerely,



Paul Shearon,
President



Matthew Biggs,
Secretary-Treasurer/Legislative Director