

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Military Affairs and Domestic Security Committee

BILL: SB 2522

INTRODUCER: Senator Fasano

SUBJECT: Family Readiness Program

DATE: March 20, 2008

REVISED: 03/26/08

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Pardue	McElroy	MS	Favorable
2.			TA	
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

I. Summary:

This bill expands the Family Readiness Program eligibility by authorizing the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) to provide emergency financial assistance to servicemembers who are unmarried and who do not have dependents.

The change proposed in this bill will likely have little government fiscal impact in the near term and may result in greater program utilization.

This bill substantially amends s. 250.5206 of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

In the aftermath of the Cold War, and the initiation of the Global War on Terrorism, the National Guard and the Reserve Forces have been called to active duty in unprecedented numbers. The military has recognized that these operations have placed enormous strains on servicemembers and their families and demonstrated that mission readiness and family readiness are closely connected.

To ensure that reservists and their families are prepared to cope with the strains associated with long and repeated deployments and are adequately served by military family care systems and organizations, the Department of Defense established a National Guard and Reserve Family Readiness Strategic Plan.¹ The major goals of this initiative include:

¹ Department of Defense National Guard & Reserve Family Readiness Strategic Plan: 2000-2005.

- Support mission readiness through Reserve component family readiness;
- Develop family readiness programs and services that improve quality of life and support recruiting and retention;
- Provide Guard and Reserve members equitable and accessible benefits and entitlements; and
- Standardize family readiness programs to ensure Reserve component families are seamlessly integrated into the Total Force and that mission requirements for each service and Reserve component provide family support to the Total Force.

A component of Florida's Family Readiness Program provides need-based assistance to Florida resident family members and dependents of servicemembers serving in the Florida National Guard and United States Reserve Forces, including the Coast Guard Reserve.² The intent of this program is to provide for emergency assistance to families while the servicemember is federally deployed in support of the Global War on Terrorism or is participating in state operations for homeland defense.

Under the program, an award of up to \$5,000 may be routinely made in an emergency situation³ to purchase critically needed services, including, but not limited to: reasonable living expenses, housing, vehicles, equipment or renovations necessary to meet disability needs, and healthcare.⁴

For example:

- Reasonable living expenses – where critically needed to prevent termination of utilities, to provide food, or to furnish similar basic necessities;
- Housing – includes emergency repairs to the service member's primary residence that are critically needed to address health or safety issues and for assistance with mortgage and rent expenses where need-based and determined to be appropriate;
- Vehicles – repairs essential to maintain one vehicle per family in safe operating condition;
- Disability – equipment or renovations necessary to meet disability needs. Medical documentation is required; and
- Healthcare – documented by medical authority as essential for the health and welfare of the individual, not elective, and not covered by other medical/dental insurance.

The Family Readiness Program can provide assistance to family members who have suffered catastrophic losses during a hurricane, among other circumstances, while the servicemember is deployed and for up to 120 days after return from deployment.

² Section 250.5206, F.S.

³ Note: Awards greater than \$5,000 may be made only with approval at the highest command level of the Florida National Guard. Based on data provided by the Guard, the total program average award is \$3,476.53. Thirty-two awards have been made that exceed \$5,000 out of a total of 161 awards made since the program's inception. The average award for this category is \$7,748.64. The overwhelming majority of awards have been made for living expenses and housing. It should also be noted that the total population of the Florida Army and Air National Guard is approximately 12,500 members.

⁴ Florida National Guard Pamphlet 930-4, July 1, 2006.

As part of this program, the Florida National Guard operates eight Family Centers and provides a fulltime Family Center Support Specialist in each of the designated Family Readiness Areas. Applications for assistance are validated by one of the Area Family Center Support Specialists or by a designated official at a reserve facility. Applications are forwarded, with a recommendation for approval or disapproval by the local commander, to the Family Readiness Program Assistance Fund manager for review. Officials at the Florida National Guard headquarters receive the applications from the Program Manager and are authorized to award funds. There are procedures in place to expedite the review process due to the emergency nature of an application.

Eligible recipients include persons designated as beneficiaries on the United States Department of Defense Form 93 or who are otherwise dependents of eligible servicemembers and who are residents of the State of Florida.⁵

The statutes do not authorize the Department of Military Affairs to provide similar financial assistance to servicemembers who are unmarried and do not have dependents.

As of December 31, 2007, approximately 1,410 members of the Florida National Guard and reservists were deployed overseas in support of the Global War on Terrorism. DMA estimates that approximately 61% (or 860) of the deployed servicemembers are unmarried.

There is evidence that certain other states provide some emergency assistance to Guard and Reserve servicemembers irrespective of a member's marital status or dependent status. For example:

- The Arizona Army National Guard Emergency Relief Fund (ARNG-ERF) was established to provide short term emergency financial assistance in the form of loans or grants to AZ National Guard Soldier's and /or families impacted by mobilization and deployment;⁶
- The Texas National Guard Family Support Foundation provides loans and grants when a member cannot otherwise pay for specific basic needs-lack of which would affect the member's military job or the essential quality of dignity of life the military wants for its members;⁷
- Persons eligible for assistance: Residents of the State of Delaware who are members of the Reserve Components of the Armed Forces of the United States who were ordered to or volunteered for active federal service in support of the Global War on Terrorism or their dependents;⁸ and
- The Massachusetts Office of the State Treasurer has a Homefront Financial Security Loan that is available for all members of the Massachusetts National Guard who have been called to active duty at home or abroad since September 11, 2001.⁹

⁵ Note: Department of Defense (DOD) Form 93 is the Record of Emergency Data form used by service members and DOD civilian personnel (including contractors) to provide emergency contact information. Service members also use the form to designate beneficiaries for certain benefits such as death gratuity benefits per Department of Defense Instruction, 3001.02, August 8, 2006.

⁶ <http://www.az.ngb.army.mil/Families /Financial%20Assistance.htm>

⁷ http://www.txngfoundation.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=29&Itemid=49

⁸ State of Delaware Department of Military Affairs DNG Pam 930-1, 13 March 2003.

⁹ http://www.mass.gov/guard/family_program/family_support_ma/financial_assistance.htm

Further, other organizations provide emergency assistance to Guard and Reserve members in the form of grants and loans including the:

- Air Force Aid Society Fund;
- Army Emergency Relief;
- Navy Marine Relief Society;
- Coast Guard Mutual Assistance;
- Red Cross; and
- Salvation Army Fund.¹⁰

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

This bill expands the Family Readiness Program eligibility by authorizing the DMA to provide emergency financial assistance to servicemembers who are unmarried and who do not have dependents.

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2008.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The Family Readiness Program within the Department of Military Affairs was initially provided \$5,000,000 from the General Revenue Fund by the FY 2005-2006

¹⁰ Id.

appropriations bill. According to department reports, approximately \$566,000 has been expended in providing assistance to eligible recipients since the program's inception. An additional \$2 million has been transferred from the program during the 2008 Legislative Session.¹¹

The change proposed in this bill will likely have little government fiscal impact in the near term and may result in greater utilization of what has been an important but under-utilized resource for the benefit and assistance of Guard and Reserve members and their families. Approximately \$2.3 million in funds carried forward from previous fiscal years is currently available to continue to fund the Family Readiness Program if the Legislature so desires.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

¹¹ Chapter 2008-1, L.O.F.