

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 Transportation and Economic Development Appropriations
Committee

BILL: CS/SB 2522

INTRODUCER: Transportation and Economic Development Appropriations Committee and Senator
Fasano

SUBJECT: Family Readiness Program

DATE: April 8, 2008

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Pardue	McElroy	MS	Favorable
2.	Carey	Noble	TA	Fav/CS
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

I. Summary:

CS/SB 2522 (CS) clarifies that the purpose of the Family Readiness Program is to provide need-based financial assistance to eligible servicemembers and eligible families of those servicemembers. The CS also specifies persons eligible to receive financial assistance from the Family Readiness Program.

The changes proposed in the CS 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:

- 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.

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

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.

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.

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

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.

- 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

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:

The CS provides that the Family Readiness Program in the Department of Military shall provide need-based financial assistance to eligible servicemembers and Florida residents designated as beneficiaries on the U.S. Department of Defense Form 93, or who are otherwise dependents or families of dependents of those service members. Eligible servicemembers are Florida Residents who are members of the Florida National Guard, United States Reserve Forces, including the Coast Guard Reserves, who are on active duty serving in the Global War on Terrorism and who are federally deployed or participating in state operations for homeland defense.

The CS 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.

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

¹⁰ Id.

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 appropriations bill. According to department reports, the Family Readiness Program has expended approximately \$835,000 since the program's inception. Of that amount, approximately \$566,000 has been expended in providing assistance to eligible recipients. In addition, \$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.

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.)

The committee substitute specifies that the purpose of the Family Readiness Program is to provide need-based financial assistance to eligible servicemembers and eligible families of those servicemembers. The eligibility requirements for financial assistance is expanded to include all servicemembers regardless of their marital status or whether or not they have dependents.

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.