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The Ethical Dilemma of Dual and Single Parents Joining the Military

The Army's leadership has always emphasized to "do what's right", but does knowing the right thing to do make it easier to make a decision? Of course not, we're faced with ethical decisions everyday. People tend to think of ethical decisions as being based upon rational considerations and thinking. Sure, there are emotional considerations as well, but most of the literature on ethics revolves around how we can better arrive at rational conclusions.

Webster's dictionary defines ethics as the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation, the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group, a guiding philosophy. As the Army continues its transformation and the Global War on Terrorism endures we must re-evaluate the prerequisites for enlisting in the military.

Currently, the military services may not enlist married individuals with more than two dependents under the age of 18 or unmarried individuals with custody of any dependents under the age of 18. The government recognizes that some persons for personal reasons have given up custody of a child or children. It is not the intent or desire of the U.S. Army to require any person to relinquish custody of his or her children to qualify for enlistment. Under no circumstances will any military representative advise, imply, or assist an applicant with regard to surrender of custody for the purpose of enlistment. Applicants will be advised that they do not meet the dependent criteria for enlistment In Accordance With Army Regulation 601-211 and that the Army's mission and unit readiness are not consistent with being a sole parent. Persons who are sole parents would be placed in positions, as any other Soldier, where

they are required at times to work long or unusual hours, to be available for worldwide assignment, and to be prepared for mobilization, all of which would create conflicting duties between children and military requirements for the sole parent. However, if one becomes a single parent while in the military, due to death of a spouse, separation/divorce, adoption, pregnancy, etc., or a military couple has children, the military will not force them to separate from the service, as long as they meet the family care requirements of DOD and the various related service regulations. How did we get here? The military services has always had regulations which required single-parents and dual military couples with children to have plans concerning the care of their dependents in the event they were ever deployed. These regulations weren't strictly enforced until Desert Shield/Desert Storm. When the services got orders from the President to begin deploying active duty, National Guard and Reserve members in support of DESERT SHIELD, they got an unexpected surprise -- hundreds of single-parents and dual-military couples with children were not ready to go. They had no plan for the care of their children, which caused a lot of rescheduling and juggling of deployment plans.

At present, there are approximately 83,564 single parents and 34,732 dual-military couples with children enlisted in the Army. Today the Army states that in order for a single parent to join the military they must forfeit all rights to their children for the entire term of their initial enlistment whether the enlistment is for 2 years, 4 years or 6 years and will be advised that if they regain custody during their term of enlistment, they will be in violation of the stated intent of their enlistment contract. They will (unless they can show cause, such as death or incapacity of the person who has custody)

be processed for involuntary separation for fraudulent enlistment. Is that fair? Some of you may say yes, because the Soldier has violated their contract. I say no because, Soldiers cannot fully function as Soldiers unless they know that their families are taken care of or in their presence. No one wants to sign his or her children over to someone else and live a life apart.

These Soldiers are not entitled to any benefits such as Basic Housing Allowance (BAH) to help take care of their family members they have left behind. But at the same time if this Soldier has a child while in the military, they are entitled to all benefits, pay and allowances associated with this unborn child. Is it okay that the Army provides for one, but not the other? There is a need to address the current regulations that are ambiguous and contradictory toward enlisting dual and single parents.

While the intent of the military services is to preclude deployment distracters may indeed be justified they may be overlooking the ethical dilemma. Is it fair, right or moral to restrict dual and single parents from enlisting in the military unless they give custody of their child to someone versus a single Soldier that enlists and becomes pregnant and be allowed to maintain custody of their child without the fear of being involuntarily separated from the service? Today's armed forces are composed of a significantly different population than in previous decades. The same exceptions that are made for single Soldiers currently serving on active duty should be offered to those single parents wishing to enlist in the Army. The government needs to take a hard look at changing current policy that forces single parents to give custody of their child or children to someone else. One proposed change would be to have sole parents temporarily give custody to a family member or close friend until the training phase has

been completed. The Soldier will start the process of a family care plan in Basic Combat Training and Advance Individual Training, and upon completion they will have 30 days to finalize the family care plan upon arrival at the new duty station.

In conclusion, being a dual or single parent in the military is a lot of things: demanding, difficult, challenging and it requires a lot of time and management; but the one thing it isn't, is impossible.