



AFSA Retiree and Veteran Affairs Newsletter

- THE AFSA 2020 vLAW EXTREMELY SUCCESSFUL

The AFSA Military and Government Affairs Staff and AFSA Legislative Committee and are extremely thankful for the efforts of so many participants in the 2020 vLAW. Our vLAW campaign resulted in over 2,000 letters and e-mails being sent to our elected official on Capitol Hill! That is afsolutely an amazing effort and response! We are looking forward to continuing to building virtual platforms for members to engage with to better position Chapters, Divisions, and the Headquarters to yield timely and desired results in the legislative process.

With the Senate currently undergoing its Supreme Court nominee hearing process, it remains uncertain, what other accomplishments will be gained by the conclusion of the 116th Congress. Our team remains laser-focused and is looking to build on the momentum gained on several issues from the 2020 vLAW.

- HERE'S YOUR 2021 MILITARY RETIREE AND VA DISABILITY PAY RAISE

Military retirees, those who receive disability or other benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs, federal retirees and Social Security recipients will see a 1.3% increase in their monthly checks for 2021. The annual Cost Of Living Allowance (COLA) is slightly less than the 1.6% increase from last year but in line with the historical increases seen over the last 10 years. Each year, military retirement pay, Survivor Benefit Plan Annuities, VA Compensation and Pensions, and Social Security benefits are adjusted for the rate of inflation.

Military retirement pay is one of the top three benefits of military service, along with medical and other benefits. Understanding how to calculate military retirement pay involves understanding the final pay and high 36-month average methods.

Retirement Pay Increase

As a result of the increase, retired military members will see a \$13 increase for each \$1,000 in military retirement pension they receive each month.

Retirees who entered military service on or after Aug. 1, 1986, and opted for the Career Status Bonus (CSB/Redux retirement plan) have any COLA increases reduced by 1%, so they will see a smaller increase in 2021. They should see a monthly increase of only \$3 per \$1,000.

Survivors receiving Survivor Benefit Plan payments will see the same increase of \$13 per \$1,000 in their monthly payments.

- ADVOCATES RENEW PUSH FOR STIPEND TO FEED LOW-INCOME MILITARY FAMILIES

A provision in the House's fiscal 2021 defense policy bill would give some service members an additional allowance to cover the cost of food and other basic needs -- a stipend advocacy groups say is needed to relieve financial and psychological strain on young military families.

In order to become law, the measure must be agreed to by the Senate, where it faces the same challenges it endured last year. Still, advocates and House lawmakers from both sides of the aisle said they are more optimistic about passage of the measure, which would give an additional monthly allowance to service members whose gross household income does not exceed 130% of the federal poverty guidelines.

Among the reasons for their hope: a tweak to the proposal that would take the application process out of the chain of command and make Defense Finance and Accounting System responsible to notify troops of their eligibility and requirements to furnish information on any spouse employment to receive the stipend.

Service members also could opt out of the effort. Advocacy groups concede there is little data on the extent of food insecurity among military families, but say, they know troops often rely on food banks and other community programs located near their duty stations to help support their needs.

"The Pentagon says that, when you compare the pay and benefits counterparts in the private sector, it's more than fair. But the fact that we have food pantries that are serving military families across the country indicates otherwise," said Josh Protas, vice president for public policy at MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger.

The proposed stipend would be equal to 130% of the federal poverty guidelines minus the service member's gross income (not counting any allowances) divided by 12. For an E-4 with several years in the military, a spouse and two children, this would equate to roughly \$250 extra a month.

- EAT BETTER, EAT TOGETHER

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, how many times a week did you sit down for a meal as a family?

Most people will likely answer not very often due to sports practice, music lessons, late meetings, homework, and social events. Parents and kids can be so busy that it is tough to carve out time to sit down together. Six months ago, the pandemic changed our lives and all the sudden we were all together, all the time. However, what a better time than this to share a meal as a family? Involve your kids in the process, such as let them pick out recipes, help you cook and make up new dishes. Sit at the table to eat together and talk. There are so many benefits to families eating together.

Research has shown that family meals have physical, emotional and mental benefits such as:

- Developmental boosts – manners, conversation skills, responsibility
- Improves mental health – decrease in depression, substance abuse
- Family bonding – gives families a chance to reconnect
- Better grades – kids who had less than 3 meals per week with their family were twice as likely to receive grades of C or lower. Kids who had family meals 5-7 times per week were more likely to receive grades of A's and B's

- Better physical health – increased fruit, vegetable intake, decreased fast food intake, decreased calorie intake, kids may become less picky

If you're still not eating a meal as a family, it's never too late to start. Here are some tips to get started:

- Make family meals a priority. The fact that you're together as a family is more important than what you're eating
- Start small and slowly increase the number of family meals by one extra meal a week. Make it a priority
- As a family, plan the weekly. That can help with the grocery list, preparing food, setting the table
- Work as a family to clean up afterwards
- No technology: turn off cell phones, computers, and TV

Something as simple as sitting together for a meal can make a positive difference for the future.

- EXPANDED ASSISTANCE FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS

The Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) is for eligible Veterans who have incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975 or on or after September 11, 2001. This program provides resources, education, support, a financial stipend, and health insurance (if eligible), beneficiary travel (if eligible), to caregivers of eligible Veterans.

Veterans may be eligible for this clinical program if they:

Sustained or aggravated a serious injury serious injury (now includes serious illness) in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975 or on or after 9/11/2001; and meet both of the following criteria to be eligible for PCAFC. Among other applicable eligibility criteria, the Veteran must:

- Have a single or combined service-connected disability rating by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) of 70% or more. This requirement is included in the definition of "serious injury;" and
- Be in need of personal care services (requiring in-person personal care services) for a minimum of six continuous months based on any one of the following:
 - An inability to perform an activity of daily living (ADL)
 - A need for supervision, protection, or instruction

For more information visit:

https://www.caregiver.va.gov/pdfs/MissionAct/EligibilityCriteriaFactsheet_Chapter2_Launch_Approved_Final_100120.pdf#

- FIGHTING THE FLU TOGETHER

Getting your flu shot is the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones from the flu. Veterans enrolled in VA health care can receive a no-cost flu shot at over 60,000 community locations. Find the nearest location to get your flu shot today! Visit: <https://www.va.gov/find-locations>

- FREE AUDIO BOOKS FOR VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES

The National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled circulates books and magazines in braille or audio formats, delivered by postage-free mail or instantly downloadable.

- TEAM RWB – KEEPING VETERANS CONNECTED

Every year, more than 250,000 active-duty Service members transition out of the military to join the multitude of Veteran communities nationwide. Transitioning Service members, however, face many challenges to their physical and mental wellbeing. This is why Team Red, White & Blue (RWB) is dedicated to connecting Veterans communities through physical and social activity. Tackle challenges by joining Team RWB's virtual activities, like meditation and yoga. Some chapters are also offering in-person events that adhere to safety restrictions (e.g., no more than 10 people, social distancing, etc.).

- DISABILITY COMPENSATION AND PENSION BENEFIT PAYMENTS

If you receive disability compensation or pension payments from VA, you can update your direct deposit information in your VA.gov profile. You'll need your bank's routing number and account number to make the updates.

Note: You'll need to sign in to VA.gov to update your direct deposit information. Once signed in, you'll have to verify your identity and set up 2-factor authentication only if you've haven't done this already.

- AFSA MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Founded in 1961, the Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA) legislates, advocates and educates America's elected, military and community leaders in support of the quality of life for our 100,000 military members and their families. AFSA continues to work long and hard to ensure the many benefit reductions being proposed are minimized or nullified. Your membership will continue to pay dividends in terms of fair and equitable pay increases, retirement programs, educational benefits, and affordable and available health care.

AFSA MEMBERSHIP is open to all: UNIFORMED SERVICES: Active Duty, Guard, Reserve, Retired and Veteran Military Members (Joint Services Enlisted and Commissioned Officers), Public Health Services (PHS), and National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) personnel; FAMILY MEMBERS of Uniformed Service Members, and ASSOCIATE MEMBERS: DoD Civilians, Civil Air Patrol, JROTC, Mission Partners/Sponsors and all Military Supporters. Visit: WWW.HQAFSA.org for more information and to join.

- ARE YOU A VETERAN IN CRISIS OR CONCERNED ABOUT ONE?

Did you know that VA offers same day services in Primary Care and Mental Health at 172 VA Medical Centers across the country? Contact the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255 and press 1, Chat, or Text 838255.)