

Introduction

The Military Family Act of 1985, Public Law 99-145 as amended, Section 806 (codified at 10 U.S.C. 113 note), focused attention on the extremely important role of military families in the Department of Defense (DoD). Spousal preference was one of several initiatives undertaken to retain military members, enhance the well being of military families, and provide the resources necessary to maintain an environment compatible with a healthy military family lifestyle.

The following information is intended to provide a summary of the highlights of military spouse employment preference programs currently in operation in DoD for spouses of personnel on active duty in the Military Departments or Coast Guard.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is military spouse preference?

Military spouse preference provides priority in the employment selection process for military spouses who are relocating as a result of their military spouse's PCS. Spouse preference does not apply to separation or retirement moves. Spouse preference may be used for most vacant positions in DoD and applies only within the commuting area of the permanent duty station of the sponsor. Spouse preference is not limited to the branch of military of which the sponsor is serving or to only those who have previously worked for the Federal government. Spouses must be found best qualified for the position and may exercise preference no more than one time per permanent relocation of the sponsor.

Preference does not mean that positions will be created or made available especially for the military spouses or that spouses will be given any special appointing authority. Preference does not provide any guarantee of employment.

Does all of DoD operate an identical spouse preference program?

No. While all Military Services operate under the same DoD guidance, there are some variations. This reflects the decentralization nature of civilian personnel within DoD and provides the flexibility to tailor policies to the local mission and needs. Spouses need to check the policies in the local area to which they are moving (See question 14).

Am I eligible for military spouse employment preference?

If you are the spouse of an active duty Armed Forces member (including the Coast Guard) and relocating to his/her new permanent duty station, you are entitled to spouse employment preference as long as you are among the best qualified for the position. You must have entered into the marriage with the military sponsor prior to his/her reporting date to the new geographic area.

To what positions does preference apply?

Preference applies worldwide to most DoD appropriated fund (APF) positions at grades S-15 and below (or equivalent wage grade positions) in the competitive or excepted service. Certain positions are excluded, for example, positions in intelligence related activities and those that require mandatory mobility agreements.

Military spouse preference also applies to positions in non-appropriated fund instrumentalities (NAFI) at grades UA-8 and below (or equivalent grade levels). NAFIs include positions established in the Army/Air Force Exchange System (AAFES) at the exchanges and retail stores, as well as in NAFIs at clubs, snack bars, recreation centers and sports facilities, and related activities throughout DoD. At some installations, NAF employment offices may be referred to as

Human Resources Offices (HRO) and may not be co-located with the appropriated fund Civilian Personnel Office. Be sure to ask where NAF employment offices are located, and contact those offices directly if you are interested in NAF employment or need more information about NAF activities before seeking employment.

When does spouse preference apply?

Spouse preference eligibility begins 30 days prior to the sponsor's reporting date to the new duty station and continues throughout the spouse accepts or declines a continuing appropriated or non-appropriated fund position (lasting one year or longer) from any Federal agency in the commuting area. In foreign areas, spouses do not receive preference until they actually arrive at the overseas location. Spouse preference eligibles must specifically designate whether or not they are interested in temporary positions.

Preference applies to the initial employment at the location. Once the spouse accepts or declines such a Federal position at the new duty station, eligibility terminates, whether or not the position was obtained through spouse preference.

Preference does not apply if the placement would violate laws or regulations on nepotism or veterans preference. Preference does not apply if placement would result in the displacement of a current employee of the activity or if a Priority 1 or Priority 2 Placement Program (PPP) registrant is available for placement.

Are there any special situations that may affect a spouse's claim for military spouse preference?

If the military member is scheduled to relocate to a new active duty station, and you are currently working as a Federal appropriated fund or NAF employee, you may want to ask for information on leave without pay (LWOP) procedures. A request for LWOP, if approved, may help avoid a break in service, if you are able to find employment at your sponsor's new duty station. When relocating to a new duty station, you may encounter employment restrictions. Employment restrictions may be imposed locally or by the highest levels of DoD and are often referred to as an employment freeze or "hiring freeze." When employment restrictions are imposed, not all positions may be considered vacancies for the purpose of military spouse preference.

What determines the extent of the commuting area?

The commuting area for spouse preference includes the military sponsor's duty station and the surrounding localities to which the spouse has determined he/she is willing to travel back and forth daily for employment, as demonstrated through application for employment, with or without a request for preference.

How do I receive preference?

Spouse preference is applied differently depending on how a vacancy is being filled, its location and whether the spouse is immediately "appointable".

Within the United States: Spouses may apply at the old duty station (if they are immediately available) or the new duty station, at either the CPO where the sponsor is assigned or where the spouse would like to work.

For competitive service positions, spouses who are immediately appointable (e.g., have personal status or Executive Order [EO] 12721 or Veterans Readjustment Act [VRA] eligibility) must register in Program "S" of the PPP. This automated system of referral is the only means through which an eligible spouse can exercise preference for these jobs in the U.S. Questions on your personal status or EO or VRA eligibility should be addressed to your local CPO.

Eligible spouses, to include those who are applying for excepted service positions on through the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), a delegated examining unit, or direct hire, will be referred manually at the gaining site.

Overseas: Spouses may apply and be considered according to local procedures established by the appropriate overseas personnel office. Spouses must be in the area of consideration for recruitment to receive preference.

Am I restricted to what positions I can apply for using Preference?

Spouses must be fully qualified for the positions for which they register. They may register only for a grade that is no higher than a position ever held on a permanent basis, unless their only Federal service was overseas on a time-limited appointment. Then, they may register for the highest grade held. If a spouse has reinstatement eligibility under Executive Order 12721, he/she may register on the basis of the Executive Order, if that grade is more beneficial. Registration may occur down to the lowest grade for which qualified and available.

Are there any individuals with higher preference than military spouse?

Yes. Veterans retain preference for initial employment over military spouses, as do employees displaced from their positions through no personal cause, selected employees placed under the Department's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Program, and selected, planned career progressions of employees in developmental positions.

Do I have to exercise preference when I relocate?

No. Registration is voluntary. Spouses who are interested in seeking a promotion or a position outside the commuting area may compete equally with other applicants without preference.

How does spouse preference work?

Management may select from any source of candidates (reassignment, change to lower grade, promotion, reinstatement, Office of personnel Management lists, etc.). If management chooses to select from non competitive candidates or use alternate sources (e.g., Veterans Readjustment Authority [VRA] appointments, transfer placements to correct Equal Employment Opportunity deficiencies), spouse preference generally will not apply. If management wants to select from a competitive list of applicants, a spouse preference eligible, who is ranked among the most qualified, must be selected for the position, unless an exception is granted by the local commander. If more than one spouse is determined to be the best qualified, management may select any one of the best qualified military spouse.

What paperwork do I need to provide to the CPO when I register?

Your application for spousal preference should include the following information: A written application for Federal employment. The names of the installations, activities, or locations at which you are requesting preference. The announcement numbers or position titles for which you are applying. Your most recent performance appraisal. Copies of the most recent Notification of Personnel Action (SF-50) and any other SF-50 to verify Federal service. A copy of your spouse's official Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders, or written evidence which verifies your eligibility.

When you are ready to submit your application, check with your local CPO to make sure that your application package meets local requirements. Refusal to participate in the merit process by not providing required forms, such as supplemental forms which address your knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) relative to a specific job, is considered a declination and may terminate spouse preference entitlement.

Where can I get more information?

Any nearby Defense agency civilian personnel office will be able to provide more detailed information about this program, any specific local procedures, listings of positions or actual vacancies at the installation, and general

employment or special entitlement information. Ask to speak with the military spouse family member employment coordinator. Specialists at the installation family center (referred to as Army Community Service Centers, Air Force Airman & Family Readiness Centers, and Navy or Marine Corps Family Service Centers) can also assist military spouses with the job search by providing employment information and assisting with job search skills necessary to locate employment in the localities surrounding the installation. Spouses who will relocate to areas with limited Federal employment are also encouraged to use other existing automated systems and the Transition Bulletin Board, as well as the installation family centers to locate additional employment opportunities. These automated networks are accessible through the installation's transition office, the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) office, or at the installation family center.