

FYY2022 NDAA Military Personnel Issues: Preservation of the Force and Family Program

November 4, 2021

Background

The [United States Special Operations Command](#) (USSOCOM) is the [Unified Combatant Command](#) (COCOM) responsible for training and equipping Special Operations Forces (SOF) of the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force. Since at least 2001, frequent deployments, high personnel tempo ([PERSTEMPO](#)), and combat exposure have [stressed](#) SOF personnel and their families. Combat exposure [has been associated](#) with higher risks of negative mental and behavioral health outcomes like post-traumatic stress (PTS), suicidality, and substance misuse. There is [some evidence](#) that military personnel may decline to seek treatment or support for these conditions due to perceived negative career consequences or “stigma”. Deployments have also [been found](#) to negatively impact familial relationships and well-being of military spouses and children.

In 2010, in an effort to address these issues, USSOCOM launched a resiliency [initiative](#), currently known as the Preservation of the Force and Family ([POTFF](#)) program. In 2013, POTFF first received congressional authorization to fund SOF-specific family support pilot programs beyond family programs offered by the military departments. In 2017, Congress made the authority permanent in the FY2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA; P.L. 115-91; codified under [10 U.S.C §1788a](#)).

USSOCOM describes [POTFF](#) as “an integrated, embedded, and multi-domain model to maximize human performance through increased access to services, improve[d] continuity of programs, and minimize[d] stigma associated with seeking care.” POTFF initiatives cover five performance domains, (1) Physical, (2) Psychological/Behavioral, (3) Spiritual, (4) Social/Family, and (5) Cognitive (see **Figure 1**). For example, the family domain includes family workshops and training tied to the SOF deployment cycles to assist in preparation and reintegration.

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IN11791

Figure I. POTFF Performance Domains

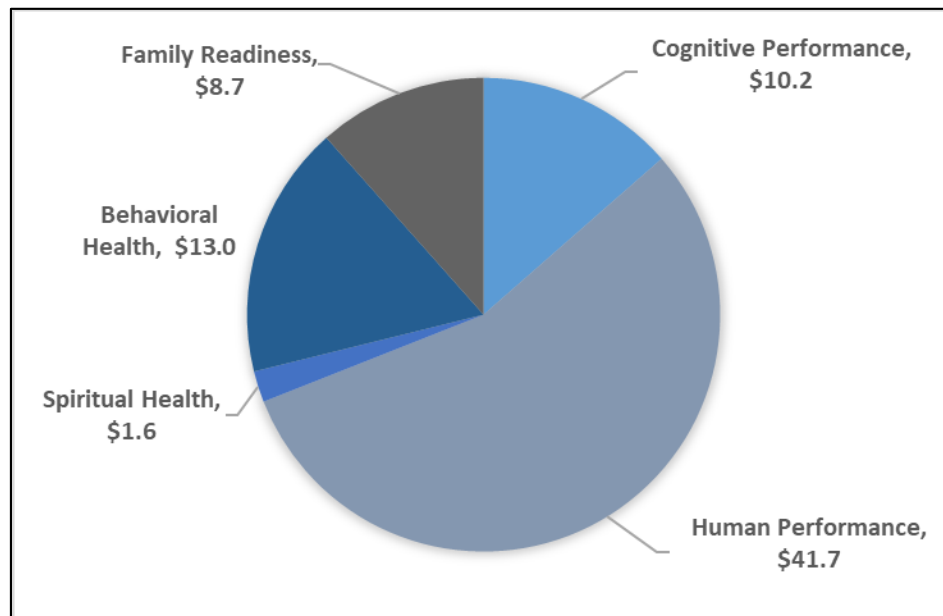
Domain	Description of Services	Types of Resources
Human Performance (Physical)	Physical conditioning, exercise physiology, nutrition guidance, and rehabilitative support/physical therapy	Human: Physical therapists, strength coaches, athletic trainers, and dieticians Capital: Gyms/rehabilitation facilities, exercise equipment
Psychological	Behavioral health counseling/therapy	Human: Licenses clinical social workers, nurse case managers, psychologists, and psychiatrists
Spiritual	Workshops, retreats, counseling	Human: Military chaplains and chaplain assistants
Social/Family Readiness	Family and community social activities and programs	Human: Family readiness program staff, family life counselors, military chaplains and chaplain assistants
Cognitive	Brain health, cognitive function support, and mental skills training,	Human: Sports psychologists and cognitive performance specialists

Source: USSOCOM, “[About POTFF](#),” accessed July 28, 2021; [DOD Comptroller](#), “[Fiscal Year 2022 President’s Budget: United States Special Operations Command](#),” May 2021, p. 151.

Notes: In various documents, domains have different names. Under “*Types of Resources*,” *Human* denotes individual people, and *Capital* denotes physical assets.

Typically, individual military departments fund and administer separate family readiness programs and services under [10 U.S.C. §1788](#). USSOCOM has an additional authority (under [10 U.S.C §1788a](#)) to expend up to \$10 million annually from [Major Force Program 11](#) funds for SOF-specific family support. This authority limits funding to services that provide a “direct and concrete impact on the readiness of special operations forces, but that are not being provided by the Secretary of a military department to the immediate family members of members of the armed forces assigned to special operations forces.” USSOCOM’s FY2022 POTFF [budget request](#) is \$75.2 million, of which \$8.7 million is under the family readiness domain and \$66.5 million is for the remainder of the POTFF domains (see **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.**).

Figure 2. FY2022 USSOCOM Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Budget Request for the POTFF Program
(millions)



Source: USSOCOM, FY2022 Budget Estimates, DOD Comptroller, “Fiscal Year 2022 President’s Budget: United States Special Operations Command,” May 2021, pp. 151-158.

Notes: Family readiness funds are governed by limitations under 10 U.S.C. §1788a.

Congressional oversight of POTFF has focused on the balance of program spending across domains and associated impacts on SOF unit, individual, and family readiness. Provisions in the House-passed Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (FY2022 NDAA) would expand USSOCOM’s authority to fund family support programs and would require assessments of programming under the human performance domain (see Table 1).

Table 1. Selected FY2022 NDAA Legislative Proposals

House-passed H.R. 4350	Senate Armed Services Committee-passed S. 2792
Section 563 would expand family support programs to survivors of SOF servicemembers who died in a combat-related incident.	No similar provisions
Section 569C would require the USSOCOM Commander to assess the effectiveness of POTFF efforts under the human performance domain.	
Section 569D would require a GAO review of POTFF activities and outcomes under the human performance domain.	

Source: Congressional Research Service

Discussion

Section 563 of the House-passed bill would expand eligibility for POTFF family support under 10 U.S.C. §1788a to immediate family members (i.e., spouse and child(ren)) of a servicemember who died in a combat-related incident. The determination of a qualifying incident would use the same criteria as defined

for a [combat-related disability](#) under 10 U.S.C. §1413a(e)(2). This provision does not include any additional budget authority. Family members of those who die in combat-related incidents are also eligible for [other survivor benefits](#) provided by the military departments and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

USSOCOM uses servicemember survey responses and program participation rates to evaluate efficacy of POTFF programs. A 2016 review of POTFF evaluation metrics by the MITRE Corporation found that “there are not enough data to link the program to specific outcomes. However, the literature review and information gained during site visits provide reasonable supporting evidence that the program should have a positive effect.” USSOCOM has since reported that it is continuing to work with [academic partners](#) to collect and analyze data, [develop tools](#) for optimizing performance across all domains, and apply standardized assessment metrics.

USSOCOM has attributed several positive outcomes to programs conducted as part of the human performance domain, to include decreased injuries during training; improved speed, agility, power, strength, and body composition; increased access to preventative care (physical therapists/strength and condition coaches); and a 75% return to operational status for individuals within the [Warrior Care Program](#). Sections 569C and D of the House-passed bill would require USSOCOM and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct assessments focused on the sufficiency and efficacy of programming under the human performance domain. The provision specifies that these reports shall include an assessment of “the unique needs of members of special operations forces, including women and minorities.”

The Senate committee-passed bill does not include provisions related to POTFF programs. The Senate may consider these or other proposals during the FY2022 [defense authorization](#) and appropriations process.

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