



FY2026 NDAA: Military Child Care Programs

February 3, 2026

Overview

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026 (FY2026 NDAA, P.L. P.L. 119-60) was enacted on December 18, 2025. This law included several provisions related to military child care programs (see **Table 1**). The Department of Defense (DOD), which is using a secondary designation as the Department of War following [Executive Order 14247](#) dated September 5, 2025, operates the largest employer-sponsored child care program in the United States, [serving approximately 200,000 children](#) of servicemembers and DOD civilians. The FY2026 NDAA enacts changes to some of [DOD's child development programs \(CDPs\)](#) including enhanced regulations for DOD-operated child development centers (CDCs), and increased subsidies for the [Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood \(MCCYN\) fee assistance program](#) for qualified private care centers in designated communities. The FY2026 NDAA also extends DOD's [Child Care in Your Home](#) pilot under the fee assistance program that allows eligible families to receive subsidies for care from a qualified provider (e.g., a babysitter or nanny) in their home.

Table 1. Selected Child Care Provisions in the FY2026 NDAA

| House-passed (H.R. 3838) | Senate-passed (S. 2296) | Enacted (P.L. 119-60) |
|---|------------------------------|---|
| <p>Sec. 571 would have amended 10 U.S.C. §1794 to require covered child and youth programs to notify parents and guardians within 24 hours of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect of a child and would require 72-hour notice to the Armed Services Committees and Members in whose jurisdiction the abuse occurred.</p> | <p>No similar provision.</p> | <p>Sec. 581 requires the CDC director to notify a parent or guardian when child abuse is suspected to have occurred at a military CDC not later than 24 hours after child care employee learns of such an incident. The enacted provision does not include the congressional notification requirement.</p> |
| <p>Sec. 576 would have prohibited appropriated funds to be used for the termination of a military child care employee “unless the employee was documented as not performing or engaging in misconduct.”</p> | <p>No similar provision.</p> | <p>Sec. 585 prohibits appropriated funds to be used for the termination of a military child care employee unless the employee “was documented as not performing or engaging in misconduct”, or there were changes in staffing requirements due to enrollment.</p> |

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| House-passed (H.R. 3838) | Senate-passed (S. 2296) | Enacted (P.L. 119-60) |
|---|--|--|
| Sec. 574 would have extended a pilot program to provide financial assistance to members of the Armed Forces for in-home childcare to December 31, 2029. | No similar provision. | Sec. 586 adopts the House provision. |
| Sec. 572 would have established a 5-year pilot program to increase the maximum amount of child care financial assistance by 30% for children who are 2 years or younger and located in areas with high child care service costs. | No similar provision. | Sec. 589D adopts the House provision to authorize a 5-year pilot program with a technical amendment to require annual (vice semiannual) reports to Congress and to amend the scope of those reports. |
| Not enacted | | |
| Sec. 573 would have authorized a DOD pilot program to provide grants to eligible childcare providers seeking to expand the capacity of childcare for infants and toddlers. | No similar provision. | Not adopted. The Joint Explanatory Statement notes that “another section under this Act includes an authority to improve access to childcare services in high-cost areas.” |
| Sec. 577 would have required a report on the staffing of, and access to, military child development centers for members of the Armed Forces and their families. | Sec. 559 would have required a report on unmet need for child care in certain areas. | Not adopted. The Joint Explanatory Statement notes that section 586 of the FY2025 NDAA (P.L. 118-159) already requires annual briefings on unmet childcare needs in certain areas. |
| No similar provision. | Sec. 556 would have authorized DOD to take actions to expand child care options for military families. | Not adopted. The Joint Explanatory Statement notes that DOD is currently implementing a new staffing and compensation model intended to help close gaps between early childcare needs and eligible providers. |
| No similar provision. | Sec. 558 would have authorized a pilot program to increase compensation and benefits for CDC employees. | Not adopted. The Joint Explanatory Statement notes the projected implementation of the new staffing and compensation model. |

Source: CRS analysis of legislation on Congress.gov.

Discussion

Child Abuse Reporting

There has been long-standing statutory requirements for child abuse prevention and safety at military CDCs under [10 U.S.C. §1794](#). Nonetheless, notification requirements of suspected abuse have not always been standard across the military departments. In response to parental notification recommendations by the [DOD Inspector General](#), DOD released a [December 18, 2024 memorandum](#) requiring child care staff to notify the parents or legal guardians of children and youth who are impacted by an allegation of child abuse or neglect no later than 24 hours after child and youth program staff are made aware of the allegation. [Section 581](#) of the enacted FY2026 NDAA adopts a House-passed provision and codifies this 24-hour notification requirement.

Child Care Staffing

The military services employ a combination of [appropriated fund \(APF\)](#) and [non-appropriated fund \(NAF\)](#) workers as direct care providers in their CDCs. Salary and benefits fall under federally determined pay tables.

In early 2025, Secretary Hegseth announced plans to [reduce](#) and [reorganize](#) DOD civilian staff. These plans, along with broader Administration efforts to [cut the federal workforce through a hiring freeze](#) and to terminate programs related to [“diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility \(DEIA\)”](#) were reportedly followed by some confusion and concern among military families, DOD education activity (DODEA) [teachers](#), and [child care workers](#). [Section 585](#) of the enacted FY2026 NDAA prohibits appropriated funds from being used to terminate the employment of teachers and child care workers under conditions not related to performance, misconduct, or (in the case of child care centers) enrollment changes that lead to staff reductions.

Several provisions in earlier House and Senate versions of the bill would have required DOD to expand efforts to recruit and retain child care staff or otherwise expand and report on staffing capacity. [Section 589A](#) of the FY2025 NDAA (P.L. 118-159) required DOD to redesign its child care staffing model and compensation system and to begin implementation of these reforms by April 1, 2025. The [Joint Explanatory Statement](#) to accompany the FY2026 NDAA notes that DOD is in the process of implementing the new system and that there are existing reporting requirements from the prior year NDAA that cover similar topics to those proposed.

MYCCN Fee Assistance Program

DOD’s MYCCN program, authorized under [10 U.S.C. §1798](#), subsidizes qualified civilian child care providers when families are unable to access military-operated care due to location unavailability or long waitlists. The military services separately administer the funding for this program. The U.S. Coast Guard, under the Department of Homeland Security, has a separate authorization under [14 U.S.C. §2927](#).

The FY2026 NDAA includes a provision (Section 586) to extend the [Child Care in Your Home](#) (CCYH) fee assistance pilot program through December 31, 2029. CCYH is offered at [12 military locations with](#) the “highest demand and longest waitlists” for childcare. This program was first authorized as an expansion of the fee assistance program in the FY2021 NDAA (P.L. 116-283); this legislation also required DOD to provide regular reports to the Armed Services Committees on the number of military families participating in the program.

Fee assistance subsidy levels are based on [total family income](#). Expected family contributions differ for [areas designated as “high-cost.”](#) DOD also sets a provider rate cap, which is the maximum amount allowed for care, including the family’s contribution and the DOD subsidy. The [rate cap for FY2026](#) is \$2,000 per child, per month. [Section 589D](#) of the FY2026 NDAA authorizes a five-year pilot program to increase the maximum subsidy for child care fee assistance by 30% per month, per child two years old or younger and located in areas with high child care service costs. The provision also allows the Secretary of Defense to increase the cap in other areas not designated as high cost, as appropriate through the pilot program. The legislation requires annual reports to Congress on the implementation of this pilot.

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