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From: Mr. Dennis Biddick, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy, (Reserve Affairs/Total Force Integration)
To: Co-Chairmen, Secretary of the Navy's Retiree Council
Subj: SECRETARIAT RESPONSE TO THE 2015 SECRETARY OF THE NAVY'S RETIREE COUNCIL REPORT
Ref: (a) SECNAVINST 5420.169J

The Secretary of the Navy's Retiree Council (SNRC) met at the Washington Navy Yard 3-6 August 2015 pursuant to reference (a). I have reviewed the SNRC 2015 report and am pleased to provide the following responses and actions regarding each issue:

1. Issue 2015-1: Shortage of Mental Healthcare Providers. This is a repeat issue from the 2014 SNRC Report. Retiree access to mental healthcare providers is woefully inadequate. Given current economic and medical trends and a nationwide shortage of Mental Health providers, it is now one of the most intractable large scale issues in healthcare in general. The Tricare provider network reflects this shortage of Mental Health resources. Navy, Marine Corps and Secretariat all concurred with this recommendation in response to the 2013 SNRC report (Issue 2013-7). The Secretariat response to issue 2014-7 indicated that DoN would continue efforts to explore options with the Defense Health Agency (DHA) and behavioral health provider associations to improve Tricare provider acceptance. While the Secretariat's response and ongoing efforts to resolve this high visibility issue is appreciated, the Council requests more detailed feedback to include specific actions taken and metrics providing tangible evidence of improvement. Actions should include: increased funding; engaging/recruiting providers; providing educational, and administrative and financial support to decrease barriers to Tricare participation.

a. Navy Response: Concur. In FY-15 Tricare added 14,022 behavioral health providers to the network; this includes 6 overseas. The Navy is concerned whether Tricare's models fully account for the retiree population when determining adequacy.

b. Marine Corps Response: Concur, with recommendations of the Council.

c. Secretariat Response: The Navy's response stated that 14,022 behavioral health providers were added to the network to include 6 overseas. DASN(RA/TFI) contacted Tricare for clarification on how their model determines the number of required providers. Tricare cannot share the model as it is a proprietary formula used by the contracted regional partners, but did clarify that contracted regional partners use the entire

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TRICARE eligible population. Active duty, reserves, and retirees are all considered when calculating target numbers. Additionally, the total eligible population includes both enrolled (TRICARE Prime) and non-enrolled (TRICARE Standard/Extra).

2. Issue 2015-2: Temporary Disability Retired List (TDRL) Process. Service members (SM) who go through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) process and are found unfit with a Department of Defense (DoD) rating of 30 percent or more are medically retired. There are two retirement lists a SM can be placed on: The Permanent Disability Retired List (PDRL) or the Temporary Disability Retired List (TDRL). If placed on the TDRL, a SM is required to report to a Military Treatment Facility (MTF) every 18 months for up to 5 years for re-evaluation (12 months for Mental Health). For each re-evaluation within the DoN, the Service's retirement branch sends orders to the Marine or Sailor with a reporting date, time, and place. The Navy Physical Evaluation Board (PEB) then determines if the SM fits into one of three categories: 1) move to the PDRL; 2) retain on the TDRL and report again in 12/18 months for another re-evaluation; or, 3) change the disability rating to below 30 percent and the SM is dropped off the retirement list and separated from the service. The Council recommends an analysis and evaluation of the benefit of continuing the use of TDRL as an outcome of the IDES process. Council also recommends eliminating and/or modifying the TDRL designation if determined not to be effective.

a. Navy Response: Concur. The Assistant Secretary of Defense, Health Affairs (ASD HA) submitted proposal HA-003-17, which would reduce the maximum tenure of Service members placed on TDRL, due to an injury or illness eligible for disability retirement, from five years to three. HA-003-17 is currently in the Defense Legislative Plan (DLP), located in the first tranche (#051).

b. Marine Corps Response: Concur, with recommendations of the Council.

c. Secretariat Response: Concur with Navy's Response. DoD forwarded to Congress a legislative proposal to reduce the tenure of members on the TRDL from 5 to 3 years as part of the FY17 legislative cycle. This proposal was included in the Senate Armed Services Committee's mark-up of the FY17 NDAA as "SEC. 534. REDUCTION OF TENURE ON THE TEMPORARY DISABILITY RETIRED LIST." This section was ultimately not adopted in the full Senate bill and, likewise, was not included in the House version of the FY17 NDAA. It remains to be seen whether the proposal will be resurrected in conference. If the legislative proposal is unsuccessful during the FY17 cycle, the Secretariat will continue monitoring and possibly resubmit.

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3. Issue 2015-3: Concurrent Receipt of Military Pay and Disability Compensation Benefits for all Disabled Retirees. The 2004 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) allows military retirees with a combined Veterans Affairs (VA) disability rating of at least 50 percent and with at least 20 years of service to receive both a full military retired pension and full VA disability compensation benefits. This benefit is known as Concurrent Retirement and Disability Payment (CRDP), which was phased in over a 10-year period. However military retirees with a VA rated disability of 40 percent or less are still required to waive a portion of their military retirement pay to receive compensation, which is known as the VA Disability Offset or VA waiver. This offset is currently in effect for approximately 450,000 retirees. Examples of both: If sailor A, with no dependents, has a VA disability rating of 50 percent, the entitlement is full military retirement pay (taxable) plus an additional \$1,551.48 in VA compensation. If Sailor B, with no dependents, has a VA disability rating of 40 percent, the entitlements is reduced military retirement pay in the amount of the VA disability (non-taxable amount of \$587.36). Other than military personnel, no other federal retirement annuitant has their retirement reduced because they receive disability compensation from the DVA for service-connected wounds, injuries or illnesses. Council recommends DoN support of initiatives referred to Congress to enact legislation amending Title 10 of the United States Code to include language providing an expansion of the CRDP entitlement to all military retirees, regardless of the VA disability rating.

a. Navy Response: Concur. Defer to DoD for cost benefit analysis.

b. Marine Corps Response: Concur, with recommendations of the Council.

c. Secretariat Response: While not opposed to expanding CRDP to include all disabled retirees in receipt of VA compensation, it is important to caveat that such an expansion of concurrent benefits would cost approximately \$35 billion over a ten year period according to the DoD Office of the Actuary. Department of the Navy cannot propose this legislation without an equivalent budgetary offset.

4. Issue 2015-4: Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC)/Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) Offset. SBP and DIC are two separate and distinct programs. DIC is an entitlement and SBP is a purchased insurance program. DIC is a DVA program providing \$1,254.00 per month (\$15,048 per year) for survivors of veterans whose death is determined to have been caused by military service. Under current law, survivors who are eligible for both SBP and DIC must forfeit one dollar of their SBP annuity for every dollar of DIC received from the DVA. Often, the offset cancels out the SBP annuity. In such cases, the survivor receives a proportional refund of SBP premiums with no interest

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on what may have been many years of premium payments. No other surviving spouses receiving a Federal annuity are required to forfeit it because of service-connected death (the offset does not apply to surviving military children). SBP should not be offset by DIC.

a. Navy Response: Concur. Legislation H.R. 1594; the Military Surviving Spouse Equity Act pursues the elimination of this offset. H.R. 1594 was referred to the House Committee on Armed Services on March 24, 2015 and referred to the House Committee on Military Personnel on August 13, 2015.

b. Marine Corps Response: Concur, with recommendations of the Council.

c. Secretariat Response: This recommendation is in opposition to DoD's long-standing formal position opposing elimination of the SBP-DIC offset. Doing so would create inequity compared to beneficiaries who are not eligible for both by creating a group of survivors receiving two government-subsidized survivor annuities. Survivors of most military retirees and survivors of veterans who did not serve to retirement would receive only one. There are over 350,000 DIC recipients and over 280,000 SBP recipients across DoD, with an overlap between the programs of about 70,000. Elimination of the offset would provide an enhanced lifetime annuity for this group of 70,000 that would be inequitable to that received by survivors entitled to only DIC or SBP, but not both. Additionally, the high cost of eliminating the SBP offset for all survivors entitled to DIC – more than \$7 billion over 10 years – makes the proposal's success unlikely. H.R. 1594 has not progressed beyond sub-committee and was not included in either the House or Senate's FY17 NDAA bills.

Additionally, beneficiaries who are subject to the offset of SBP annuities because of DIC are eligible for the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA). SSIA provides a \$310 monthly allowance (or less if the amount of SBP offset is less than \$310) to such beneficiaries. This provides an increased benefit to survivors who are eligible for both SBP and DIC in comparison to survivors entitled to just one or the other program. Authorized in the FY08 NDAA, SSIA has been renewed on a year to year basis since. The House's version of the FY17 NDAA includes this one-year expansion of SSIA. The Senate's version of the FY17 NDAA makes SSIA payment permanent.

5. Issue 2015-5: Extension of Presumption of Exposure to Agent Orange to the "Blue Water" Navy. This issue is a repeat from the 2014 SNRC Report. The Council is aware of two pending bills: H.R. 969 and S.B. 681 which addresses this issue and awaits their passage and signature by the President. The Council is also aware of recent softening of the DVA's position which, while not a direct commitment to this proposal, does reflect a more receptive view of this issue pending passage of the above bills. While, and until,

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the above bills are passed, the Council will carry this as an active item. If pending the DVA's position which, while not a direct commitment to this proposal, does reflect a more receptive view of this issue pending passage of the above bills. While, and until, the above bills are passed, the Council will carry this as an active item. If pending legislation fails, or is delayed, the 2016 Council intends to resubmit and elevate the issue for Navy concurrence and commitment.

a. Navy Response: Concur. H.R. 969 was referred to the House Committee of Veteran Affairs on February 14, 2015. A hearing on S.B. 681 was held by the Committee on Veteran Affairs on May 13, 2015.

b. Marine Corps Response: Concur, with recommendations of the Council.

c. Secretariat Response: H.R. 969 and S. 681 remain in subcommittee since initial assignment to the respective committees on Veterans Affairs last February. The Secretariat will continue to monitor this legislation through OLA and will update the Council as appropriate.

6. Issue 2015-6: Raising the Priority of Transitional Housing for Single Parent Veterans With Children. This issue is a modified repeats from the 2014 SNRC to address not only military retirees but rather veterans in general, including junior medically-retired veterans. There are a growing number of single parent (primarily female) homeless veterans with children, and insufficient transitional housing for them in most areas. MOUs between the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and community housing entities are insufficient to address the need. Prior to the Hearth Act of 2009, families had priority for HUD housing. The current priorities are: Chronically homeless, single veterans, and families. Many shelters do not accept or service multiple-person parties. In some cases the waiting time for housing is 1 ½ to 2 years. Also in many cases, temporary shelters do not allow occupation during daytime hours. The DVA, in conjunction with the HUD should realign priorities and revise the terms of the VASH (Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing) vouchers to extend them beyond the current maximum of four months in commercial housing to a case-by-case basis.

a. Navy Response: Concur. Defer to the DVA and HUD.

b. Marine Corps Response: Concur, with recommendations of the Council.

c. Secretariat Response. DASN(RA/TFI) has engaged directly with VA's National Director of HUD-VA Supportive Housing and VHA Homeless Programs, as well as the VA Director of the Grant and Per Diem Program. VA indicated no plans to modify

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priority or change the voucher program. Next step will be for DASN(RA/TFI) to confer with OSD's Office of DoD-VA Collaboration for guidance in determining DoD's position.

7. Issue 2015-7: Space Available (Space A) Transportation for Selected Surviving Retiree Family Spouses. This issue is a modified repeat from the 2014 SNRC to specifically target overseas survivors. When the retiree dies, surviving family members no longer have Space A privileges. In many cases, the family is no longer able to travel due to their inability to afford the cost of an airline ticket. In such cases, a surviving spouse living overseas may lose the opportunity to visit relatives, including children and grandchildren living in the U.S. In response to SNRC 2014 Report Issue 2014-23, both Navy and Marine Corps concurred that all surviving spouses should maintain Space A privileges. SECNAV indicated DoN would coordinate with the other Service's to ascertain whether they concur with this request. If so, a change recommendation to OSD's governing body will be initiated. The Council looks forward to future positive developments.

a. Navy Response: Concur. The Army and Air Force Retiree Councils strongly support the immediate revision of any pertinent DoD directives, instructions, policy and regulations to permit surviving spouses of Retirees to fly Space A on military aircraft as category VI personnel, including addressing specific categories such as widows living overseas. Defer to ASN to initiate a change recommendation.

b. Marine Corps Response: Concur, with recommendations of the Council.

c. Secretariat Response: The Secretariat has investigated the feasibility of a modification to DoDI 1415.13, "*Air Transportation Eligibility*." Expansion of Space A eligibility is unlikely in the short-term. In 2012, S. 2112 was introduced in the Senate to expand Space A eligibility to include, among other changes, "(3) *An unremarried widow or widower of an active or reserve component member of the armed forces.*" Ultimately, this legislation was not forwarded out of committee.

As a result of this legislative proposal, though, the FY12 NDAA directed GAO "to review DoD's space-available travel program" to determine, "the effect that an increase in eligible travelers will have on the usage of the space available program, adherence to DoD's original intent for the program, and air terminal logistics and maintenance." GAO concluded in its report, "if the program were to be expanded to include overseas travel for gray-area retirees... and travel for widows or widowers and their dependents, officials anticipate that an additional \$1.2 million per year in fuel costs and an additional \$646,000 per year in manpower costs for processing travelers in terminals would be

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incurred. These estimates assume only the number of unused seats in calendar year 2011 (about 57,000) would be filled.”

Consequently, during staffing for the reissuance of DoDI 1415.13 in 2015, ADUSD (Transportation Policy) cited this study as a reason for not expanding Space A travel beyond current eligibility. The Secretariat will continue to monitor this issue and will work with OPNAV N41 to seek opportunities to revisit eligibility for Space A travel in the future.

8. Issue 2015-8: Exposure to Residual Radiation Aboard Navy Nuclear-Powered Vessels is Suspected to Cause Cancer in Some Veterans Who Served Aboard Nuclear-Powered Vessels Outside of Reactor/Propulsion Spaces in Non-Nuclear Occupations. Sailors who served onboard nuclear-powered aircraft carriers in non-nuclear occupations have reported instances of cancer, particularly prostate cancer, which is not consistent with family history. These Sailors report that they were not required to wear a thermoluminescent dosimeter (TLD). Therefore, these Sailors do not have specific evidence of exposure. Veteran's claims should be investigated and a determination made of the need for a presumptive illness category to cover these individuals. Determine if there is evidence to support increased risk of cancer in non-nuclear Sailors assigned to nuclear-powered vessels. If so, a commensurate disability rating should be assigned.

a. Navy Response: Non-Concur. The VA claims process determines whether or not a disease or illness is a result of their exposure to ionizing radiation during military service. 38 CFR 3.311(b) (2) provides a complete listing of the diseases associated with ionizing radiation, which includes forms of cancer.

b. Marine Corps Response: Concur, with recommendations of the Council.

c. Secretariat Response: VA responded that they are aware of this issue. Rather than grant presumptive coverage, the VA recommends veterans use the claims process for VA disability determination. The claims process will determine if a disease/illness was a result of the Veteran being exposed to ionizing radiation during military service. A complete listing of diseases/illnesses are contained within 38 CFR 3.311(b) (2) (Claims based on exposure to ionizing radiation), to include different forms of cancer. The Veteran must meet the eligibility and evidence requirements to support their claim through VA, although TLD readings are not required to prove exposure.

9. Issue 2015-9: Tricare Provider Network Expansion Overseas, Especially in Former Troop Concentration Areas; as Part of an Overall Effort to Expand Tricare Acceptance Worldwide. OCONUS Tricare beneficiaries are dependent upon Tricare network

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providers. The number of Tricare providers overseas is often insufficient. It is common for overseas providers to require a patient to pay for a surgery, test or procedure in advance before treatment starts. It can be difficult for many retirees to pay these up-front costs, and as a result, many conditions may go untreated. If an overseas provider is allowed to join the Tricare network and agrees to accept Tricare as an insurer, it would usually not true for these remote retiree communities. Recommend Secretary of the Navy take action to encourage Tricare efforts to increase the number of providers overseas, especially in areas surrounding former U.S. military concentration areas. This would be a complementary effort overseas to mirror ongoing efforts by DHA to increase Tricare acceptance within CONUS.

a. Navy Response: Concur. In FY-15 Tricare added 189 non-network participating overseas providers; however, the number of network providers decrease by 5. As stated in Issue 2015-1, the current process to determine the number of required providers is based on the Active Duty members and their families, not Retirees. The current Tricare model shows they have the appropriate number of network providers and there is no plan to change the policy. Defer to DHA for further updates.

b. Marine Corps Response: Concur, with recommendations of the Council.

c. Secretariat Response: DASN(RA/TFI) contacted Tricare to discuss. Tricare representatives indicated their regional contractors use proprietary models to determine the number of required providers. They disagreed with Navy's assessment that the models do not take into account retirees. Active duty, reserves, and retirees are all considered when calculating target numbers. Additionally, the total eligible population includes both enrolled (TRICARE Prime) and non-enrolled (TRICARE Standard/Extra). Will continue working with Tricare to determine if this issue needs further resolution.

10. Issue 2015-10: Tricare Eye Care Coverage. This is a repeat issue from the SNRC 2014 Report. The Tricare Eye Exam benefit is not consistent with the recommendations of the American Optometric Association (AOA). Currently, only Tricare Prime enrollees are entitled to eye exams every two years. Retirees enrolled in Tricare Standard, Tricare Extra, and Tricare Retired Reserve are not provided eye care coverage. The Secretariat response to issue 2014-6 stated: "The Department is investigating the possibility of Tricare beneficiaries to enroll in Federal Employee Dental and Vision Plan, which could cover an annual eye examination." Unless this benefit can be provided without additional cost, it does not meet the intent of the 2014 SNRC recommendations (AOA guidelines prescribe that an eye exam should be performed once every two years up to the age of 61 and annually thereafter). This benefit should be provided through Tricare or at no additional cost through the Federal Employee Plan or other similar plans.

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- a. Navy Response: Concur. Defer to ASN (M&RA) for update.
- b. Marine Corps Response: Concur, with recommendations of the Council.
- c. Secretariat Response: American Optometric Association does recommend that an eye exam be performed every two years. Tricare Prime Enrollees currently are entitled to one eye exams every two years. Eye Exam Coverage is not covered for Tricare Standard, Tricare Extra or Tricare Retired Reserve. However; Tricare Prime is available for Retirees and their families. Adding eye exam coverage to all Tricare plans is deemed unfeasible by Tricare due to cost.

11. Issue 2015-11: Tricare Enrollment Fees/Premiums are not Pre-Tax Payments. This issue is a repeat from the 2014 SNRC Report. Generally, in the public and private sector, these deductions are taken on a pre-tax basis IAW Internal Revenue Code, Section 125. Under current federal tax law however, Tricare premiums paid by retirees do not qualify as a pre-tax benefit and Tricare premiums must be deducted on a post-tax basis. This is more costly to the retiree. In both 2013 and 2014, SNRC recommended that legislation be proposed to qualify Tricare fees as a pre-tax benefit. Navy and Secretariat both concurred with this recommendation in response to the 2013 SNRC Report (Issue 1013-10). In response to Issue 2014-18, the Navy response was: "OPNAV N1 will initiate a Unified Legislation and Budgeting (ULB) proposal via OPNAV N1X." This Navy response was gratefully welcomed by the Council, and the efforts of OPNAV N1 are encouraging to all retirees. Council recommends these positive actions be aggressively continued.

- a. Navy Response: Concur. Navy actively working on Legislative Proposal for FY19.
- b. Marine Corps Response: Concur, with recommendations of the Council.
- c. Secretariat Response: Navy submitted a ULB for FY-19. ASN (M&RA) will continue to track the ULB proposal and report to Council.

12. Issue 2015-12: Retiree Activities Office (RAO) Communications With Retirees. This issue is a modified repeat from the 2014 SNRC Report. Presently, there is no unified communication venue to communicate with all retirees, whether the retiree transitioned from active duty or the Selected Reserve. There should be an avenue to contact retirees via email. The email listings may come from the Defense Finance & Accounting Service (DFAS), Navy Personnel Command (NPC) or the Marine Corps; or members may self-elect to add themselves to an email list. An email system may be divided into subgroups to "e-blast" all retirees or may be able to target retirees by region

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(via their zip code), depending upon how the email contact system is initiated. This communication tool will enable RAOs the ability to communicate regional events or timely information of interest to the retired members. The email form of communication will also allow "two-way" communication between the Retiree and the RAO. Create a system to be provided to the RAO to communicate via email with regional Retirees. The system could be a "ListServe" type system or any other means determined to be advantageous to the RAO. The initial email list may be obtained from DFAS or other databases. There is discussion to add the service member email address to the DD-214 (with ability to opt out). The addition of a voluntary online enrollment webpage, or something similar, will also allow DoN to collect more updated contact information for communicating with its Retirees. The DoN/Marine Corps can also have this communication channel to communicate other needs and information to its Retirees as it may deem important to operations, recruiting or other public affairs needs.

a. Navy Response: Non-Concur. A system to reach Retirees by email is already in place. DFAS-SmartDocs@mail.mil is currently the unified system used by DFAS to communicate important information to military Retirees. SmartDocs retrieves email addresses from the MyPay System and bulk emails are disseminated with information to Active Duty and Retirees. However, according to DFAS, only 50 percent of military Retirees have signed up for a MyPay account. As a result of the Council's recommendation, Retired Activities Office Directors have been provided the requirements for submitting emails to DFAS for the purpose of distributing information to Retirees in their specific zip codes. In addition, the Navy Retired Activity Program Office will actively assist DFAS with encouraging Retirees to sign up for a MyPay Account. Articles will also be periodically published in the Retired Activities Newsletter "Shift Colors" and MyPay sign up information will be made available at Annual Retiree Appreciation Day Seminars.

b. Marine Corps Response: Concur, with recommendations of the Council.

c. Secretariat Response: DFAS SmartDocs is the appropriate system to widely disseminate information to all retirees. The Navy Retired Activity Program Office will continue working to ensure more retirees utilize MyPay and update their email addresses.

13. Issue 2015-13: Retired Activities Role for Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC) and Regional Commanders. Unlike the Army, the Navy's Personnel Support Detachment (PSD) does not provide services to retirees beyond their retirement date. All post retirement services to Retirees are provided by an all-volunteer RAO, if available, and through various veteran services agencies and organizations. OPNAV Instruction 1720.3F contains limited guidance for Commander, Naval Installations

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Command (CNIC) with respect to Retired Activities. The instruction (Para 3.c.), states: "CNIC will provide assistance to regional coordinators and liaison with the Retired Activities Program Office to ensure the SECNAV directed program meets the needs of regional coordinator. Further, there is no guidance or definition for regional commanders on the designation and duties of regional coordinators. In paragraph 4.e.(1)(d) of the same instruction, the formation of Retired Activities Offices (RAOs) is discussed in some detail, but the entire responsibility for determining the need for, and taking action to open an RAO is left completely to base Commanding Officers. The potential role of a regional coordinator to coordinate placement of RAOs or carry out other retiree specific matters is not mentioned.

- a. Navy Response: Concur. OPNAVINST 1720.3F is currently under formal review and update by all stakeholders. As part of the review, the feasibility of funding/appointing Regional RAO Coordinators is being coordinated.
- b. Marine Corps Response: Concur, with recommendations of the Council.
- c. Secretariat Response: Concur with Navy's response. Revision of the applicable instruction is ongoing. The Secretariat will continue to track and notify the Council upon determination of feasibility of funding Regional RAO Coordinators.

14. Issue 2015-14: Transition Benefits Preparation for Navy Reserve Force Selected Reserve (SELRES) Retirees. Presently, there is no unified transition to retirement briefing for SELRES members who are retiring. Complicating this is that many SELRES members may retire several years before they are eligible for retirement and members are not eligible for retirement pay or Tricare benefits until after the age 60." Even if a SELRES member attends a transition briefing at time of retirement, that briefing may become outdated or forgotten while the member waits in the "grey area." The DoN should provide notice to the retired "grey area" member a full six months before turning age 60 of their authorization to attend an transitional briefing as a refresh or to help prepare them for filing requests for pay and health care benefits. Presently, Navy Personnel Command (NPC) sends out a retirement authorization letter six months prior to the member's 60th birthday to remind the SELRES to submit their retirement application. DoN/NPC/Marine Corps direct a consistent transition benefits briefing to occur at two points in a SELRES career: Once within 60 days of date of retirement and a second time six months prior to age 60. DoN/NPC/Marine Corps could elect to provide an online instructional video series to accomplish the briefing to back-up a live presentation accessible on the public internet; or to provide the briefings on a monthly schedule via webinars on the public internet. Recommend NPC provide a notice letter to the "grey area" retiree six months prior to turning age 60 which should include the point capture form for the member to review.

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a. Navy Response: Non-Concur. The DVA currently provides a Summary of VA Benefits Brief for National Guard, Reserve Members and Veterans. A link to the Veteran Affairs Webpage is available on the Navy Reserve Webpage at (<http://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/Pages/ForReserve.aspx>) and on the NPC Retired Activities Webpage (http://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/support/retired_activities/Pages/default.aspx). Grey area Retirees are also authorized to attend Day 5 (VA Benefits Brief I and II) of the Transition GPS course on a space available basis. As a result of this recommendation, the Navy Reserve Retirement Branch (PERS-912) has also modified their retirement instruction letters to include the total points on record, with instructions on how to correct errors or omissions.

b. Marine Corps Response: Concur, with recommendations of the Council.

c. Secretariat Response: Concur with Navy's response.

15. Issue 2015-15: Military Postal Service (MPS) Limitations. Military retirees outside CONUS may send and receive letters and small parcels through the MPS/U.S. Postal system. As a basic quality of life issue, the weight limit on Retiree parcels sent via overseas MPS should be raised to at a minimum of 5 pounds and up to 10 pounds or more. However, in accordance with DoD Directive 4525.6-M, military retirees can only send or receive parcels weighing one pound or less. This imposes great hardships on retirees and their families who reside overseas or who are traveling outside the U.S. Over the years, this issue has been discussed repeatedly and included in other Service Council reports and there seems to be little, if any, resistance to the basic idea of increasing the weight limit. Historically, the main objection was that an increase in Retiree mail weight limits would incur much greater expense to the MPS. The Council believes any increase in mail volume or weight is estimated to be negligible since the retiree community overseas is comparatively small. However, there is no specific data showing the exact cost of increasing weight limits for retiree mail and the precise impact on the military postal system. If this cost could be empirically defined, it would be easier to defend the concept of raising the mailing limits to a more reasonable weight. In the 2014 SNRC Report, IRT Issue 2014-22, the Secretariat stated that the Secretariat's office is awaiting formal review and a cost analysis from military postal service. To date, a test has not been scheduled. Recommend the Secretary of the Navy continue to support, and request other Service Secretaries to continue their support for an increase in the retiree MPS weight limits, and DoN lead the effort to have MPS regulations changed in FY-16.

a. Navy Response: Concur. Defer to ASN (M&RA) for update.

b. Marine Corps Response: Concur, with recommendations of the Council.

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c. Secretariat Response: Currently DUSD (Logistics and Materiel Readiness) restricts the maximum limit of incoming and outgoing mail that retirees and their surviving spouses may send through Military Post Offices to 16 ounces. DoD is opposed to increasing the weight limits due to increased cost.

16. Issue 2015-16: Retirees are Denied Access to Commissary/Navy Exchange (NEX) in Spain. This issue is a repeat from the 2014 SNCR Report. U.S. military retirees and family members, as well as other categories of individuals (such as 100 percent disabled veterans and Medal of Honor recipients) are prohibited from enjoying the privilege of using the U.S. owned and operated Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) and Navy Exchange (NEX) in Spain. Due to an inadvertent oversight in including these categories in the Agreement on Defense Cooperation (ADC) between Spain and the United States, Spain is the only country where U.S. forces are permanently stationed and Exchange/Commissary facilities are located, where U.S. military retirees are prohibited from using those facilities. DoD Instruction 1330.17 authorizes this privilege and all Military retirees, including those living outside of the U.S. should be treated equally. Further details of this issue and background are available in both the 2013 and 2014 SNRC Report. In response to this issue in the 2014 SNRC Report (Issue 2014-21), DASN (RA/TFI) indicated that he would personally engage with OSD policy entities and request coordination on Status of Forces reform. The Council sincerely thanks DASN (RA/TFI) for his attention to this issue and looks forward to positive responses.

a. Navy Response: Concur. ASN (M&RA) is drafting a note to initiate coordination with OSD for a Status of Forces Agreement in Spain.

b. Marine Corps Response: Concur, with recommendations of the Council.

c. Secretariat Response: DASN (RA/TFI) met with OUSD (Policy) to discuss. USD (Policy) is supportive of the Council's recommendation. OUSD (Policy) and ASN (M&RA) will work with DeCA to develop a proposal, and then coordinate with State Department and, potentially, the Defense Attaché's office to inquire about potential solutions in the next ADC. The Council will be advised when a decision is made.


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