

Retention program changes affect NCOs

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(U.S. Army photo)

Career counselors are urging Army Soldiers to read the changes to the Army enlisted force retention program, re-class and initial entry requirements that took effect in 2016.

The changes not only ensure Soldiers are aligned into the fields best suited for them, but offer the most qualified Soldiers avenues for career advancement.

"The key is to re-enlist quality Soldiers to meet our purpose of fulfilling end strength to better posture the Army, maintain readiness and care for Soldiers," said Sgt. Maj. Cielito Pascual-Jackson, Army Training and Doctrine Command career counselor.

"In order to meet that mission we need key people to understand the responsibilities in embracing and communicating this program."

Enlisted force retention

The Army Directive, (AD 2016-19), will result in re-enlistment and career progression changes through three programs: the Bar to Continued Service Program, the Noncommissioned Officer Career Status Program and Retention Control Point System.

Bar to Continued Service Program

Formerly known as the Bar to Re-enlistment Program, all enlisted ranks in the active and Reserve components can be notified of punitive separation due to performance issues ranging from fitness ratings to professional development standards through the Bar to Continued Service Program.

According to Sgt. 1st Class Pedro Leon, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command Retention Operations Active component career counselor, Soldiers can now be barred to continue service at any rank even if they were indefinite or career Soldiers.

Soldiers who are under the current NCO Career Status Program will not be grandfathered into the previous program. The bar will be reviewed at periods of three and six months before separation procedures begin.

Some of the key areas Soldiers should focus on to prevent bar from continued service are (list not all-inclusive):

- Physical assessment standards.

- Staff sergeants with 36 months' time in grade must graduate from the Advanced Leadership Course.
- Sergeant first class' with 36 months' time in grade must graduate from the Senior Leaders Course.
- NCOs with two or more years' time in grade and more than 18 months until their established retention control point may be denied continued service under the Qualitative Service Program.

Career program and time in service retention changes

Under the new directive, the Indefinite Re-enlistment Program has changed to the NCO Career Status Program.

According to Leon, the program is similar in nature, but in an effort to align with the military's new blended retirement system, the application date has been moved to a Soldier's 12th year of service, rather than their 10th.

The directive also reduces retention control point levels, starting at the rank of staff sergeant, by reducing the number of years NCOs can continue to serve.

Every Soldier will have more than a year to plan their retirement as the implementation of the new control points will be staggered based on basic active service dates and rank:

Command sergeant major/sergeant major in nominative positions can stay past 30 years.

Re-class and initial entry changes

When Soldiers re-class or recruits enter the Army they will have to take an occupational physical assessment test that determines if they are able to handle the physical demands of various career fields.

According to Leon, the test will determine a Soldier's or recruit's fitness level, which will directly correlate with jobs available to them. Those who score in the highest level will have every specialty available, while those who score lower will have the jobs at or below their level available.

Soldiers or recruits preparing to take the test should practice the following exercises to ensure they meet their desired specialty requirements.

Standing long jump:

- Minimum: 120 centimeters.
- Standard: 140 centimeters.
- Maximum: 160 centimeters and above.

4.4 pound medicine ball seated power throw:

- Minimum: 350 centimeters.
- Standard: 400 centimeters.
- Maximum: 450 centimeters and above.

Interval aerobic run, similar to suicides at 20 meter timed intervals:

- Minimum: 36 shuttles.
- Standard: 40 shuttles.
- Maximum: 43 shuttles.

Deadlift:

- Minimum: 120 pounds.
- Standard: 140 pounds.
- Maximum: 160 pounds.

Another change to the re-class system is allowing female Soldiers into combat arms professions. Thus far approximately 140 female Soldiers have enlisted into combat arms.

For Leon, this means quality female NCOs must take the opportunity to step up as mentors to these new Soldiers by re-classing into a combat position.

"I tell any female Soldier that comes into my office for career counseling to re-class into a combat position," Leon said. "It's a huge development and promotion opportunity. When you're in a board and they see that you have combat experience, even if it was just for four years and you went back to your original MOS, that's huge."

Soldiers seeking more information on these changes should contact their supervisors and unit career counselors.

"We're a force alignment tool not a force reduction tool," Leon said. "We're here to re-enlist, qualify and transfer Soldiers."

In order to best align Soldiers for their career path, supervisors and leaders must counsel their Soldiers on the new changes and professional development options and specialty paths available, Pascual-Jackson said.

"We are just facilitators, so when leaders don't understand the purpose of the retention program for the Army or where they fit in, it's a real

problem," Pascual-Jackson said. "It can cause confusion and unnecessary actions that could unnecessarily end a Soldier's career."

Pascual-Jackson stressed that the key steps in helping Soldiers are supporting, instilling, promoting, communicating and monitoring retention programs, implementing policies, evaluating personnel, providing resources and utilizing career counselors.

"Our line of effort and the mission of retention for the Army is readiness and end strength," she said. "In order for us to meet our mission, we need leaders to understand their role, which is to embrace and communicate the retention program by instilling the importance to subordinate leaders."