



# For 30 Years, AFAP Has Brought Quality-Of-Life Issues to Forefront

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**J**ust over 30 years ago, on Aug. 15, the Army reached out to its entire family — active and reserve-component Soldiers, their families, retirees, survivors and civilian employees, asking them to identify quality-of-life issues and concerns for review and resolution by Army senior leadership.

It was in 1983 when a ground-breaking white paper on the importance of increasing support to the Army family by then Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. John A. Wickham Jr., put into motion the Army Family Action Plan, or AFAP.

Since inception, AFAP has reviewed 692 quality-of-life issues and resolved 520 of them while classifying 158 as unattainable. Additionally, the plan has been the driving force behind the enactment of 128 pieces of legislation and 184 Department of Defense and U.S. Army changes, while improving 208 programs and services.

Throughout those 30 years, AFAP sponsored traditional conferences at 8th Army in South Korea; U.S. Army Pacific in Hawaii and U.S. Army Europe in Germany. Installations and garrisons within each of those command structures sent representatives to voice quality-of-life concerns and issues which would then be evaluated and forwarded to Washington.

The review process could be laborious and take nearly 18 months to filter through to the Army staff for final approval or disapproval.

As a result of the Army budget crunch and restrictions on travel and conference funding, AFAP made the decision in the spring to move away from the three regional conferences and instead streamline the reporting procedures down to a two-stage process.

"As we transform to a garrison-based Army faced with unprecedented financial constraints, we need the voice of

our customers to help guide and validate the changes the Army is making,” said Christina Vine, who oversees the Headquarters Department of the Army AFAP program, and who is also an Army spouse and mother of twin youngsters.

“Without a successful ground-level AFAP program, the voice of our customers is silenced and senior leaders lose essential situational awareness of what is and is not working in our communities,” she said.

Following local garrison and tenant command AFAP conferences, prioritized issues requiring higher headquarters resolution will be forwarded directly to the assistant chief of staff for installation management, or ACSIM. This does away with running issues through mid-level commands.

Vine said ACSIM leadership would coordinate with the Army staff to consolidate similar issues, then prepare information papers on which of those are viable. A cross-section of constituents from select Army commands will next prioritize the Army staff-vetted issues and return those to ACSIM who tallies and enters the top issues into the AFAP resolution process.

Action officers work the issues and report their progress during reviews chaired by the ACSIM. Those are then reviewed and possibly closed out through the general officer steering committee chaired by the Army vice chief of staff.

Vine said the new process is expected to reduce the resolution time for issues from 18 months to only six. Additionally, she said, it’s expected that 90 percent of AFAP issues will remain at the garrison or unit level

for resolution because they’re garrison-specific policies and procedures.

A few issues presently being reviewed include behavioral health care providers for children; an out-of-area TRICARE 24/7 one-call resolution process that would help beneficiaries DOD-wide; funding of service dogs for wounded warriors; an out-of-the-continental U.S. sex offender registry; and a recommendation to extend from one to three years the time a survivor can invest a Military Death Gratuity and Service Members’ Group Life Insurance into a Roth Individual Retirement Account or a Coverdell Education Savings Account. On the latter, grief studies recommend that life-altering decisions not be made during the first year after the loss of a service member.

“We just closed an issue on the application process for citizenship and residency for Soldiers and families and basically that means they can do all their necessary physicals, fingerprints and everything they would normally have to do at an immigration office at their local military installation,” Vine said. “That’s a huge good-news story for a lot of our service members and their spouses because now they don’t have to make that trek to the immigration office.

“The big thing is we’re retaining the voice of the customer; the foundation in that the customer is still creating the issues,” she said. “Thirty years ago, General Wickham asserted a healthy family environment allows Soldiers to more fully concentrate on their mission, so he set about wanting to get feedback on what could be improved to enhance their standard of living and that’s how we started improving quality of life.” ■



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