

**House Armed Services Committee: SubCommittee on Military Personnel Hearing:
“Exceptional Family Member Program- Are the Military Services Really Taking Care of Family
Members?”**

Congresswoman Escobar – SERVE ACT (H.R. 2767/S. 2673)

February 5, 2020

Background: Thank you Chairwoman and Ranking Member for holding this hearing on the important issue of taking care of our military families. Given it is National Eating Disorders Awareness month, I’d like to discuss the serious mental illness of eating disorders. Eating disorders have the 2nd highest mortality rate out of any psychiatric illness, only 2nd to opioid use; and sadly has a significantly high rate of suicide- 23x higher than the general population. Studies show that eating disorders affect our servicemembers, their families, and veterans at a higher rate than the civilian population, with 21% of military children meeting the screening criteria for an eating disorder, 3x the rate of their civilian peers, and recent studies showing that military children are 2x more likely to engage in disordered eating if a parent is deployed.

This brings to mind two questions:

1. CAPT Simmer (Chief Clinical Officer, TRICARE Health Plans, DHA)

- a. TRICARE permits military families to receive residential treatment for substance use disorder at any age, however, limits residential treatment for psychiatric conditions like eating disorders to under 21 years old. Given that the average age of onset for an eating disorder, such as bulimia and binge eating disorder, occurs between the ages of 21 and 26 years old¹, why does TRICARE limit treatment coverage for military families?

2. Ms. Carolyn Stevens, Director, Office of Military Family Readiness Policy

- a. Given the higher occurrence of eating disorders and disordered eating in military children, can you discuss what the military services is doing to identify and treat eating disorders amongst our families? Are there specific programs that you can discuss with the Committee?

¹ Coffino, J. A., Udo, T., & Grilo, C. M. (2019). Rates of help-seeking in US adults with lifetime DSM-5 eating disorders: prevalence across diagnoses and differences by sex and ethnicity/race. *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, 94(8), 1415-1426.