

ARMY EMERGENCY RELIEF



DATE: 5 NOVEMBER 2020

ASSISTANCE BULLETIN NUMBER: 14-2020

SUBJECT: COVID CHILD CARE RELIEF PROGRAM

1. REFERENCES.

- a. Army Regulation 930-4, dated 5 May 2019
- b. Army Emergency Relief Section Reference Manual (SRM), Chapter 2, dated 15 October 2019

2. APPLICABILITY.

These instructions apply to Headquarters AER, all Army AER Sections, American Red Cross and Other Military Aid Society Offices.

3. BACKGROUND.

Access to high quality, affordable childcare has been a long-standing issue for Army Families prior to the COVID pandemic. In 2019, there were high numbers of military children on waitlists at military Child Development Centers (CDC) nationwide. The Army Fee Assistance Program administered through Childcare Aware of America (CCAoA) provided relief through referrals to DOD approved and accredited off-post Childcare Centers; however, since the pandemic, CDC's and Civilian providers have limited their capacity to comply with safety and social distancing guidelines. CCAoA is working aggressively with the Army on a way ahead for Army Fee Assistance in response to child development center closures. This issue has been further exacerbated by school closures and various school options (Remote or Hybrid) offered during the pandemic. Many Army families are experiencing an unbudgeted childcare burden as a result of these school options. In the wake of the COVID pandemic, accessible and affordable childcare has literally been left reeling and is now even more fragmented for many Families with school age children.

4. PURPOSE.

This AER Bulletin provides guidance on the AER COVID Childcare Relief Program. This special category of assistance is intended to assist parents of school age children with unforeseen childcare expenses resulting from reduced capacity of CDC's and Childcare providers, and unbudgeted expenses associated with COVID school options.

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5. ELIGIBILITY.

The individuals listed below are eligible for the AER COVID Childcare Relief Program:

- a. Soldiers on **Active Duty** and their eligible Family Members;
- b. **Members of the Reserve Component** of the Army (National Guard and Army Reserve **under Title 10 U.S.C**) on continuous Active Duty **for more than thirty (30) consecutive days** and their eligible Family Members;

6. GENERAL GUIDELINES.

- a. Childcare expenses must be for children who are 12 years of age and under.
- b. The Spouse of an Army Sponsor must be employed (minimum 16 hours per week) or currently pursuing a college degree (minimum of 6 credit hours) or pursuing a professional licensure or certification (minimum of 16 hours per week). **Supporting documentation such as copies of pay stubs to verify work hours and a school schedule verifying enrollment is required.**
- c. Applicant must provide proof of the unforeseen childcare need i.e. proof of childcare center closure, reduction in capacity and hours as validated by the local military or civilian Childcare Center. **Supporting documentation examples are: Waitlist verification; Statement of Non-availability from on-post Childcare Center; Childcare Center notices of closure, reduced capacity or reduced hours; School closure notices and School option selection with projected invoice for unbudgeted childcare expenses as a result of COVID school closures and/or selected option.**
- d. Assistance is “needs based” and there are no dollar caps or limits.
- e. AER Officers may approve and/or recommend approval for up to three months of advance validated Childcare expenses.
- f. Childcare assistance **may be considered** for the following:
 - (1) Before and After School Care
 - (2) Childcare at a Day/Child Care Facility, Nursery School or Private Licensed Sitter
 - (3) Private Licensed caregiver for an Exceptional Family Member

NOTE: It is the Parent’s responsibility to verify that the civilian Child Care Center or Private Family Childcare Provider (i.e. In-home) is properly credentialed (State and/or National accreditation) to provide childcare.

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- g. Childcare assistance **will not be considered** for the following:
 - (1) Overnight Camps
 - (2) Childcare to attend private events
 - (3) Childcare to attend personal events
 - (4) Late payment fees
 - (5) Tuition for Kindergarten or Grade School
- h. Assistance will be provided as a **Loan, Grant, or a combination of both**.
- i. Repayment may be deferred for ninety (90) days.
- j. Repayment of a loan will not exceed twenty-four (24) months, except when approved by HQ AER.
- k. A loan must be repaid sixty (60) days prior to ETS, end of the Active Duty commitment (USAR/ARNG) or within twenty-four (24) months after the first scheduled repayment, whichever comes first.
- l. AER Form 57, Budget Planning Sheet (BPS) is required for all assistance requests.
- m. Soldiers who find themselves in a situation where repayment of a loan is causing a financial hardship should contact HQ AER Loan Management Section for further guidance.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES.

a. HQ AER Assistance Section.

- 1) Establish Special Event Code (STAT A), “**COVID Childcare**” for assistance request and inform AER Sections, American Red Cross and Other Military Aid Society HQs.
- 2) Establish secure portal instructions for AER Officers to send and receive application information from Leaders, Soldiers, and Families.
- 3) Upon notification by AER Section, review assistance requests and process Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) transactions as needed IAW HQ AER Accounting Section in a timely manner.
- 4) Receive feedback from AER Sections on any procedural improvements required.

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b. HQ AER Accounting Section.

- 1) Process EFT transactions, as needed in a timely manner upon receipt of signed AER Form 52, AER Check and Promissory Note and completed AER Form 575, AER Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) Authorization Form.
- 2) Provide feedback to the Assistance Section of any rejected EFT transactions and reason.

c. HQ AER Loan Management Section.

- 1) Establish repayment schedule IAW AER Form 52 by allotment or EPAY using bank information provided on the AER Form 575.
- 2) Ensure repayment ends no later than twenty-four (24) months after repayment begins or sixty (60) days prior to ETS or end of Active Duty commitment (USAR/ARNG), whichever comes first.
- 3) Contact applicant, chain of command, and AER Officer for repayment issues (i.e. account closed, payment disputed, etc.).
- 4) Monitor and report delinquent loan payments by installation to Director, AER.
- 5) Execute collections on loans past due thirty (30) plus days.

8. PROCEDURE.

a. Routing of assistance requests.

Assistance requests received from Soldiers **(Active Duty, AGR, and ARNG/USAR under Title 10 for more than thirty (30) consecutive days)** will follow the existing Direct Access guidelines for assistance case processing. **If eligible for Direct Access, no COC involvement is required; if not eligible for Direct Access, COC involvement is required.**

b. Soldier or eligible Family Member with Special Power of Attorney (SPOA).

- 1) Informs Company Commander or First Sergeant as applicable IAW Paragraph 8(a) above.
- 2) Electronically forwards all required AER application information and the supporting documentation listed in Paragraph 9 below to the Unit COC for review, validation, and signature, as applicable.

Note: Soldiers who are eligible for Direct Access and a Spouse with SPOA should contact the local AER Section for guidance and may forward AER application information directly to the local AER Officer.

c. Company Commander or First Sergeant.

- 1) Validates the financial need exists for childcare expenses.

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- 2) Reviews Soldier Leave and Earning Statement (LES) and Spouse income sources (if applicable) when completing AER Form 57, Budget Planning Sheet (BPS) to determine the overall financial situation.
- 3) If AER assistance is required, verifies the amount(s) to meet valid financial needs.
- 4) Reviews documentation associated with childcare capacity/accessibility and unforeseen expenses associated with local school options.
- 5) Ensures Soldier completes AER Form 101, Application for Financial Assistance itemizing specific valid needs in Block 17.
- 6) Ensures Soldier completes AER Form 575, Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) Authorization Form, if applicable.
- 7) Ensures Soldier obtains a Trustee approval letter (if under bankruptcy).
- 8) Ensures Soldier obtains Special Power of Attorney (AER Form 53 or civilian equivalent) or Allotment Authorization (AER Form 55) when Soldier is not available, and Spouse is requesting assistance on the Soldier's behalf.
- 9) Contacts the nearest AER Section or other service Military Aid Society (Air Force, Navy/Marine Corps or Coast Guard) within a fifty (50) mile commuting radius for application processing instructions.
- 10) Forwards AER application with supporting documentation listed in Paragraph 9 below to the nearest AER Section or Military Aid Society Office for review, evaluation, and assistance consideration.
- 11) If outside the fifty (50) mile commuting radius of any military installation, contact the American Red Cross at 1-877-272-7337 and select Option 1 for financial assistance. The American Red Cross will provide a secure link to transmit application information listed in Paragraph 9 below, conduct case intake on behalf of AER Section and forward case information to HQ AER for review, evaluation, and assistance consideration/decision.

NOTE: Unit Leaders, Soldiers and Family members will ensure documents containing Personally Identifiable Information (PII) are only transmitted electronically through a secure means i.e. encrypted email, DoD Safe secure portal or other secure means. A secure link can be requested from the local AER Officer or HQ AER to securely transmit documents containing PII.

d. AER Officers.

- 1) Receive, evaluate, and process assistance requests in accordance with these outlines.
- 2) Ensure widest dissemination of these instructions to Soldiers and Families near their respective Posts, Camps, or Stations.
- 3) Provide instructions on how to process AER assistance request(s) electronically in accordance with these guidelines when "face to face" interaction is restricted for AER Staff members.
- 4) When Soldiers and Leaders request a secure link, send secure DoD safe portal links to allow them to **SEND** and **RECEIVE** application data securely.

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- 5) Assist Soldiers and Leaders as necessary to validate childcare expense needs.
- 6) Input the following case information in netFORUM/ARMS:
 - a) Under “Assistance Details” select “**Childcare Expenses**” as the request category and the appropriate sub-category as outlined in 6f(1-3) above.
 - b) Enter STAT A Code “**COVID Childcare.**”
- 7) Verify client banking information is correct on AER Form 575 when the funds will be disbursed via EFT by HQ AER.
- 8) When EFT support is required in coordination with HQ AER, complete the following actions:
 - a) Upload signed AER Form 575 into the “Case Documents” icon in the Assistance Case Profile in netFORUM/ARMS.
 - b) When uploading multiple documents, ensure AER Form 575 is titled in the following format: “**AER FORM 575 - Case ID#.**”
 - c) Forward EFT support request to assistance@aerhq.org with CASE ID# in the SUBJECT line and the following in the body of the email message:
 - CASE ID # - it must be included in both the SUBJECT and the body of the email
 - The client’s preferred email address
 - Recommended repayment terms
 - The client’s repayment method (i.e. Allotment or Supplement Promissory Note)

9. MANDATORY DOCUMENTS.

- a. AER FORM 101, Application for AER Assistance
- b. AER Form 57, Budget Planning Sheet (BPS)
- c. AER Form 575, Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) Authorization Form, as applicable
- d. Leave and Earning Statement (LES) and other earning statements for Soldier and/or Spouse, as applicable
- e. Documentation to support and validate the financial need, as required
- f. Trustee approval letter (if under bankruptcy)
- g. Special Power of Attorney (AER Form 53 or civilian equivalent) or Allotment Authorization (AER Form 55) when Soldier is not available

10. **This bulletin will remain in effect until rescinded by HQ AER.**

11. Points of contacts for this bulletin are as follows:

- Assistance Section - SGM(R) Glen Wellman or CSM(R) Charles Durr at (571) 389-7137/ Extension #1 or via email at assistance@aerhq.org.
- Loan Management Section - SGM(R) William Hagzan at (571) 389-7137/Extension #2 or via email at repayments-allotments@arehq.org.

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12. If additional guidance is required during non-business hours, please contact an HQ AER caseworker through the Army Operations Center at (703) 697-0218.

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