Mike Bloomberg’s Veterans and Families Policy

The fewer than 1% of Americans1 who choose to serve in the military undertake a sacred obligation to defend this country with their lives. In fulfilling that mission, they also become a true warrior elite—young women and men with technical, leadership and interpersonal skills that set them apart from many of their nonveteran peers. They display uncommon grit and resilience and, most importantly, a desire to serve their country that endures long after they remove their military uniform.

America’s veterans and military families possess enormous untapped leadership potential; they are assets that we as a nation are foolish to ignore. Any president aiming to strengthen America should not just ensure that our troops have the best equipment, weaponry and training while in the military—but that veterans and their families are empowered to help in the task of reinventing and revitalizing our communities.

As mayor of New York City, Mike Bloomberg’s administration launched a Veterans Employment Initiative that provided career services to 6,000 veterans and their spouses,2 and expanded an entrepreneurship program to help veterans set up their own businesses. He provided $52.4 million3 in taxable bonds to finance military housing and nearly $10 million to house more than 1,000 veterans.4 His company has consistently recruited and promoted veterans, knowing how valuable they are as team members, leaders and innovators. As president, Mike Bloomberg will fulfill our own sacred obligation—to value and support America’s servicemembers, veterans and their families throughout their lives.

1. Ensure that veterans and their families thrive in civilian life, whether in jobs, business or service.

Once they leave the military, veterans typically don’t have a professional network to connect them to job opportunities. Meanwhile, companies often don’t have a good grasp of military culture and skills, or knowledge of how to reach and mentor potential veteran recruits. As a result, nearly a third5 of veterans—some of whom have held leadership responsibilities far beyond their years when in the military—may be underemployed. More than two-thirds6 of respondents in one survey said they hadn’t found work at a level comparable to their military service.

● Work with the private sector to create new pathways to guide veterans into fulfilling careers. Together with business leaders and other providers of services to veterans, Mike’s administration will establish a network of local and regional Centers of Excellence and Empowerment. These public-private partnerships will meet veterans where they are and help prepare them and their spouses to enter or reenter the civilian workforce. They will also give corporate human-resources officers a chance to learn about the unique talents and needs of veterans and their families. The Centers will develop a comprehensive jobs portal to connect applicants with employment opportunities and the skills programs needed to compete for them. Veterans will be allowed to

1 Council on Foreign Relations, Demographics of the US Military, April 2018
2 City of New York, Mayor Bloomberg Announces Veterans Entrepreneurship Program to Help Veterans Start and Grow a Business, November 2013
3 City of New York, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg And Us Department Of Army At Fort Hamilton Break Ground On New Family Housing For Military Personnel, August 2004
4 City of New York, Mayor Bloomberg, Hud Deputy Secretary Bernardi And Va Secretary Peake Announce Hud And Va To Provide Permanent Housing For An Estimated 10,000 Homeless Veteran, April, 2008
5 Call of Duty Endowment, Challenges on the Home Front: Underemployment Hits Veterans Hard, Accessed February 2020
6 Monster, Monster Announces 2018 Best Companies for Veterans, November 2018
access Center resources at any point during their career and employed veterans will rotate back through as mentors and counselors. Data will be collected on which veterans who pass through the system thrive in various environments and why, so training tools and other programs can be tailored most effectively.

- **Reduce unnecessary barriers to hiring veterans.** Mike will look into expanding tax credits for companies to hire veterans, such as the Returning Heroes and Wounded Warriors credits. He will also direct the armed services to establish institutions similar to the Community College of the Air Force, which helps veterans translate their skills into civilian credentials. And his administration will develop a much more efficient and accessible repository to match the skills required for a military position with civilian jobs that are related.

- **Help veteran entrepreneurs start their own businesses.** One in four service members would like to start a business. Yet the number of veteran entrepreneurs is declining compared to the civilian population. In 2017, 60% of vet-owned businesses reported a financing shortfall. Through the Centers of Excellence, Mike will help aspiring entrepreneurs to access startup capital and expertise in developing business plans. He will also expand the Small Business Administration’s “Boots to Business” program and launch pilot programs to support veteran entrepreneurs, such as those proposed in the Veterans Entrepreneurial Transition Act of 2016, as well as a challenge grant program to encourage the best ideas for supporting veteran-owned businesses. During Mike’s tenure as mayor, New York’s Competition THRIVE programs similarly funded scalable growth opportunities for immigrant entrepreneurs.

- **Give veterans the educational foundation they need to seize on emerging opportunities.** U.S. universities are projected to produce only enough computer-science graduates to fill less than 30% of the 1.4 million job openings that are expected. To prepare veterans for such jobs, Mike will encourage the branches to invest more in teaching basic coding and other skills to active-duty servicemembers. He will also broaden programs such as Vet Tec that train and credential veterans on various IT platforms, and expand opportunities within the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program, to help veterans with training, resume development and employment. His administration will establish a program similar to the now-defunct Veterans Retraining Assistance Program, which offered up to 12 months of training assistance for unemployed veterans focused on high-demand occupations. And expiration dates on using GI Bill benefits will be lifted for those discharged before 2013, so they can engage in lifelong learning.

- **Attend to the needs of military spouses, whose careers can be disrupted by repeated moves.** Mike will further enhance licensing portability so that spouses of servicemembers can continue to work even after changing states. He will also ask states to waive the first $1,000 in fees for relicensing and then apply for reimbursement from the federal government, thereby lifting the burden for doing so off spouses. And he will allow military spouses who lose their job because of a move and can’t find new work to pause repaying their federal student loans for a fixed period.

---

7 New York Fed, **Veteran Entrepreneurs and Capital Access**, November 2018
8 Crain’s New York Business, **Ideas to stoke immigrant-owned biz**, June 2011
9 Quartz, **You probably should have majored in computer science**, March 2017
10 Veterans Affairs, **Vet Tech program**, accessed February 2020
11 Military One Source, **Fees for relicensing**, January 2020
● Put in place safeguards to ensure veterans and their families are protected from financial and educational scams. Student veterans are disproportionately targeted by some for-profit colleges that have been accused of shady practices, in part because of a loophole in the Higher Education Act. Meanwhile, one study found that veterans use payday loans at nearly four times the national rate. Yet the Trump administration’s Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has reversed a rule that would have made payday lending less predatory. Mike will support bipartisan efforts to close the so-called “90/10” loophole, while refining efforts to collect and distribute data on affordability, completion rates and career outcomes for all career-preparation programs, including those offered by for-profit institutions. He’ll ensure that veterans and their families can access financial literacy services through the Veterans Administration, as well as more guidance on how to use their pensions, throughout their lives. And he will restore the CFPB’s payday lending rule.

● Create a new civilian platform for those veterans who want to continue in service to the nation. Mike understands that servicemembers sign up because they want to serve the country and that that desire doesn’t wane once they’re discharged. Some enter the Reserves in part to maintain the sense of common purpose and camaraderie they found in the military. While civilian volunteer possibilities do exist, they are often localized and restricted to metropolitan areas. By contrast, Mike will scale up a national volunteer program to pair platoons of veterans with communities in need, similar to the model pioneered by missioncontinues.org. He will also study the idea of creating a “civilian reserves” as a way for former service members to perform national service.

2. Provide veterans and their families access to world-class health care, good housing and all the benefits they have earned.

Often in health care we talk about patient-centered, value-based care — the kind of care that emphasizes the whole person and not the treatments that make hospitals, physicians and drug companies the most money. At the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), which receives a set amount of funding to provide care for a set number of patients, this should be the model. Mike will ensure that the VA lives up to these standards and that all those eligible for care and benefits receive them quickly, efficiently and safely.

● Reduce wait times and increase access to care. There are an estimated 43,000 vacancies in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), including for physicians and mental-health professionals. There is a role for supplementing directly provided care with care purchased outside the system. At the same time, no veteran should be forced outside the system because of a lack of VA resources. Mike’s administration will evaluate funding and staffing needs and aim to ensure the VA has adequate staff. The Department of Defense and the VA will be directed to assess how to optimize their existing facilities and, given the location of military members and veterans, whether it is better to augment with purchase care, outsource and/or expand existing capacity to provide health services. Mike will also introduce a “Docs-to-Doctors” program similar to the one proposed in the Veterans Health Care Staffing Improvement Act to recruit military doctors to join the VA after discharge.

---

12 Greenville Online, Veterans suffered, investors lost millions in nationwide schemes, November 2019
13 Navy Times, Insurance scam bilked nearly $5 million from service members, authorities say, July 2019
14 PBS, Why these veterans regret their for-profit college degrees and debt, October 2018
15 Veterans Education Success, What is the 90/10 loophole, accessed February 2020
16 Mission Continues, accessed February 2020
17 Military Times, As staff vacancies at VA rise, lawmaker wants answers why, December 2019
addition, co-pays currently paid by veterans for preventive healthcare services and birth control will be eliminated.

- **Increase efficiencies in administration and technology.** Mike will pursue efficiencies as diligently as he has done in the private sector, starting by appointing a White House liaison with military experience to oversee the long-overdue integration of DOD and VA electronic health records. His administration will integrate best practices and better use modern technology to accelerate the disability claims process, adding incentives to prioritize speed as well as accuracy in processing claims.

- **Invest in research to benefit not just veterans and their families but all Americans.** The military and VHA have been in the vanguard of medical innovation in a number of areas, such as refractive eye surgery, prosthetics and telehealth, developing treatments and cures from which all American have benefited. Mike’s administration will encourage further research into innovative, non-opioid therapies for chronic pain, which some 72% of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans say they suffer from. It will collect data on family caregiving and the most successful ways to support it, while integrating family caregivers and veterans’ professional health care teams. And it will integrate military hospitals into civilian trauma systems. That way military doctors, who during peacetime see too few trauma patients to keep their skills sharp, can maintain their readiness and skills, while providing civilians with excellent care.

  - **Confront the consequences of burn-pit exposure.** Mike will direct the VA to work with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine to complete a comprehensive study of the impacts of “burn pits,” which exposed soldiers who served in Iraq and Afghanistan to toxins whose effects aren’t well understood. Health care services needed for veterans suffering from health complications from burn pits will be covered while the long-term impacts are studied. And the VA will be instructed to maintain robust, real-time and longitudinal data on burn-pit exposure, recognizing that some effects may take years to express themselves.

  - **Invest more in researching traumatic brain injuries.** Research will be conducted to better understand the impacts of these all-too-common injuries. The disability ratings system will then be reviewed to see how TBI should fit in.

- **Ensure that military service won’t limit service members’ ability to have a family.** Many private-sector employers now cover fertility and IVF services for families who need it — including same-sex couples. To maintain the best and brightest in the military, DOD needs to do the same. Mike will expand TRICARE, the military health system, to cover cryopreservation for all active-duty service members, allowing men and women to freeze sperm or eggs pre-deployment and use them as they see fit. He will also have TRICARE cover IVF for those who need it, collecting data on

---

18 Veterans Affairs, *Non-VA Emergency Care Claims Inappropriately Denied or Rejected*, August 2019
19 Healio, *U.S. military the vanguard in refractive surgery research and implementation*, March 2010
20 Veterans Affairs, *VA’s cutting-edge technology helps physicians provide top-notch Veteran care*, December 2019
21 IAVA, *2019 member survey*, accessed February 2020
22 National Academies, *Recommendations for a National Trauma Care System*, June 2016
23 American College of Surgeons, *Trauma System*, accessed February 2016
the results so we can better understand why IVF is only about 40% effective25 for women under 37.

- **Address the specific needs of female service members and veterans.** Women represent the fastest-growing demographic26 in military recruiting and their thirties are some of the most important years of their career, which coincides with when many may want to start a family. Too many women feel like they have to leave the military in order to pursue a having a family: Female servicemembers often cite family, pregnancy and personal life as reasons for ending their military service. Mike will direct the military to find ways to accommodate pregnant servicemembers so they can continue serving, as appropriate. To ensure female veterans can also access world-class care, Mike will modernize VA facilities to provide more comprehensive health services for female veterans, including primary care and preventive screenings, as well as more child care options.

- **Consider veterans in making critical infrastructure investments.** Mike will extend broadband to 10 million more Americans within his first term. This will bring telehealth services to many more veterans, who are more likely28 than other Americans to live in rural areas29 and to lack access to high-speed internet. He will also immediately repair base housing that is posing hazards to families and end arrangements with shoddy contractors. Going forward, he’ll modify tenant satisfaction measures for DOD housing to ensure that any future problems are spotted and addressed quickly.

3. **Mike will especially serve those veterans and their families who are in greatest need, seeking to end the homelessness and epidemic of suicide that are plaguing the veteran community.**

As of January 2019, roughly 8% of homeless adults30 were U.S. military veterans. After declining by half31 between 2010-16, the number of homeless vets has persisted around 37,000 nationally.32 Meanwhile, military and veteran suicide now takes more lives than combat. Over 45,000 veterans33 and active-duty servicemembers have killed themselves in the last six years. The latest Pentagon Suicide Report shows suicide rates among active-duty troops across all service branches have risen by over a third in five years. An estimated 17 veterans die by suicide every day.34

- **Fully fund efforts to provide permanent supportive housing for homeless veterans and their families.** The HUD-VA Supportive Housing and Supportive Services for Veteran Families programs are responsible for much of the decline in veteran homelessness thus far. Officials have said35 they could process enough HUD-VASH vouchers to house over 6,000 veterans if empty case-manager positions were filled. Mike will expedite hiring for those positions and fully fund both programs. He will also continue efforts such as the Mayor’s Challenge to End Homelessness to encourage innovative local efforts to combat the problem.

25 SART, Final Cumulative Outcome per Egg Retrieval Cycle for 2016, Accessed February 2020
26 Military, With Historic Number of Women in Uniform, the Vet Community is About to Change, March 2019
27 RAND Corporation, Addressing Barriers to Female Officer Retention in the Air Force, 2018
29 USDA, Veterans are Positioned to Contribute Economically to Rural Communities, September 2017
30 HUD, 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, January 2020
31 Military Times, Fewer veterans were homeless in 2018, after a worrisome rise last year, November 2018
32 HUD, 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, January 2020
33 NYT, Suicide has been deadlier than combat for the military, November 2019
34 Stars and Stripes, VA reveals its veteran suicide statistic included active-duty troops, June 2018
35 Military Times, Thousands of housing vouchers for veterans went unused last year, January 2019
Address the full range of needs of homeless veterans. Mike will offer $10 million block grants to cities with plans to build transitional community housing with wraparound services for veterans who need temporary support, similar to the successful Veterans Community Project. And he will launch a challenge grant program focused on finding innovative approaches to helping homeless female vets, who are more than twice as likely to experience homelessness as non-veteran women.

* Lead a public-private campaign to bring the veterans suicide crisis into the open, eliminate the stigma associated with mental-health issues and increase mental-health resources. Mike will increase funding for the VA’s Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, and direct the VA and DOD to conduct, with input from academic and nonprofit groups, a joint study of the root causes of rising suicide rates, along with comprehensive recommendations for how to address them. In addition, his administration will increase the number of VA providers to address mental-health disorders, particularly PTSD, including by allowing mental health providers credentialed at one VA facility to work at any of them. It will ensure that existing suicide hotline resources are appropriately staffed and advertised in rural areas, and that telehealth providers are trained to deal with military-specific mental health issues, including access to lethal means.

* Encourage more public-private partnerships to get help to veterans in need faster. Mike supports the Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act, which would establish a grant program to help local organizations coordinate mental health care for veterans in order to ensure veterans access to fast and comprehensive mental health services.

* Seek to track unit-level data of suicides. Members of the same unit can be especially hard-hit if one of their number takes their own life. Mike will have the VA put more effort into tracking unit-level data, so that after a suicide is reported, mental health professionals can proactively conduct outreach to other unit members before they, too, begin to experience suicidal ideation.

* Enact common-sense gun policies. Around 85% of those who attempt to take their lives by firearms succeed and one in three veterans store at least one of their guns loaded and unlocked. On average, 4,200 veterans commit suicide using guns every year, around 11 per day. That rate rose 33% between 2005-17. Mike will institute stronger background checks and a national permitting system that would allow law-enforcement authorities to block the sale of guns to people with a history of violence or behavioral health risks. He will work with Congress to pass a federal “red-flag” law so that families can protect their loved ones from suicide by petitioning courts to temporarily remove their guns. And he will direct DOD to launch education programs prior to discharge to encourage veterans to treat their personal weapons as carefully as they did their military-issued firearms.

36 Veterans Community Project, accessed February 2020
37 U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, Homelessness in America: Focus on Veterans, June 2018
38 NYT, “In Unit Stalked by Suicide, Veterans Try to Save One Another,” September 2015
40 American Journal of Preventive Medicine, Firearm Storage Practices among American Veterans, October 2018
42 Ibid
4. Field the most able force possibly by removing lingering barriers to entry and promotion for minorities, women, immigrants and LGBTQ+ service members.

Increasingly, the fewer than 1% of Americans who serve in the military are coming from the same parts of the country and even the same families. Fielding a force that looks like the U.S., from lower ranks up to flag officers, will make the armed services stronger and our country more secure. While the military has traditionally done a better job than many companies at encouraging diversity, barriers do exist — some unrecognized and some imposed deliberately and unnecessarily by the Trump administration.

- **Widen the pool of eligible recruits.** The U.S. military is increasingly having issues recruiting young Americans, less than 30%, of whom even qualify, to enlist. In 2018, the Army had to reduce enlistment goals multiple times. Multiple criteria can prevent a candidate from serving in the military, some of which tend to exclude inner-city youth. To change that, Mike will expand waivers for juvenile crimes that were adversely adjudicated, and so that anyone within 2% of the body-fat percentage standard who meets other requirements can enlist. Social media, podcasts and other untraditional media will be used to reach different segments of the population.

  - **Focus on increasing diversity at the top.** As of 2017, minorities accounted for at least 36% of active-duty service members but barely more than 12% of the military’s top ranks. Mike will expand and improve existing leadership development programs, and ensure that they address the unique needs and challenges of diverse communities.

- **Ensure female service members have clearer paths to success.** Having women in leadership positions in the military makes our country safer and enhances our military capabilities. The military has made great improvements in the promotion process: Women made up 18% of all commissioned officers in 2017, compared to 5% in 1975. But more can be done. Mike will ensure leadership development programs address the unique challenges women encounter in the military, as well as those they face as leaders out of uniform. He will encourage military leaders to support women in pursuit of full careers, including by removing unnecessary information (e.g., photos) from the Promotion Board process to remove potential sources of bias.

  - **Address child care shortages.** As in the civilian world, a lack of child care poses one of the biggest impediments to women pursuing military careers. The military will only subsidize child care at outside facilities that have national certification, which many centers cannot afford to procure. Mike’s administration will subsidize efforts by local child care centers to gain national certification, while expanding after-hours care at on-base child care centers.

- **Confront the scourge of military sexual assault, which affects both men and women.** In 2017, 5,277 servicemen and women reported sexual assault and that was estimated to be only about a third of the total. Mike will require that DOD provide a progress report to Congress on eliminating sexual harassment and sexual assault in the military. His administration will ensure that when an

---

43 The Heritage Foundation, [The looming national security crisis : Young Americans unable to serve the military](https://www.heritage.org), February 2018
44 Military Times, [Manning the military: America’s problem](https://www.militarytimes.com), July 2019
45 Army Times, [It’ll be tight, but the Army expects to meet recruiting goals this year](https://www.armytimes.com), June 2019
47 Pew Research Center, [Changing profile of the U.S. military: Smaller size, more diverse, more women in leadership](https://www.pewresearch.org), September 2019
48 Ibid
49 DOD, [Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military](https://www.DefenseLink.mil), May 2018
assault is reported, people across the both the DOD and the VA are trained to respond appropriately — from processing complaints to providing medical care to investigating. Victims will be given the option of having an independent military prosecutor take on their case, rather than working through their commanding officer, and all command prosecution decisions will be independently reviewed. All officers will receive enhanced training in how to deal with such cases.

- **Welcome immigrants — some of the most loyal Americans — into the military.** The Trump administration has made the naturalization process more difficult for lawful permanent residents who want to join the military, as well as children of some servicemembers stationed overseas. Military members are now denied citizenship at a higher rate than civilians. The administration has also deported veterans and their family members, contravening a policy set up during the Iraq War to prevent precisely that. Mike will protect service members and their families from deportation and allow “parole in place” for veterans wrongfully deported by the Trump administration. He will restore expedited naturalization for active-duty military, as had been the case for years, making recruits more deployable and reversing the decline in successful naturalization applications for service members and their families. And he will reinstate and reform the Military Accessions to Vital National Interests program, to bolster the military’s language and other critical skills.

- **Remove stigmas and policies that prevent LGBTQ+ Americans from serving.** The Trump administration has banned transgender men and women from enlisting, as well as gender reassignment surgery for current servicemembers; Mike will reverse both bans. Meanwhile, structural prejudices linger from the obsolete “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, and many LGBTQ+ veterans don’t feel comfortable receiving care from the VA. Mike will require cultural competency training and ensure that medical personnel support LGBTQ+ troops and veterans. He will also grant honorable discharges to veterans discharged solely on the basis of being LGBTQ+ under the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy.

---

50 ILRC, Changes to the expedited naturalization process for military service members, March 2018
51 McClatchy DC, Some children of military members born overseas won’t automatically be U.S. citizens, August 2919
52 McClatchy DC, Immigrant soldiers now denied US citizenship at higher rate than civilians, May 15, 2019
53 Military Times, ICE is supported to consider service when deporting veterans. It hasn’t been, June 2019
54 Task & Purpose, LGBTQ Vets, Uncomfortable With VA, Look To Each Other For Mental Health Care, June 2018
55 NYT, Ousted as Gay, Aging Veterans Are Battling Again for Honorable Discharges, September 2015