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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE PROVIDES SAME-SEX MARRIED COUPLES BENEFITS – REGISTRATION READY NO LATER THAN SEPTEMBER 3rd.

(Washington, August 14, 2013) – Today the Department of Defense cleared the final barrier for same-sex married couples to accessing spousal benefits. All spouses and children in same-sex military families can enroll in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) no later than September 3, 2013. The Military Partners and Families Coalition (MPFC) applauds the efforts of the Department of Defense for working diligently to modify DEERS for open enrollment to all eligible families.

Enrollment in DEERS provides access to over a thousand benefits that have long been restricted to the former federal definition of “spouse” that excluded same-sex couples. These benefits include the many mission-critical resources extended to all other military families, including health and mental health care, on-base housing, commissary privileges, spouse employment opportunities, dependents accompanying service members to overseas assignments, and burials in DoD cemeteries. “This final administrative step is enthusiastically welcomed by our legally married families who have been waiting for the extension of these critical benefits since the Supreme Court struck down DOMA in June,” said MPFC president and co-founder, Ariana Bostian-Kentes.

The DOMA decision caused the Department of Defense to halt a previous directive from the Secretary of Defense to extend 22 limited benefits to same-sex couples who signed a military-specific Same Sex Domestic Partnership (SSDP) agreement. Enrollment in DEERS requires a civil marriage license issued by one of the 13 states that have marriage equality or the District of Columbia.

Joyce Raezer, Executive Director of the National Military Family Association (NMFA) and an MPFC coalition member, welcomes the DoD guidance for same sex military spouses. “NMFA is committed to the continuing work with MPFC and others to educate new same sex spouses on benefits and resources that will now be open to them.”

The DoD is granting non-chargeable marriage leave to same-sex couples who must travel greater than 100 miles from their military assignment location to obtain a license in a marriage equality state. Bostian-Kentes noted that, “We agree that a civil license leaves no question concerning the status of our relationships, and we are glad that the DoD recognizes travel is necessary to obtain that license for many of our families. We are thrilled that our

marriages will finally be considered equal and look forward to the day that marriage is accessible to everyone, no matter where their family is stationed.”

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Military Partners and Families Coalition (MPFC): is a leading national organization providing support, resources, education, and advocacy for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender military families. Founded in 2011 by a group of spouses and partners of active duty U.S. Armed Forces service members stationed in the U.S. and overseas, MPFC is a non-profit, non-partisan organization based in Washington, D.C. For more information, go to www.milpfc.org or www.facebook.com/milpfc.