

## **F.M.L.A. Change Grants Military Family Members Time to Deal With Deployments**

Allows federal employees to take up to 12 weeks off to deal with situation at home

Many service members will say one of the toughest parts about a deployment is saying goodbye to their family. Soon new changes to the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) will make that farewell easier to handle. Beginning October 31, federal employees who have an active duty family member will be allowed to take up to 12 weeks off of unpaid time to deal with the emotional stress at home that often times accompanies deployment. "If you haven't experienced this moment of goodbye then you just don't get it. This law change allows a person to take the time off and deal with the emotional toll that this farewell imposes. It gives them the mental security of knowing their job will be safe when they return" said Lisa Windsor, retired Army colonel currently practicing Military Law at Tully Rinckey PLLC. "Someone is looking into the eyes of their loved one who they will not see again for months if not years so the last thing they should be concerned about is their job." The new changes will also apply to all military-run, deployment related counseling services for the employee and the service member's child. Finding child care, attending school related conferences and making financial and legal preparations could qualify as FMLA-covered leave. It will even allow a family member to spend some quality time (up to 5 days) with the service member when he or she returns home on leave. "This law change is brand new and many employers will not be aware of it. Employees face a personal crisis when a loved one is called to active duty. Employers who give them a hard time for attempting to address such a crisis will soon be facing one of their own – only it will be prompted by a civil lawsuit" said Ms. Windsor, a former Army JAG attorney. The FMLA was created in 1993 to provide job protection for employees taking time off to deal with approved medical and family reasons. In 2008 Congress made the first of what would be many revisions to the act to further protect employees with family members serving in the military.