

DACOWITS RFI #1 (SEPTEMBER 2024)

Subj: DACOWITS RFI #1 – Recruitment Barriers

RFI #1: The Committee continues to be interested in the recruitment of servicewomen, including barriers and facilitators that impact the pool of women qualified to join the Armed Forces as compared to men. The Committee seeks to understand potential recruitment barriers that continue to inhibit the accession of women into the Armed Forces. More specifically, DACOWITS is interested in the availability of Military Entrance Processing Stations (MEPS) appointments, any preliminary data pertaining to female recruits admitted through the Military Accession Record Pilot (MARF) program, the medical waiver process, and both the challenges and facilitators reported by recruiting commands. Additionally, by March 2022 all MEPS fully deployed a new congressionally mandated electronic health information system called Military Health System (MHS) Genesis. This marked a major change to medical record processing for accessions. The Committee understands that the Defense Department is now using medical data collected from MHS Genesis via the MARF program to review the recentness of 49 medical conditions for which the lifetime disqualification in Medical Standards for *Military Service: Appointment, Enlistment, or Induction* (DoDI 6130.03) was changed to 0.5, 3, 5, or 7 years. The Committee is also aware that in March 2024, a DoD report titled, “*Military Medical Standards for Accession*,” was delivered to the Committee on Armed Services of the Senate and House of Representatives and that this report noted a need for increased MEPS personnel, including medical providers, technicians, and onboarding specialists. The Committee received briefings from Military Services’ Medical Waiver Review Authorities (SMWRAs) in June 2024 (via RFI 1.1).

The Committee requests a **written response** from the **Military Services’ SMWRAs** on the following:

- 1.a.** For applicants awaiting waiver(s), what is the loss rate during this wait period, and what is the threshold/timeframe where losses are the most prevalent (30 days, 60 days, 90 days, etc.)? Is this different for men and women? If so, how?
- 1.b.** What is the average length of time to obtain a medical recommendation from the branch’s waiver authority for the following female specific disqualifying medical conditions:
 - i.** Pregnancy;
 - ii.** Abnormal uterine or vaginal bleeding;
 - iii.** Abnormal Pap smear/test;
 - iv.** Endometriosis;
 - v.** polycystic ovarian syndrome:
- 1.c.** If a specialty consult is required, what is the average wait time to see a specialist for each of these female specific disqualifying conditions noted above? Additionally, provide the percentage of applicants waiting: 1) less than 30 days; 2) 31- 60 days; 3) 61-90 days; and 4) greater than 90 days, for each of the female specific disqualifying medical conditions noted above.
- 1.d.** For those applicants requiring specialty consults, what percent of applicants sought care outside of the referred MEPS provider? Can applicants who sought their own consultation be reimbursed?
- 1.e.** Please provide a table for FY21, FY22, and FY23 with the following information about the top five female specific disqualifying conditions (i.e., pregnancy, abnormal uterine/vaginal bleeding, abnormal pap smear/test, endometriosis, polycystic ovarian syndrome, and total of these five conditions) your Service is currently providing waivers for, broken down by the:
 - i.** Number of waivers granted;
 - ii.** Number of waivers requested;
 - iii.** Waiver rate percentage (number granted/number requested); and the
 - iv.** Average processing time (number of days) from the time the applicant is told they need additional medical consult to final determination.

Response:

1.a. When an applicant is going through the process to become a Marine, they can stop at any time without providing a reason to the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps does not compel an applicant to disclose the reason they stopped processing. Marine Corps recruiting doctrine allows recruiters 90 days to process an applicant for enlistment. Applicants that have not contracted at the end of 90 days are coded into four bins (medical, mental, moral, or other) by recruiting personnel for a reason they may have failed to contract. The recruiter will redeclare the applicant (starting a new 90-day clock) and continue to work with these applicants (including submission of waivers) until the applicant decides to no longer pursue enlistment.

To best answer the committee's question, the Marine Corps can provide data regarding the number of people who are no longer, active applicants but have a medical waiver submission in the system, indicating they stopped processing while going through the waiver process. Using this methodology for fiscal year to date 6.35% (653 of 10,284) of applicants with submitted waivers did not complete the waiver process and are no longer active applicants. Males at 6.27% (562 of 8,957) and females at 6.86% (91 of 1,327).

1.b. Based on electronic waiver system reporting of the turnaround between the time of waiver package submission to the time of a final recommendation for FY 2024 YTD:

- i. Pregnancy: 2.6 days
- ii. Abnormal uterine or vaginal bleeding: 2.7 days
- iii. Abnormal Pap smear/test: 2.5 days
- iv. Endometriosis: 5.5 days (2 cases had extended periods of time due to a letter error needing correction, if letter corrections were removed from the calculation, the average time was 2.5 days)
- v. Polycystic ovarian syndrome: 5 days

1.c. No specialty consults were requested for pregnancy, abnormal pap test, endometriosis, or polycystic ovarian syndrome for FY 2024 YTD.

Of the 49 waiver requests submitted for these 5 disqualifications, 16 were closed with a request for more information. Of those 16 cases:

- 7 requested additional information on completely unrelated disqualifiers (psych, ortho, vision),
- 7 requested past medical records, a recent laboratory test, or a personal statement related to the women's health related DQ condition
- 1 requested a current evaluation by a primary care provider.
- 1 requested a current evaluation by a Gynecologist for dysmenorrhea. This consult took 29 days to complete.

1.d. Unable to tell whether the 1 consult was completed through MEPS referral or through own provider. The evaluation does not specify. Applicants who choose to seek their own consultation are not reimbursed by USMEPCOM or the Service.

1.e.

FY21:

Condition	# Waivers Recommended	# Waivers Requested	Waiver Percentage Rate	Average Processing Time (days) for Consult
Pregnancy	0	0		no consults requested
AUB	25	30	83%	no consults requested*
Abnormal pap	0	0		no consults requested
Endometriosis	0	0		no consults requested
PCOS	1	1	100%	no consults requested
Total	26	31	84%	

*2 PCM consults were requested. No specialty consults.

FY22:

Condition	# Waivers Recommended	# Waivers Requested	Waiver Percentage Rate	Average Processing Time (days) for Consult
Pregnancy	0	0		no consults requested
AUB	31	39	79%	27.5 *
Abnormal pap	0	1	0%	no consults requested
Endometriosis	0	0		no consults requested
PCOS	1	1	100%	no consults requested
Total	32	41	78%	

*4 Specialty consults were requested, but PCM notes were returned and accepted.

FY23:

Condition	# Waivers Recommended	# Waivers Requested	Waiver Percentage Rate	Average Processing Time (days) for Consult
Pregnancy	7	8	88%	no consults requested
AUB	19	34	56%	9
Abnormal pap	1	2	50%	no consults requested
Endometriosis	0	2	0%	1 consult requested*
PCOS	2	4	50%	no consults requested
Total	29	50	58%**	

*No follow up on the requested consult.

**Standards significantly relaxed at the start of FY23 and thus more individuals with low risk conditions were qualified without need for a waiver; as a result, the waivers submitted reflected more concerning features, such as symptoms and multiple days of work or school missed related to the condition.

FY24 YTD:

Condition	# Waivers Recommended	# Waivers Requested	Waiver Percentage Rate	Average Processing Time (days) for Consult
Pregnancy	5	6	83%	no consults requested
AUB	24	30	80%	29 *
Abnormal pap	4	6	67%	no consults requested
Endometriosis	2	5	40%	no consults requested
PCOS	0	2	0% **	no consults requested
Total	36	49	73%	

* There was only 1 individual who needed a female-related specialty consult; however, this individual had 2 other unrelated (pulmonary and dermatologic) disqualifications in addition to the female-related condition. It took 29 days to get the consult completed for the female-related issue, but 90 days to get the requested information needed to waive her pulmonary condition. The final waiver was not granted until 90 days after the original submission due to the time to complete the pulmonary consult.

**All had additional psychiatric disqualifiers that were the primary reason for the unfavorable recommendation, additionally both were currently taking metformin for pre-diabetes.