

PCS Pain

Bridging communication gaps in the PCS process

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Conducting a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) move is a mentally and physically challenging exercise that affects not only the Marine but the entire family. When questions arise and a move goes bad, the Marine Corps should support the Marine, but who supports the spouse? What can a command do to ensure a Marine's PCS challenges are addressed quickly? Where do spouses turn when it all becomes overwhelming? Communication gaps and unfamiliarity with policies and procedures that govern the moving of household goods and passengers often create more stress and challenges by letting a molehill-sized problem turn into a mountain. In an unprecedented level of cooperation, Installation and Logistics has partnered with the USMC PCS Advocacy Council (UPAC) to bridge the PCS communication gap by providing support and resources via social media to spouses and Marines on a global scale. What makes this more effective than past measures? UPAC is an organized team of spouses of active-duty Marines who understand the unique needs of the family because they PCS too. This article identifies the communication gaps in the PCS process, how that affects families, what commands can do to provide PCS support, and how Installations and Logistics is bridging the communication gaps by partnering with a team of volunteer spouse advocates to ease the pain of a PCS.

Communication Gaps

Have you ever had a well-meaning friend say, "It's easy, right? The Marine Corps moves you." If you have ever been issued orders to PCS, you know it is far more complicated than that. Resources and funding are provided by

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the government, but every aspect of a relocation hinges on the Marine's family being prepared every step of the way. Communication gaps occur when roles and responsibilities are unclear, Marines do not seek the support provided, and spouses rely solely on personal experience to guide their move.

Responsibilities Are Unclear

Every move has three key players:

the Distribution Management Office (DMO), Transportation Service Provider (TSP), and the Marine and family. Moves begin in Defense Personal Property System when the application to move is submitted and the TSP is assigned. Logistics and coordination begin, but who is in charge and who is responsible for the success of the move? A mental disconnect can happen when the government funds and assigns the

USMC PCS ADVOCACY COUNCIL

READY. SET. PCS.

Our private social media community is committed to providing support to Marine Corps service members and their families.



Partnered with and supported by HQMC Installations and Logistics (I&L) and Logistics Distribution Branch.



Advocating for change means a better PCS experience for you and every Marine family!



SCAN ME

Links to join our private Facebook groups, PCS support and more about how YOU can make your voice heard.

The UPAC provides Marines and their families global resources and support through social media. (Slide by Silha Bess, UPAC Media Lead.)

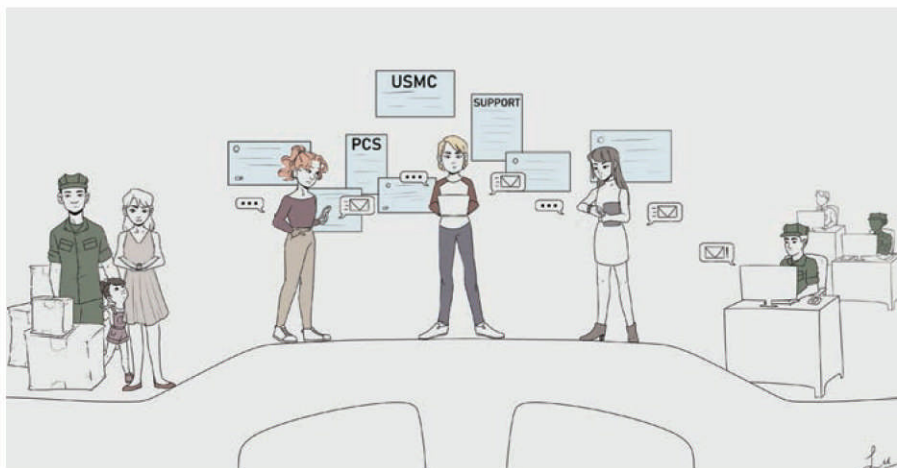
moving company, but the move belongs to the Marine. The Marine is the conduit for all coordination and communications and is responsible for the success of the pack, load, delivery, and claims. The lack of clarity on what the Marine is responsible for and where they turn for support can create challenges that turn a simple question into a problem to solve.

Not Seeking Support Provided

Marines and spouses are often unaware of the official resources for support that are provided for every move. A PCS, which is a personal experience unique to each family's needs, is governed by a set of policies and procedures that are inherently impersonal. Policy serves as the guide and rule book. Seasoned movers are often overconfident in this arena, believing they know the rules, but are completely unaware that the policy and procedures are updated and changed frequently. PCS support resources are abundant but must be sought out.

Personal Experience and Policy

A spouse can avoid participating in their Marine's career and every Marine Corps event, but it is nearly impossible to avoid participating in the move process. A spouse does not view their move as a logistical operation. They move the memories and treasures that make their house a home. Spouses need more than "official" support and will naturally turn toward other spouses they can relate to—often searching for answers



UPAC serves as the bridge between the Marine Corps PCS administrative apparatus and the individual Marine, Marine spouse, and their families. (Illustration by Alyssa Ickles.)

on social media. Learning from each other's successes and failures is something that happens within our Marine Corps communities every day, but when it comes to a move, personal ex-

periences do not always match up with what policy dictates. When spouses rely on the personal experiences of others and do not understand how the policy applies or what procedures are in place to assist when questions arise, tensions run high and molehill-sized problems turn into mountains. The spouse's role

Bridging the Communication Gaps

Closing communication gaps seems simple enough: provide a handout to explain policy, teach a class, or guide the Marine toward the subject-matter experts. All these measures have been implemented—yet, there are still gaps. Resources are a tool. Having a tool and understanding how to use that tool are very different things. Recognizing these communication gaps and noticing a social media storm of move challenges, Deputy Commandant, Installations and Logistics, began working with a group of Marine Corps spouse advocates to bridge the gaps. Improved official resources, command support, and spouse advocacy are proving successful in closing the communication gaps.

Using Official Resources

Empowering Marines and spouses to take control of their move is the first step to success and this happens when Marines and spouses have all the information they need. They should attend move classes provided by the installation Information, Referral, and Relocation program office and use official resources provided on Military One Source and Logistics Distribution Branch's (LPD) PCS Move Resources website to learn about PCS policies and procedures. These web resources

USMC PCS ADVOCACY COUNCIL MISSION STATEMENT

The USMC PCS Advocacy Council (UPAC) is an autonomous council with members that partner with Headquarters, United States Marine Corps (HQMC) to facilitate information flow between HQMC Installations and Logistics (I&L) department and Marine Corps service members and their families pertaining to the movement of families, personal property, and pets during a Permanent Change of Station (PCS). We work to identify trends and advocate on behalf of USMC families to reduce the negative effects of a PCS on quality of life and military personnel retention.

UPCA mission statement. (Slide by Silhas Bess, UPAC Media Lead.)

are quick to access and, among other things, provide moving checklists, an explanation of move entitlements, videos, podcasts, and links to their local DMO. Counseling is provided inside Defense Personal Property System but can also be arranged in person at the local DMO. The OCONUS sponsorship program is widely used during OCONUS moves but is underutilized for CONUS moves. Ensuring Marines and spouses are informed of and are using the most up-to-date official resources available will give them the confidence needed to be in control of their move.

Command Support

Commands play a large role in PCS support by providing the Marine adequate time to handle PCS paperwork, availability for moving obligations such as the pre-move survey and pack/load days, and guidance on seeking out Military One Source and the PCS Move Resources websites to assist during the move. Preparing for the logistical movements of a PCS takes time, and commands should afford the Marine adequate time to submit documents to DMO, attend move classes, and be present for pre-move surveys and on moving days. OCONUS moves are even more time-consuming with the need for passports, medical requirements for area clearances, pet transport, and passenger travel. Commanders need to support their Marines before, during, and after the move and be ready to provide support and offer guidance should the move develop complications anywhere in the process. Command participation provides the safety net should complications arise.

Spouse Support

Providing direct support specifically to spouses during a move is a new initiative and a huge leap forward in bridging communication gaps. In 2019, the DC, I&L began working with a group of volunteer spouses who were passionate about improving the PCS process. Initially, the intent was for spouses to communicate questions gathered from social media spouse groups to the LPD within I&L and LPD would provide official PCS resources to answer these

questions. What started as a grassroots effort to help, has grown into a partnership where advocates and I&L's LPD work together to support families with specific needs during their PCS and advocate for changes to improve every move experience.

"Thank you so much for your help. The resources you provided are so helpful. I feel like you are the person who cares about our move."
—UPAC group member

The volunteer spouses of the USMC PCS Advocacy Council are organized into three tiers: lead advocates, advocate

specialists, and advocate ambassadors. This team reports to local DMOs and LPD weekly and the DC, I&L monthly. Advocates are a diverse group of spouses of active-duty Marines who PCS regularly and can empathize with the challenges each family faces. Using social media spouse groups, advocates track trends and identify common issues being experienced by Marines. This allows LPD to make necessary changes and provide additional guidance as needed before issues grow out of control. Individual support is offered in the way of directing Marines and spouses to the appropriate agency for the help they need. Informative posts that provide official resources are published regularly in an effort to keep Marines and spouses up to date on PCS policy and procedure changes, making Marines and their spouses more informed consumers. The use of social media as a form of communication allows for a global reach. Having a direct line of



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communication “straight to the top” allows advocates to provide the correct official resources and course of action for each family’s unique needs. Their unique viewpoint offers a practical approach on how to implement official policy and procedures in a personal move. This unprecedented level of cooperation between HQMC and volunteer spouse advocates has created a direct line of open communication that was not previously there.

The USMC PCS Advocacy Council and LPD participate in a monthly panel hosted by the U.S. Transportation Command, J9 Defense Personal Property Program Management Office.

“The UPAC provides two very key services: Direct support to service members and their families during their PCS, and behind the scenes advocacy with the highest levels at HQMC. PCS moves place service members and their families in an extremely vulnerable situation—their entire lives and financial well-being depend on a well-executed move. Direct customer support empowers these customers with the resources they need to have a safe, successful move—and it’s an indescribable feeling. We aren’t just a call center reading from a script. We really know how to help, because we PCS too. Behind the scenes advocacy is equally rewarding. Sharing the challenges families experience in each step of the PCS with leadership has resulted in both immediate and long term policy changes. Knowing that the leadership at HQMC is not only listening, but passionate about streamlining the PCS process and easing the burden on the service member has reinstated my confidence in the USMC.”

—UPAC Advocate Specialist

Advocacy at the DOD Level

The USMC PCS Advocacy Council and LPD participate in a monthly panel hosted by the U.S. Transportation Command, J9 Defense Personal Property Program Management Office. The Defense Personal Property Program Military Spouse Advisory Panel allows Service spouses to advocate for

larger policy changes. U.S. Transportation Command, J9 Defense Personal Property Program Management Office owns the Tender of Service that is agreed to by every TSP, also known as the moving company, the government uses. Their position on the panel allows for requesting better move resources to be published on Military One Source

and advocating for changes that improve every service member’s PCS move. Recent changes implemented by U.S. Transportation Command, J9 Defense Personal Property Program Management Office, which were a direct result of a UPAC recommendation, include the addition of washers and dryers to the list of essential items when doing an essential items claim and better contract language to hold the TSP accountable when electronics are damaged in a move. Advocates continually engage policymakers with requests for clearer and improved PCS policies. Entitlements and allowances should not be difficult to understand. Advocates, working together with LPD, try to make understanding them easier for Marines and their spouses throughout the move process.

For more information on the USMC PCS Advocacy Council and to join their PCS support groups visit: <https://www.iandl.marines.mil/Divisions/Logistics-Division-LP/Logistics-Distribution-Policy-Branch-LPD/PCS-Move-Resources/USMC-PCS-Advocacy-Council>.

For DOD and Marine Corps-specific personal property and passenger travel information, visit the PCS Move Resources webpage: <https://www.iandl.marines.mil/Divisions/Logistics-Division-LP/Logistics-Distribution-Policy-Branch-LPD/PCS-Move-Resources>. Looking for the Official Personal Property page on MilitaryOneSource.mil? Visit: www.militaryonesource.mil/personalproperty.



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