



Congressman Michael R. Turner  
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[www.Turner.House.Gov](http://www.Turner.House.Gov)

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## **Gates Joins Turner in Fight for Service Member Child Custody Rights**

*Letter from Secretary of Defense Calls for Legislation Which  
Creates Uniform Standard of Protection*

**Washington, D.C.** – Today, Congressman Mike Turner released a letter from Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, in which the Secretary agrees with Turner’s fight for a Uniformed Standard of Protection for Service members in child custody disputes. The Standard would apply specifically to those cases where service is the sole factor involved in a custody decision.

“I join families of Service members around the globe in thanking Secretary Gates for his support of their parental rights. Our men and women in uniform should not have to worry about losing their children while they defend us overseas,” said Turner.

The decision by Secretary Gates follows years of effort on the part of Congressman Turner where he has introduced his Service Members Family Protection Act, which has passed the House five times, including by voice vote and under suspension with no opposition – only to languish in the Senate. With the support of Secretary Gates, Turner’s effort to protect service members finds new momentum.

In his letter, Secretary Gates wrote: “I have been giving this matter a lot of thought and believe [the Department of Defense] should change [its] position to one where [they] are willing to consider whether appropriate legislation can be crafted that provides Service members with a federal uniform standard of protection in cases where it is established that military service is the sole factor involved in a child custody decision involving a Service member...we should work with Congress to pursue an acceptable legislative formula.”

“With the support of the Secretary of Defense coupled with years of widespread support in the House, we have an opportunity to see this great wrong righted. I look forward to working with my colleagues in Congress on both sides of the aisle to see that we create a Uniform Standard for our Service members,” added Turner.

Turner began his advocacy on behalf of deployed military parents after hearing the story of Eva Crouch-Slusher, a Captain in the Kentucky National Guard. Captain Slusher served an 18-month mobilization with the Kentucky National Guard starting in 2003. Her service was later used as the basis to strip her of custody of her daughter, Sara. After an emotionally and financially costly two-year legal battle, she regained custody of her daughter. Since then, Eva Slusher has joined Congressman Turner in advocating for legislation to help protect other military parents from similar custody fights.

“I am pleased Secretary Gates has recognized the value of a Uniform Standard for child custody issues for our military service members. To have our men and women worried about these issues while they are deployed detracts from the overall war effort. As the Chairman of the Military Personnel Subcommittee, I look forward to working with Mr. Turner to provide a federal, baseline standard to assist men and women serving in our active duty military and I thank him for his relentless work on this important issue,” said Congressman Joe Wilson, the Chairman of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel,

which has jurisdiction over the creation of the uniformed standard.

*A copy of Secretary Gate's letter to Congressman Turner is attached to this release.*

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