Washington Times Op-ed—Marine Acceptance is Breakthrough

by J. Michael Smith
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The U.S. Marine Corps recently announced that homeschool graduates after a long struggle to be treated equally are eligible for all enlistment programs.

The statement was made by Master Sgt. James D. Edwards, Marine Corps recruiting command public affairs chief, in a recent article in which he said: “Home-school graduates are afforded the same opportunity to enlist as graduates from public and private schools. They can sign up for all enlistment programs, as long as they are mentally, morally and physically qualified for enlistment and score appropriately on the required Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery Test. And they can often receive an enlistment bonus.”

This is music to the ears of homeschool graduates who desire to serve their country in the Marine Corps. It is a major breakthrough because homeschool graduates have had a difficult time being recognized by military recruiters as “bona fide” high school graduates. The Marine Corps has joined the U.S. Army in welcoming homeschoolers on a level playing field with their public and private school counterparts.

Furthermore, the Marine Corps will treat homeschoolers as Tier I enlistees in its internal ranking. This ensures homeschoolers will receive any applicable enlistment bonuses.

It is gratifying to see these policy changes, as the Home School Legal Defense Association has been working for nearly 10 years to ensure that homeschoolers are treated fairly by the military.

In particular, the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act last year advanced the gains homeschoolers have made in their quest to be treated equally by the military. Section 591 of the act instructs the Pentagon to develop a policy whereby homeschool graduates can compete equally with their peers from institutional schools.

In January 2005, the Department of Defense issued a letter stating that homeschoolers were considered “preferred enlistees” and that there were no “practical limits” to the numbers of homeschoolers who could obtain entrance into the Armed Services. Since then, the Department of Defense has worked with HSLDA to resolve almost every local recruitment problem concerning homeschool graduates.

HSLDA is confident that homeschoolers will succeed in the military. Data from a pilot program, which ran from 1998 to 2004 and gave homeschoolers access to the military, revealed that homeschool enlistees competed successfully with their public school and private school counterparts.

For example, homeschoolers enlisting in the Army have consistently scored, on average, as high as traditional public school graduates on the Armed Forces Qualification Test. In addition, there were no legal waivers issued to homeschoolers for drug and alcohol offenses committed prior to enlistment.

HSLDA is confident that homeschoolers who enter the Marines will demonstrate all the necessary qualities to be successful, but it has been a challenge for Marine recruiters to find homeschoolers. There is no school campus to visit or public roster of homeschool students. Therefore, HSLDA has stepped in and widely communicated this change of policy so homeschoolers are aware of the opportunity.

HSLDA remains committed to ensuring that homeschoolers are fully able to enlist in any military program, and it salutes the Marine Corps for recognizing the achievements of homeschooled graduates.

The change in policy by the Marine Corps is another step in the story of the modern homeschool movement. One of the main goals of the movement is to ensure that homeschoolers are treated equally with students from traditional education backgrounds. Today, we are one step closer to that goal.

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