



Presentation

Before the Subcommittee on Personnel to the Senate
Armed Services Committee

***Military Personnel Policies and Military Family
Readiness***

Witness Statement of
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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record. It is an honor to represent the Airmen of the United States Air Force and the families whose strength and sacrifice underpin our ability to defend the Nation. The work of this Subcommittee has played a meaningful role in shaping personnel policies directly influencing readiness, and I appreciate your sustained focus on the people who execute the mission every day.

Our national interests are under threat around the world. As we face these challenges, it is clear our Airmen are our enduring advantage. They raised their hands and swore an oath to protect and defend the Constitution, and it is our duty to take care of them as they take care of the mission. To truly understand this enduring advantage, I am here to discuss our most advanced weapon system.

Our most complex, most adaptable, and most essential weapon system is, in fact, our United States Airman. This human weapon system is comprised of the innovative mind, solving a problem no technical manual could predict and the unwavering character placing the team's welfare before its own.

Like any advanced system, it requires precise maintenance to function under pressure. This maintenance is measured in the stability of their family, education, spousal employment, the quality of their housing, and their access to care. If our Airmen are distracted by family instability or financial hardship, their performance degrades. In our profession, degraded performance can mean mission failure and lives lost.

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My testimony today is an honest accounting of where we are succeeding, where we are facing challenges, and where we require your support.

THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT: THE LETHALITY EQUATION

I want to be clear up front about compensation. Our Airmen deserve a quality of life reflecting their service. Our commitment to "all-in compensation" is a direct investment in the readiness and sustainment of our human weapon system.

A 6th-generation fighter is only effective in the hands of a focused and skilled Airman. A world-class Airman cannot win a peer fight with outdated technology. That same Airman cannot be expected to maintain a high level of readiness and efficiency when they live and work in crumbling dorms and hangars. 6th-generation platforms need Airmen who have a 6th-generation quality of life. People and platforms are not competing variables; they are two parts of the same lethality equation. If one is weak, the entire system fails.

SUPPORT TO FAMILIES

Sustaining our human weapon system is not a task we accomplish inside the gate alone. Its most critical support structure, its power source, its resilience, is the American military family.

For our families, "Service Before Self" is not an abstract value; it is a series of concrete, life-altering sacrifices. The stressors families face is a direct tax on our readiness. It creates an unfair choice between mission requirements and family stability, and it is a direct constraint on the economic freedom of military spouses. There is some good news on this front. With support from Congress, 17 of 35 military construction requirements have been funded, reducing the projected childcare space shortfall by over 60 percent when complete. However, despite this work, nearly 2,600 children remain on the waitlist for on-installation care.

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The strain on our families is then compounded by the same economic pressures every American faces: the high cost of living, utilities, and housing. Taking care of our people is our foundational duty. This means ensuring our support systems are effective and fostering good partnerships that step up when a family is in need. We have a responsibility to set our Airmen and their families up for success, not to watch them struggle under these cumulative burdens.

Ensuring our families feel supported is therefore a critical factor in the long-term strategic competition for talent. It is foundational to retain the force we need.

RECRUITING, RETENTION, AND TALENT MANAGEMENT

The Air Force met our recruiting goals in Fiscal Year 2025. Although we are proud of this accomplishment, our focus must shift to retention in critical fields. We have a moral obligation to ensure the vibrant, talented force we recruit is not broken by the strain of an aging fleet and undermanned career fields. The average age of our aircraft fleet has increased from 17 to nearly 32 years since the Gulf War, more than doubling the maintenance actions required per aircraft. Our Airmen work miracles every day; miracle-working, however, should not be our sustainment model.

To win the war for talent, we are modernizing proven methods like direct commissioning and constructive service credit and applying them to the digital battlefield. This allows us to attract world-class civilian talent in critical fields like artificial intelligence and cyber warfare. This philosophy of valuing deep technical expertise also extends to our internal talent. The reintroduction of the Warrant Officer rank is another tool in this effort, solidifying a career path for our master technicians to continue to hone their craft.

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Acquiring talent, however, is only part of the equation; we must also manage our force sustainably. We have prioritized our frontline squadrons at 95% staffing to meet global demand, often at the expense of our test and training units. Work is being made in this area, and we are grateful for the continued support for our Bonus programs to achieve the growth in capability and capacity and restore the training pipelines to secure America's air dominance for the future.

MILITARY FAMILY HOUSING AND DORMITORIES

Every Airman deserves a clean, comfortable, and safe home. Following the Barracks Task Force, we set a clear baseline for our dormitories. This was not a celebration; it was about taking ownership of the issue. We know an inspection does not resolve ongoing issues like mold or aging infrastructure. It is why we are executing our largest Facilities, Sustainment, Restoration and Modernization (FSRM) investment in permanent party dorms in over a decade, an estimated \$1.1 billion since FY22. This investment has funded 149 projects in the last few years, with an additional 31 projects in FY26. Commanders and enlisted leaders are heavily involved in this process, leveraging Dorm Leaders to oversee each installation's dorm campus and ensure our junior enlisted reside in safe and comfortable facilities.

Every military family deserves access to safe, quality and well-maintained homes. For our families that live on base in privatized housing, we have invested considerable resources over the last five years to ensure that we hold our privatized project owners accountable. This includes meaningful changes such as the Tenant Bill of Rights, the Dispute Resolution processes, and the implementation of additional feedback mechanisms to ensure that our families receive quality customer service and maintenance services. We take housing concerns seriously, and we will continue to hold our Project Owners accountable with a focus on enhanced oversight, resident

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satisfaction and proper maintenance of homes. We are also committed to investing in and providing safe, quality and well-maintained government-owned homes, primarily at our overseas locations.

TOTAL FORCE CONSIDERATIONS

Our Guard and Reserve Airmen are indispensable. This commitment must extend throughout our Total Force. However, they operate under a system of approximately 30 different duty statuses, a complexity that creates administrative burdens and pay inequities. The friction caused by these outdated rules is a challenge to our readiness.

Beyond these immediate legislative fixes, we look forward to working with this committee to furthering our capabilities and institute greater permeability between the Active, Guard, and Reserve force. Our goal is to make it easier for an Airman to move from one component to the next without the fear of losing pay, rank, or benefits. This will unlock the full potential of our Total Force.

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

The United States Air Force is built on a foundation of dignity and respect. Any act that harms one of our Airmen is something we take seriously. When that harm is inflicted by a fellow Airman, however, it is a profound betrayal. It corrodes the trust that binds our formations and violates the core values of our service and our nation.

Therefore, our primary effort against sexual assault is to forge a healthy command climate where such acts are not tolerated and where every Airman feels empowered to intervene. The foundation of these efforts are the Integrated Primary Prevention and Sexual Assault Response Workforces—dedicated professionals whose primary mission is to empower leaders with the data

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to make decisions and ensure access to tools that will strengthen our culture, build resilience, and reduce the stigma associated with seeking help or support, whether for prevention or response.

We are seeing tangible results from this focus on creating a healthy culture, including a decrease in estimated sexual assault prevalence in the active force in Fiscal Year 2023 for the first time in nearly 10 years. While reporting has remained fairly consistent, we believe that trust in reporting systems, combined with a healthier organization culture can contribute to better outcomes for victims, allowing us to respond more quickly, support victims more effectively, and strengthen the response services that are essential to their recovery.

Our efforts to stand up the Integrated Primary Prevention and Sexual Assault Response workforces, however, have faced significant headwinds. Broader civilian employment transitions have impacted our ability to staff these critical positions. We remain committed to overcoming these challenges and fully staffing these vital roles.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

Mental health is integral to readiness. Over the past few years, tragically we have continued to lose over a hundred lives to suicide annually. In response, we are implementing peer-based programs like Wingman Guardian Connect, but this does not replace the need for clinical care. A national shortage of mental health providers means we do not have enough clinicians to meet the growing demand. Therefore, I ask for your continued focus and rigorous oversight of the Military Health System to help improve timeliness of care while maintaining quality standards across the Total Force.

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CONCLUSION

Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren, and Members of the Subcommittee, balancing the human and technological aspects of our lethality equation requires tough decisions; we are making them. Readiness and quality of life are inseparable. We look forward to our continued partnership to ensure our Airmen have the training, tools, and support they need to deter threats and, if called upon, to fly, fight, and win. Thank you.