

**RECORD VERSION**

**STATEMENT BY**

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## **Opening**

Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Wicker, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for your ongoing support for our Army and providing us the opportunity to discuss our efforts to confront the present recruiting challenge. As the Army's leadership consistently observes, our greatest asset is our people and the unmatched talent that our soldiers bring to the mission every day. Their talent, training, and expertise set us apart from other forces around the world. Our success in maintaining that decisive advantage depends on our ongoing ability to attract, recruit, and retain talented people to serve in our Army.

As we approach the 50-year anniversary of the all-volunteer force, however, we face a significant challenge in sustaining this talent pipeline. As the Army has made clear, today's recruiting landscape did not emerge overnight, and it will take more than a year to solve. Secretary Wormuth has stated that this is the top challenge the Army currently faces, and efforts to address it have the focused attention of every senior leader in the Army and our commanders, not just our Army recruiters.

The Army is meeting this challenge head-on with the Army's characteristic can-do approach. We have invested in numerous short-term and long-term efforts to help reform and modernize our recruiting enterprise. We are working to use this challenge as an opportunity to make our processes and procedures for accessing new soldiers more effective and efficient. There are a number of changes the Army is undertaking to modify our recruiting enterprise to address this issue. In addition, we are using this moment to reintroduce the Army as a career profession, with significant opportunities, to America's youth. We are also working to communicate the value of a career in military service more broadly to the entire country across all communities.

At the same time, our recent retention efforts have exceeded our target numbers, showing that once we get people through the door, they want to stay in the Army. Still, we are investing heavily in improving quality of life to ensure that we take care of our people and to help the Army remain an employer of choice.

## **How We Got Here**

In fiscal year (FY) 2022, the Army accessed 44.9K new soldiers, which fell below our mission of 60K. Though the Army's recruiting challenge did not emerge overnight, falling short of our recruiting mission demonstrated that a combination of difficult, long-term problems and current market trends were beginning to have an acute impact. The Army has worked hard to better understand the varied and complex forces impacting recruiting. While the Army is focused on improving our recruiting numbers, we continue to work across the Department to address the larger structural factors that have impacted military recruiting.

### *Competing for Talent in a Strong Economy*

Like the rest of the Department of Defense (DoD), the Army is in fierce competition for talent with industry. Employers are developing new incentives to hire talented, knowledgeable, and motivated young people. At this moment, the private sector has some advantages in competing for this future workforce. Benefits that used to set the Army apart from the private sector are becoming more commonplace. Industry can provide attractive pay, college tuition assistance benefits, healthcare benefits, and retirement options, while providing more workplace flexibility, from where employees work to what they wear.

### *Access to Schools during the Pandemic*

During the 2020 pandemic, high schools across the country closed their doors to recruiters, and many have not reopened them three years later. This has limited recruiters' ability to build relationships with administrators, teachers, and students. Pandemic-related disruptions to students' education also led to a decline in performance on military entrance exams by almost 9%.

### *Eligibility to Serve*

One of the most significant long-term trends putting pressure on the Army's recruiting ability is declining eligibility. The Army will not lower standards, so the steady decline in young Americans eligible to serve in the military presents a unique challenge. Currently, only 23% of young Americans are eligible to serve, as compared with 29% in 2013.

### *Propensity to Serve*

We also have a challenge connecting with America's youth, or Generation Z. Most of today's young adults are unaware of what it means to serve. About 75% have little to no knowledge about the Army, and only 9% have the propensity to serve, the lowest it has been in over a decade. Market research shows that with Generation Z, the Army faces a knowledge gap, a relatability gap, a trust gap, and a culture gap. According to the Joint Advertising Market Research and Studies (JAMRS) data, the most significant barriers to our youth serving in the Army, regardless of gender or religion, are fear of death or injury, fear of suffering psychological harm, and fear of leaving friends and family.

These factors have combined to generate a challenging recruiting landscape that will likely persist for the next few years. Still, the Army is making a full-court press to revitalize Army recruiting, and we are seeing signs of early momentum.

### **Reforming our Recruiting Enterprise**

The significant challenges facing the Army offer us an opportunity to restructure, reimagine, and reinvest in our recruiting enterprise for today's labor market and America's youth. Our initiatives aim to change how we select, develop, and train our recruiters and how the Army engages with recruits. The Army will continue experimenting and evolving based on what works and improves our recruiting mission. We will also keep partnering across stakeholders—with schools, community groups, organizations supporting veterans and military families, and others—to get the job done.

The Army's first set of initiatives focus on looking hard at how we recruit—who serves as recruiters, how they are trained, assigned, and incentivized, and how we support them—to make sure we are putting the Army's best representatives in the right places with appropriate tools and training.

### *Investing in Recruiters*

The U.S. Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and U.S. Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) are changing how the Army recruits. We are selecting recruiters differently,

improving training, increasing recruiter resources, and creating new incentives for high-performing recruiters. The Army launched the new "CSA Scholars" program, which incentivizes high-performing Captains to seek out recruiting assignments by providing an opportunity to attend graduate school after successfully completing their recruiting tour. The first cohort of 21 Captains is already underway.

The Army is also supporting recruiters differently by improving training, increasing recruiter resources, and creating new incentives for high-performing recruiters. Recruiters also receive preference for assignments to match special skills and family requirements. Commanders then personally assign sponsors to assist families and reduce risk when relocating to remote areas. Lastly, USAREC also established "People Week" at the end of recruiter training to ease the transition from the operational force to recruiting command. This 42-hour course increases awareness of available recruiter resources, including leased housing and reimbursement for out-of-pocket costs like parking fees. It is also designed to help with stress management, financial readiness, and family wellness, which is important since this is often the first time many recruiters are assigned on their own in locations away from units and leaders.

We are also rolling out new incentives for top-performing recruiters. This year, the Army is piloting a new program that provides specialized incentive pay for recruiters who exceed their quarterly recruiting mission. Under the program, recruiters can earn \$75 for each contract over the Category (CAT) IIIB requirement and \$150 for each CAT I-III A contract.

### *Increasing Incentives*

The Army is also expanding and adjusting existing bonuses and incentives to attract recruits to service, especially in critical fields. With the Quick Ship Bonus, recruits can earn up to \$40K just for reporting to basic training within 30 days of enlistment. A handful of enlisted job openings, such as Infantry, Intelligence Analysts, Military Police, and Cyber Operations also come with signing bonuses of up to \$40K. Qualified Army Reserve recruits are also eligible for up to \$20K of bonuses. Recruits have the opportunity to combine all available bonuses to earn up to \$50K, and recruiters can mix and match multiple incentives to tailor opportunities to individual applicants. The opportunity to be stationed at a location of choice remains the most popular incentive.

### *Military Health System (MHS) Genesis*

The Army continues to improve its processing of medical paperwork throughout the accessions timelines for new recruits. The Army is working with the DoD, Military Entrance Processing Stations, and our sister Services to reduce the time a prospective recruit spends in the MHS Genesis medical process while minimizing the overall "contact to contract" time. Additionally, USAREC increased the size of its Command Surgeon team and dispersed additional Combat Medical Specialists to expedite medical waiver processing. USAREC also contracted 36 additional medical providers to support the pre-screening process. As a result, the Army is seeing improvements. For the first half of FY 2023, the average timeline from applicant appointment to contract, is 84 days. By comparison, the same timeline was 99 days for the first half of FY 2022.

### *Direct Leader Involvement*

Every Army leader is focused on this no-fail mission. Secretary Wormuth directed establishment of the Army Recruiting Task Force, which has pulled diverse talent from across the Total Army to singularly focus on tackling this recruiting challenge. Army Leadership meets with the accessions enterprise every two weeks to review progress, remove obstacles, and approve new recruiting initiatives. Army leaders at the highest levels are also personally speaking to recruits, their families and influencers, school administrators, and recruiters nationwide to encourage youth to enlist.

Through the *Meet Your Army* program, the Army employs strategic messengers, such as general officers, senior enlisted, and senior civilians from all three components, Active Army, Army Reserve, and Army National Guard. It matches them to community leaders who have the most influence within their communities to gain their much-needed support to reconnect America to its Army. Active duty soldiers from U.S. Forces Command are conducting awareness campaigns at high schools and communities where students can watch Army dogs in action, learn about cyber and signal operations, tour a military police vehicle, and learn about medical training and simulations. They are also reconnecting with America by conducting re-enlistment ceremonies at professional sporting events and awarding scholarships during high school graduations to students enrolling at ROTC programs. Secretary Wormuth, General McConville, and other Army leaders, myself included, will travel the country this spring, engaging with superintendents, school boards,

and community groups, as well as giving high school graduation speeches in target markets.

### *The Soldier Referral Program and Army Recruiting Ribbon*

In 2023, the Army launched an initiative to turn every soldier into a recruiter since we know they are credible messengers with ties to their communities. We offer promotion points to junior enlisted soldiers in the ranks of E-1 to E-3 who refer an individual who ships to basic training. While the program is still new, early results are promising; as of March 14, the Army received nearly 4,900 referrals resulting in 68 recruits joining our Army. The Army recently established an Army Recruiting Ribbon to recognize any soldier who helps meet our recruiting mission. These programs provide opportunities for soldiers in the active Army, U.S. Army Reserves, and U.S. Army National Guard to connect with youth where they are, share their Army story, and be recognized when that person joins the Army.

### **Changes to our Engagement with Potential Recruits**

The Army is also improving how it engages with potential recruits, combining sophisticated market research with face-to-face contact to reintroduce the Army to the population. This helps young Americans better understand how the Army relates to their lives, ensures that they hear from relatable formal and informal recruiters, and assists interested prospects in signing up.

### *Marketing and Advertising*

Through our Marketing Implementation Plan, the Army will look to optimize the candidate and recruiter experience and optimize our recruiter's access and use of tools to lead to more contracts. We will execute this by centralizing our data collection of marketing activities at the national and regional levels. At the national level, the Army aims to generate awareness, create interest, educate the public, and leverage artificial intelligence/machine learning to contact potential leads. For example, Army marketing will leverage technologies to send dynamic and personalized marketing messages to prospects based on those prospects' likes and interests. This platform ensures the Army can reach audiences through multiple channels; from the time they are a prospect until they ship to basic training. The GoArmy.com website leverages research, testing, and technologies to better present prospects with the information they need to convert to a lead. This allows GoArmy.com to provide Army recruiters with a higher quantity of leads and allows Army recruiters to focus on lead

conversion instead of lead generation.

We convert this interest at the local levels into possible leads and new recruits. By tailoring social media ads and developing networks to support recruiters, candidates can get the information they need and meet with a recruiter. This will lead to decreased attrition rates and reduce administrative burdens on recruiters. Recruiters can focus on their core skills of generating leads, interviewing/screening candidates, and working with candidates through the contracting process. This will result in better returns on investment and allow the best candidates to join our ranks. The Go Army Contact center exemplifies our efforts to improve the experience for candidates and recruiters. It is a 24/7 resource for prospects that answers questions about Army service through chat and phone.

The Army has identified 15 cities nationwide as key focus areas for our recruiting efforts since we have historically been strong in those areas but have dipped in recent years. These cities are New York City, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Houston, Dallas, Washington DC, Chicago, Tampa, Miami, San Antonio, San Diego, Boston, Riverside, Phoenix, and Jacksonville. In response, we are surging resources, including recruiters and marketing, influencer involvement, and events with community partners. These events include our "High School Blitz" initiative, which drew on feedback from our top-producing recruiters to focus nationwide recruiting stations on more events in high schools, more significant presence at high school sporting events, and more engagement with school officials.

Finally, we have updated the Army brand to reintroduce ourselves to young Americans by meeting young people where they are and addressing concerns that are barriers to entry. The recent "Be All You Can Be" launch, the first brand refresh in 20 years, captures our message and helps us tell the Army story to Generation Z. With support from Congress, the Army will spend \$116.7M in FY 2023 to launch this rebranding campaign across multiple media platforms.

#### *Future Soldier Prep Course (FSPC)*

The FSPC is an investment the Army makes in young Americans. The pilot program stood up in August 2022 to help young people overcome academic and physical fitness barriers to service and,



by the end of the program, meet or exceed the Army's accession standards. As of February 18 of this year, 3094 trainees have enrolled in the Academic component. Of those, 2408 graduated and moved on to Basic Combat Training (BCT) with an average Armed Forces Qualification Test score improvement of 19.4 points. Nine hundred fifty-six (956) trainees have enrolled in the Fitness component. Of those, 821 graduated and moved on to BCT, with an average weekly body fat loss of 1.39%. Seven hundred seventy-seven (777) remain in training at Fort Jackson across both components.

Based on the initial success of the pilot, the Army will add two additional companies at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and two companies at Fort Benning, Georgia. Recruits who improve in at least one test category in the FSPC academic program can renegotiate their contract and receive any incentives offered in their new test category. If they qualify for a priority or shortage military occupational specialty (MOS), they may also select a new MOS based on the needs of the Army.

### **Investing in Retention**

Fortunately, Army retention has remained high despite recruiting challenges. We are not taking this for granted, investing in quality-of-life programs to ensure that we can recruit and retain soldiers and their families.

#### *Maintaining Retention*

Once a soldier joins, they are likely to stay. In FY 2022, the Army met all Active-Duty retention objectives. To provide soldiers and their families stability and predictability, the Army began speaking with soldiers eligible to depart service earlier (~1.5-2 years before separation). We also announced a one-year pilot to allow regular Army soldiers to submit their retirement packets up to two years before their planned retirement date. This serves two purposes for soldiers and the Army. First, it provides greater predictability for soldiers approaching retirement. Second, it will allow the Army to forecast losses earlier and time to adjust its retention goals accordingly. As a result of these practices, the Army forecast and retained 58.3K (~99.14%) of eligible soldiers from FYs 2021 and 2022. For FY 2023, the Army has included 55.1K soldiers, setting us on pace to continue manning an Army in high demand worldwide.

### *Investing in Housing and Families*

The Army recruits soldiers but retains families. We are also committed to providing high-quality housing, barracks, and Child Development Centers (CDC) for soldiers and families, which is critical for readiness, recruitment, and retention. We are demonstrating our commitment to achieving these quality-of-life goals in several ways. For example, we have invested \$1.7B in FY 2023 and requested \$1.3B in FY 2024 to improve the Army's housing inventory, including new builds and major or medium renovations. We are also investing \$10B over ten years to improve barracks across the Army.

The Army is committed to ensuring sufficient and quality childcare by advancing new construction of ten CDCs and two Youth Centers worth over \$200M in multiple locations. Another critical part of caring for people is providing affordable quality childcare, particularly in communities with limited off-post care. The Army's childcare strategy includes increasing and sustaining childcare infrastructure, recruiting and retaining quality staff, increasing Family Child Care providers, sustaining off-post care options, and exploring new initiatives and partnerships.

We have hiring incentives in place to attract and retain CDC workers, help pay for children to attend off-post facilities when we run out of capacity, and work to certify spouses to provide care in their homes. Entry-level salaries are now \$17.39 per hour. We offer recruiting and retention bonuses for childcare staff, providing them with childcare discounts for their first child and additional multiple-child discounts. We also continue to provide Army Fee Assistance to approximately 10K children of the active and reserve component per month for off-post care. But it doesn't stop there. We are always looking out for new initiatives and partnerships. Additionally, the Army increased the provider rate cap to \$1,700 monthly, reducing out-of-pocket expenses for Army families. While the Army cannot deliver the full extent of our planned improvements overnight, we can provide consistent and enduring resources to continuously improve the quality of life for soldiers and their loved ones.

### *Investing in Positive Command Climates*

Making the Army an employer of choice and appealing to recruits and their parents requires us to invest in ensuring that the Army is a safe, inclusive, and supportive workplace. We are investing significantly in picking and training our leaders, building positive command climates, and preventing harmful behaviors. These efforts should also improve our ability to recruit soldiers and positively impacts retention. The Army has numerous programs underway to achieve this goal.

### **Conclusion**

The Army has prioritized our efforts to confront the recruiting challenge, and we are doing everything possible to retool our recruiting enterprise. We are also working diligently to reintroduce the Army and the notion of military service to the American public more broadly. We are making a concerted effort to ensure we communicate the Army's career-enhancing opportunities and the value of public service in the military. Ultimately, our national security depends on our success. But we can't do it alone.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the all-volunteer force, we are already looking ahead to the next 50 years and ensuring we have capable, trained, and disciplined soldiers ready to respond to any threat.

I want to close by noting that we need your help. Military service is in danger of becoming a family business, with over 60% of enlistees having a direct relative who served; we cannot afford to let that happen. Each of you has a unique voice and opportunity to promote the benefits of service, connect with soldiers and their families, caregivers, and survivors, and encourage veterans, influencers, and educators to invest in the next generation. Participating in that mission has given generations of Americans a sense of purpose, new skills, and new possibilities. I believe we offer the same opportunity to young people today and could use your help to tell that story.