

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

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BEFORE THE

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Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, distinguished members of this panel, thank you for the invitation to speak on behalf of the Soldiers, their Families, and the Army Civilians who make up our all-volunteer force.

First, I want to say how proud I am of our Soldiers. America's Army is lethal and effective, ready to surge when called upon in times of crisis to fight and win the Nation's wars while defending enduring National interests. Our deployed forces in Europe now include 42,000 Soldiers, of which 17,000 are not permanently assigned to Europe. In the Africa and Central Command areas of operation, there are more than 23,000 Soldiers committed. On standby, are 74,000 Soldiers serving as part of the Immediate or Crisis Response Forces. Serving alongside each of them is a Family enduring the stress of a loved one away from home or prepared to leave at a moment's notice. Their sacrifice is not unnoticed.

Thank you for all the work you have done to support your Army. It has been my honor to serve over the past 30 years and the impacts of your support could not be clearer.

The Secretary of the Army outlined four focus areas: 1) keep the Army on a sustainable strategic path to transform to the Army of 2040, 2) strategically adapt the way we recruit and retain talent, 3) prevent harmful behaviors, and 4) improve the quality of life of our Soldiers, particularly with housing. My role is to ensure we stand ready to deter and defend around the globe, as the tip of the spear in Europe and the backbone of joint operations in the Indo-Pacific. The Army surges in times of crisis and is ready when called upon to fight and win the nation's wars.

Improving Quality of Life

We are forging a culture where Soldiers are treated with dignity and respect and they are required to be physically fit, well-trained, and disciplined. Attracting and retaining the highest quality individuals our country has to offer is a top priority. The ability to maintain our readiness and grow our lethality, now and into the future, depends upon us not just filling our ranks to capacity but ensuring we have qualified and quality individuals who have a desire to

be part of something righteous and with purpose. Your Army's future and the safety and security of the United States of America depends on their dedication and commitment to our country.

Unaccompanied Housing - Barracks

In our FY 2025 Budget request, the Army requests 100 percent of the barracks sustainment requirement in the operations and maintenance account and an additional \$935 million for nine barracks, seven Active and two Reserve military construction (MILCON) projects. The nine barracks projects in the MILCON request will provide 1,770 beds at eight locations. Innovation and modernization are at the forefront of the Army barracks construction program. In the last few years, with the help of the Congress, the Army's investment in permanent party barracks has grown from \$718 million per fiscal year in 2021 to an average of \$1.5 billion per year in the FY 2025 budget request. Across all components and all barracks types, the Army is requesting to invest \$2.4 billion in barracks in FY 2025.

Army Family Housing

In addition to the Army's efforts on barracks, the Army continues to make significant progress to provide high quality Family housing for our Soldiers and their Families—both government owned housing and privatized Family housing.

The FY 2025 budget request includes \$752 million for the Army Family Housing Program. This funding is vital to address government owned housing needs and improve the quality of life for Soldiers and Families. In FY 2025, the Army is requesting four construction projects, which will include 84 new housing unit in Chievres, Belgium; replacement construction of 54 units in Baumholder, Germany; renovation of another 35 units at Camp Zama, Japan; as well as a request for military privatization initiative at Fort Eisenhower, GA. The Army estimates that 90 percent of the Army owned housing inventory (primarily overseas) will meet the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) standards by the end of FY 2025.

In addition to ensuring high-quality Army-owned housing, the Army has made significant

progress in validating the quality of privatized housing. Over the next three years, privatized housing providers will invest over \$2 billion in private sector funding in new construction, renovations, and other development work. To ensure this investment is sufficient to maintain the high-quality privatized housing our Soldiers deserve the Army has implemented several oversight reforms over the last few years. These efforts included adding conditions to the ground leases held by the privatized housing providers, increasing the frequency of inspections, conditioning incentive payments based on quality assurance inspections, and providing Army investments to improve housing, when appropriate. When our inspections reveal deficiencies from the privatized housing providers, the Army is taking action.

Child Care

The resiliency of our force is dependent on more than just housing. Our Soldiers and their Families need access to safe child care so that they can remain mission focused. To assist our Families finding safe child care, the Army has a robust Child Care Fee Assistance Program that subsidizes the cost of community child care for approximately 10,000 children per day for Families with limited access to installation child care or duty station off installation.

Supporting military Families with access to affordable quality child care is another area of significant focus. The Army is constructing four child care centers (CDC) (Fort Wainwright, AK, two at Army Garrison Hawaii, and Fort Johnson, LA). The Army has six CDCs in various stages of design (Fort Eisenhower, GA; Fort Leavenworth, KS, Fort Knox, KY; Fort Meade, MD; Fort Liberty, NC, and Wiesbaden Military Community, Germany). In addition, 12 CDCs throughout the Army are under renovation.

Ongoing staffing challenges continue to impact child care availability at some locations despite initial pay increases, bonuses, and expanded hiring initiatives for child care workers. To address unmet demand for child care at installations, the Army offers fee assistance in community-based care options to all military and Civilians who are geographically dispersed or at garrisons with long wait lists for installation-based care.

In addition, the Army executed an Intergovernmental Service Agreement with West Liberty, Iowa and Clay County, Missouri to assist Reserve Soldiers in finding and funding child care during weekend drill, which has proven life changing and career-sustaining for some Soldiers.

Army Spouses

More than 431,000 spouses play an essential role in readiness and soldier intent to remain in the Army. Spouses are more likely to support their Soldier's continued service when they can build and transport their careers, have access to quality employment options, and are satisfied with their overall quality of life.

The Army continues to support meaningful spouse employment by working with the OSD to improve and promote My Career Advancement Accounts, a workforce development scholarship worth up to \$4,000 to pursue licenses, certifications, or associate degrees in portable occupations. We continue to improve opportunities for military spouses by developing the Department of the Army Voluntary Reassignment Program (DAVRAP). This program delivers an Army-wide recruitment source that allows hiring managers to quickly fill vacant positions non-competitively through reassignment of current Army employees.

We've increased the current Employment Readiness Program staff by 31; added certification to the employment readiness staff and implemented the non-appropriated fund Civilian Employee Assignment Tool (CEAT). CEAT enables non-appropriated funded Civilians to transfer from one installation to another. Since inception, over 630 spouses were able to continue employment after a Permanent Change of Station (PCS).

The Department of Defense's Military Spouse Employment Partnership connects spouses with approximately 700 partner employers committed to hiring military spouses. The Army continues collaboration with the Defense State Liaison Office to improve state license reciprocity and professional license compacts.

The Army acknowledges we must continue improving the experience for Soldiers, Civilians,

and Families to avoid hardships caused by PCS expenses. Updated policies and processes to provide PCS orders to Soldiers and Civilians 120 days prior to report dates have enabled better forecasting and scheduling for contracted movers.

The Army established a Relocation Advisory Committee which includes Army spouses, subject matter experts, and Army leaders to address PCS issues within its purview or to be raised to OSD for action. The Army continues to work with OSD, U.S. Transportation Command, and other Services to develop and implement meaningful policy changes to make improvements and reduce stressors on Soldiers and Families throughout the PCS move process.

Approximately 47,000 Soldiers (about 10 percent of the force) have 58,000 Family members enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP). The Army is committed to a holistic approach to support Families enrolled in the EFMP to help them remain ready and resilient. As we work with families enrolled in the EFMP, we strive to balance Army readiness with their wellbeing. We must ensure Families enrolled in the EFMP are stationed where they can receive appropriate medical care and support services.

In 2022, we launched the integrated Army Enterprise EFMP system to improve enrollment and overseas family member travel screening actions, transparency, assignment inquiry, and family support access for Families enrolled in the EFMP. Additionally, we are establishing the HQDA EFMP central office to ensure consistent application and processes across the Army.

Recruit and Retain Talented Soldiers

FY 2024 has been about winning the war on talent in a competitive marketplace. The gifted men and women who raise their right hands and say “yes” to service have chosen to join and remain in the Army at a pivotal point amid many global challenges facing the Nation.

We can only do this by investing in America’s sons and daughters, who are more than up to this challenge. It requires us to find innovative ways to communicate the unlimited opportunities that exist and hope they take advantage of the life accelerator the Army can be for them. Building on

the momentum off 2023 initiatives, the Army will continue to drive positive change in 2024 with how we recruit, develop, retain, reward, and sustain our all-volunteer force.

In response to the most challenging recruiting environment since the 1973 establishment of the all-volunteer force, the Army implemented the Future Soldier Preparatory Course (FSPC) program in August 2022 at Fort Jackson, SC. This program is an investment in America's youth to assist them in overcoming barriers to service by providing focused academic and fitness instruction to help recruits meet and exceed the Army's desired accession standards for body fat composition and academic test performance prior to basic training. Access to this program allows individuals who already meet all other qualifications for enlistment, including moral and medical accessions standards and provide a successful pathway to service.

In FY 2023, the success of the FSPC program provided upwards of three Brigade Combat Teams (12,887 Soldiers) worth of additional combat power to the Army. 47 percent of graduates are scoring in Test Score Category IIIA or higher, thus ensuring we maintain our continued goal of accessions quality over quantity. 96.6 percent of academic track graduates and 95.4 percent of fitness track graduates have graduated Basic Combat Training (BCT) which is higher than the standard BCT graduation rate of 94 percent.

FSPC graduates continue to be selected for leadership positions in training units at a higher rate than their peers and a large number are scoring above 500 out of 600 on the Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT).

While this program is relatively new, the Army continues to conduct longitudinal analysis on FSPC graduates throughout their term of service to better inform future FSPC efforts. Initial FY 2024 returns indicate continued positives trends within the program. The FSPC has proven success in unlocking potential within new recruits and demonstrates continued Army investment in America's youth. Investment in these Soldiers results in a higher commitment to the Army.

In FY 2023, the Army retained 56,239 Soldiers to remain in the regular Army and transitioned an

additional 7,041 from the Regular Army into the Army Reserve or Army National Guard. This year, the Regular Army Retention program continues to see success and is on track to meet its FY 2024 retention mission objectives.

Over the past 18-months, the Army has revised its policies to increase opportunities for Soldiers to train into new skills, including new military occupational specialties, merging some roles in intelligence and field artillery, and increasing the stabilization periods for Soldiers who reenlist to remain at their current installation for up to 30 additional months (increased from up to 18 months.)

The Army continues to leverage the Transfer of Education Benefits Program and look to increase the utilization of Continuation Pay through targeted increases for our most critical skills to enhance the retention program.

The Army Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Strategy published in late 2021 assists commanders to prepare squads to adapt to an environment that is constantly changing. The message is straightforward: construct cohesive teams comprised of individuals who are intellectually, and physically fit, in addition to being highly trained and disciplined. They are expected to be capable of competing, contending, and triumphing in multi-domain operations on behalf of our Nation. To meet this expectation, we must develop and empower NCOs to utilize their knowledge, abilities, and conduct to lead in accordance with standards embedded within our Army values and NCO core competencies.

The Army is aiding these subordinate leaders in their endeavors to foster team cohesion via an assortment of programs and initiatives. Field Manual 6-22 (Leader Development) was revised last year to provide leaders with the necessary tools to coach, counsel, and mentor subordinates into leaders of character who are adept at assembling cohesive teams and understanding their Soldiers. It is my conviction that engaged leadership, a positive command climate, and unit cohesion are the Army's most vital safeguards against detrimental behaviors within the ranks.

This year, the Army planned and executed five Building Cohesive Teams Forums. The forums provided a direct line of communication among Command Teams, Army Senior Leaders, and HQDA to share best practices, identify, anticipate, and further build cohesive teams at echelon.

Preventing Harmful Behaviors

The presence of harmful behaviors — like domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, suicide, sexual assault, harassment, retaliation, racism, and extremism — are the antithesis of our values and have absolutely no place in the Army.

To support our prevention efforts, the Army is developing a system at echelon that will support data-informed prevention actions to be implemented across the Army. The Army's upstream approach focuses on cultivating healthy communities and protective environments and improving the conditions in the environment to ensure that military community members thrive.

As part of the Army's efforts to get upstream of harmful behaviors and prevent them from occurring, we are implementing an integrated prevention workforce called the Integrated Prevention Advisory Group (I-PAG). I-PAGs advise and support Leaders by identifying, adapting, implementing, and evaluating research-based prevention programs, policies, and practices. I-PAG teams collaborate with other prevention partners on the installation, such as Sexual Assault Prevention and Response personnel, Family Advocacy Program personnel, Suicide Prevention personnel, Military Equal Opportunity Advisors, and Chaplains, to ensure alignment of prevention approaches. Additionally, I-PAGs address risk and protective factors; share information, research, and evaluation findings; and emphasize environmental and contextual factors (e.g., social determinants of health, pre-military risk factors, and community crime prevention) to enhance protective environments and address harmful behaviors. We are actively hiring and growing the prevention workforce at 54 locations throughout the Army.

As the Army places more emphasis on upstream prevention efforts to reduce harmful behaviors, and increase awareness of available support services, we continue to invest in the Family Advocacy Program (FAP), the Army's prevention, education, and response to domestic abuse,

and child abuse and neglect.

The FAP, a congressionally mandated program, is the Army's domestic abuse prevention and response program. FAP provides a wide array of evidence-informed prevention education programs to strengthen Families and enhance resilience by supporting healthy life skills, safe spousal and intimate relationships, and nurturing parenting skills.

When abuse incidents occur, FAP utilizes a multi-disciplinary team framework to facilitate a trauma-informed coordinated community response in partnership with medical, behavioral health, legal, command, law enforcement, and other community agencies on and off the installation, Army wide. FAP also offers evidence-based clinical assessment and treatment for all involved and 24/7 victim advocacy and referral services for victims of abuse.

Family violence is a threat to the health, welfare and safety of Soldiers and Family members and it severely degrades warfighter readiness. The Army FAP helps to strengthen Army Families by enhancing resiliency and relationship skills and improving quality of life.

We have made significant progress within our Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) Program. The Army has initiated the transfer of Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs) and Victim Advocates (VAs) from the chain of command to an installation-based support model that will strengthen and streamline an independent sexual assault response workforce, reduce reliance on collateral duty personnel and increase the level of expertise available to commanders and survivors. To support this effort, we established a supervisory structure at the installation level and a management structure at the operational level. This ensures a robust implementation framework with professional oversight across the entire force.

The Army is increasing the number of full-time SARCs and VAs who are thoroughly trained and have the requisite experience to effectively support victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault. We are also ensuring that our military personnel continue to provide victim assistance in

isolated and remote locations, in compliance with the recommendation of Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military, as approved by the Secretary of Defense. We believe this will allow for sufficient support to all sexual assault victims, regardless of location, to help them understand their reporting options and get the assistance they need. My focus is to ensure that everyone knows how to get the help they need.

To inform our prevention focus, we have introduced enhanced command climate assessment tools, procedures, and policies. These measures will provide more timely indicators of harmful behaviors, empowering leaders to be more proactive.

Holistic Health and Fitness

People are at the heart of Army readiness and our strength is Soldiers and their Families. To remain combat-ready, our Soldiers must shoot, move, communicate, and bond through tough training and learning to overcome adversity. The Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) System is the Army's primary investment in building a better warfighter. In today's unstable geopolitical environment this is the right time to invest in optimizing warfighter performance. H2F helps Soldiers achieve optimal performance, reduce injury rates, quickly rehabilitate, recondition, and reintegrate after injury, and improve Soldier and unit readiness across the Total Army. The H2F System provides leaders with resources to achieve individual and unit readiness goals. The system optimizes health and fitness by developing and sustaining positive habits learned through the five domains of H2F: mental, spiritual, sleep, nutrition, and physical readiness.

The backbone of the H2F System is the H2F Performance Team. Currently, 50 Army brigades in the Active Component have embedded interdisciplinary H2F Performance Teams, consisting of Physical Therapists, Registered Dietitians, Occupational Therapists, Certified Athletic Trainers, Cognitive Performance Specialists, and Strength and Conditioning Coaches providing injury prevention and human performance optimization expertise. We plan to continue fielding H2F Performance Teams at an accelerated rate of 15-21 brigades each year, with the goal of 111 H2F-resourced brigades across the Army by FY 2027. We are also working to incorporate H2F in the National Guard and Reserve Component to effectively address the readiness challenges our

Citizen-Soldiers face.

Initial results of embedding H2F Performance within brigades are promising. H2F-resourced brigades are beginning to see fewer acute and overuse musculoskeletal injuries, fewer overall injuries, faster return to duty rates, improved ACFT scores, and improved Army body composition standards. Lethality measures, including weapons qualification scores, are also improving in H2F-resourced brigades. Soldiers with H2F resources report that they have better access to behavioral health care and feel the command climate supports their progress. Commanders across the Army are excited about the positive impact the H2F System is having on their formations.

To better prevent suicide in Army formations, we continue to emphasize the importance of “connecting to protect” Soldiers, Army Civilians and Family members from the stressors that may contribute to suicide and enable successful service through meaningful missions. Through training and awareness initiatives, we emphasize the importance of engaging and intervening when a teammate may be at risk. We are also conducting foundational research on how to enhance and strengthen culture and climate.

The Army published a stand-alone Suicide Prevention policy in September 2023 that codifies a public health approach to suicide prevention. This approach is designed to strengthen protective factors and reduce risk factors that may lead to harmful behaviors. In addition, we published the Army’s first Lethal Means Safety Toolkit. This Toolkit helps Soldiers, especially Command Teams, and Family members recognize the importance of creating time and space between thoughts of suicide and the means to carry out the act, reducing the likelihood of suicide attempts. There’s still much work to be done in this area and we must focus on the fact that each of those Soldiers left behind Family, friends, and squad mates who mourn them daily; our efforts must work to bring that number to zero.

We are also exploring the incorporation of technology to make a better warfighter. The FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act directed the Commanding General of the U.S. Army

Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) to submit a report on the integration of wearable biometric technology in Army basic combat training. This year, we are executing that pilot at Fort Moore, GA, by incorporating wearables and a digital software platform solution for data inputs, analyses, and outputs. It is expected that the incorporation of technology will help the individual, unit, and organization make better decisions and understand the ramifications of their choices. After all – we seek behavior modification and awareness as a primary first step to improve health and fitness.

The H2F Spiritual Readiness Initiative, developed by the Army Chief of Chaplains in collaboration with the Army Surgeon General and Chief of Behavioral Health, has been integrated throughout the Army in both operational and training environments. This initiative aims at helping Soldiers discover meaning and purpose in life through personal philosophical, and/or religious teachings and beliefs. Army leaders alongside the Army Chaplain Corps have been instrumental in integrating spiritual readiness through all phases of a Soldiers career, contributing an evidence-based approach to the prevention of harmful behaviors. Additionally, the Chief of Chaplains is working with data scientists and psychology researchers to demonstrate the impact that a spiritual readiness has on preventing harmful behaviors.

This effort moves the Army's primary investment in caring for our people forward into the information age, directly addressing critical Secretary of the Army objectives to become more data centric, scale tools and resources to build positive command climates and care for Soldiers, connect our Soldiers and reduce harmful behaviors, and strategically adapt the way we recruit, manage, and retain talent. The H2F digital support platform will be critical to ensuring every Soldier is enabled with H2F through a flexible digital management system they can easily access. This platform provides personalized training, education, and culture content. It also leverages human performance data to assist individuals, leaders, and performance teams in enhance and sustain readiness for the Army. This capability will be critical to our success in the Reserve Component as well, as the majority of these Soldiers are geographically dispersed with limited touchpoints with their units confined to weekend drills and annual training.

The H2F System provides a unified and holistic strategy to change the Army's culture of health and fitness to build a better warfighter. Investing in health and fitness benefits our Soldiers and their Families and ensures the sustainment of an agile and adaptive Army, ready to provide the Nation with a professional, lethal, and decisive force that will win against any adversary.

Highly Trained and Disciplined

The Army's mission has not changed: deploy, fight, and win our Nation's wars. Building individual and team readiness is vital to accomplishing that mission. This will look different at each echelon and for each individual Soldier. However, there are specific areas that apply to most of our Soldiers, and these provide the best opportunity for improvement. One of the initiatives that we are extremely proud of is the alignment of standards for the Expert Infantry, Expert Soldier, and Expert Field Medical Badges. By doing this, units can provide more opportunities for Soldiers to train and earn these badges. Compared to the previous testing model, this concept has contributed to a nine percent increase in pass rate for all Soldiers, and a 353 percent increase in Expert Soldier and Field Medical Badges awarded.

These badges help build the individual, team, and unit readiness required to achieve strategic readiness. Since moving into the position of the Sergeant Major of the Army, I have traveled to Europe, the Middle East, and met with my direct counterparts at other venues. Their feedback has been clear: there is no substitute for having American Soldiers on the ground for both reassurance and deterrence. This speaks volumes about the readiness and professionalism of your Army's Soldiers.

Conclusion

As the Sergeant Major of the Army, the most rewarding aspect of my position is doing everything possible to ensure our Soldiers are the most lethal warfighters. I want to recognize the amazing work done every day by your Total Army and what they've accomplished to keep America safe.

People are our advantage and Army Readiness is predicated on the fortitude and resolve of our

personnel, and it commences with installation-specific infrastructure and programs. Your ongoing support ensures that your Army will continue to be an appealing choice for present and future generations, as we continue to foster cohesive teams, maintain tactical and strategic readiness, and sustain the momentum of modernization. The opportunity to deliver this testimony and your ongoing support of our Soldiers, their Families, and Civilians are greatly appreciated. Your support signifies an investment in the personnel of the Army as they fulfill their military obligations and transition back as exceptional individuals of their communities.