

United States Space Force



Testimony Before the
House Appropriations
Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies

Quality of Life in the Military

Witness Statement of
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Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and distinguished members of this Subcommittee, thank you for your steadfast dedication to the well-being of our Guardians and their families. Your commitment is integral to the strength of the Space Force. By prioritizing their needs, you directly contribute to our ability to scout, retain, and empower the talent required to ensure our nation's military readiness remains unparalleled.

These investments directly impact the welfare and readiness of our Guardians, which is why I am deeply grateful for the critical provisions Congress has provided, including the 3.8% military pay raise, the 4.2% increase in Basic Allowance for Housing, and the 2.4% rise in Basic Allowance for Subsistence. These measures are powerful investments in the resilience and readiness of our force, representing a concrete commitment to those who serve.

While these provisions provide much-needed support, the challenges we face in the rapidly evolving and contested global security environment extend into the space domain. China remains the pacing challenge. The People's Liberation Army has expanded its space presence exponentially, with more than 1,300 satellites in orbit and a rapidly growing arsenal of space weapons designed to deny America's ability to leverage space and to target Joint Forces. Russia, though facing its own challenges, continues to field advanced systems such as anti-satellite missiles and ground-based lasers that target United States assets. These threats demand that we not only protect our current capabilities but deny competitors from using space capabilities that endanger U.S. forces.

In response to these growing threats, 2025 marked a year of tremendous achievement for the Space Force, as we adapted and strengthened our capabilities. A pivotal moment occurred with the graduation of our first class of officers from the newly established Officer Training

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Course. Furthermore, more than 700 Guardians participated in the inaugural Resolute Space exercise, demonstrating the effectiveness of our operations in a contested environment. Our Guardians supported critical national security objectives, as evidenced by the success of Operation MIDNIGHT HAMMER, where they provided precision navigation, critical intelligence, and life-saving missile warning.

As we navigated these evolving challenges, the Space Force itself underwent a historic transformation to better position us for success in the future. We made a historic transition from the legacy Space Operations Command to the newly established Combat Forces Command, fundamentally enhancing our ability to field integrated combat units. Our operational tempo reached new heights, with Space Launch Delta 45 executing 109 launches in a single year, representing a 640 percent increase from the 17 launches in 2019, and marking the first time we've crossed the triple-digit threshold in a single year. Alongside these milestones, we delivered the Advanced Tracking and Launch Analysis System, replacing a 30-year-old legacy system, and began rolling out Tranche 1 of our Proliferated Warfighter Space Architecture, significantly expanding our ability to provide low-latency communication links to support the warfighter with a resilient network of integrated capabilities, including tracking of advanced missile threats, enabled by beyond-line-of-sight tactical data links from low Earth orbit.

While our achievements are a testament to our commitment today, we must continually look to the future to maintain our strategic advantage. A critical component of this future is the Space Force Personnel Management Act, which continues to play a significant role in enabling our talent resiliency. The Personnel Management Act streamlines participation, reduces barriers to service, and integrates full- and part-time billets directly into Space Force units, allowing us to

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create a flexible and adaptive force. We are on track to begin transitioning to the new Personnel Management Act in the summer of 2026, setting the stage for continued evolution.

The transition to the new Personnel Management Act authorities is already well underway. To date, 299 Air Force Reserve members have been selected for full-time transfers, with 192 of these transfers already completed. We anticipate all transfers will be finished by May 2026. Additionally, 104 Air National Guard members have applied to move into full-time positions, with transfers expected to begin in Spring 2026. Furthermore, 357 members of the Air National Guard have applied for part-time positions, with these transfers slated to begin in Summer 2026.

This shift to integrating full- and part-time billets is vital to maintaining a flexible, highly skilled force. Guardians will no longer only have the option to leave the Space Force due to personal or family reasons; they will have the option to take a break from full-time service, address their civilian careers, family, and/or educational pursuits, and return to full-time when ready. This flexibility is crucial to keeping our force agile and ensuring we retain the talent needed for tomorrow's challenges.

In parallel with our growth, ensuring the well-being of our Guardians and their families remains a cornerstone of our readiness. Access to affordable, high-quality childcare is not a convenience; it is a readiness imperative. We are actively addressing long-standing challenges like waiting lists and staffing shortages through innovative solutions. For example, the Colorado Springs Contracted Care Pilot program at Peterson Space Force Base provides 150 off-base childcare spaces managed by our Child & Youth Program, giving members vital flexibility.

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In addition to these immediate initiatives, we are also building for the long-term future of our Guardians and their families. I want to sincerely thank Congress for the crucial funding that enables projects like the new Child Development Center at Eglin North. This FY26 Department of the Air Force-funded project is already 65% designed and will provide 256 additional childcare spaces, directly benefiting 87 Guardians and their families stationed there. These initiatives not only support our service members but also strengthen the communities they call home by providing options and stability. Your support for these programs is a direct investment in the well-being of our people and the security of the space domain.

Equally critical for our Guardians' well-being is ensuring their financial wellbeing, which is an essential element of overall readiness. The Space Force is primarily an employed-in-place force, where Guardians serve from their home stations, which are power projection platforms. While they operate in a deployed-like status, fulfilling critical national missions 24/7, 365 days a year, they still manage the responsibilities of daily life, such as caring for children, supporting spouses, and maintaining households. I appreciate Congress's advocacy for cost-of-living adjustments to basic pay, Basic Allowance for Housing, and Basic Allowance for Subsistence, which have been essential steps toward improving economic security.

While financial well-being is a critical component of readiness, ensuring Guardians have access to nutritious and convenient food options is equally vital to their ability to perform at their best. To meet this need, the Department of the Air Force is modernizing its food service system with a data-driven approach to improve efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and accessibility. The Department of the Air Force is currently assessing its food service operations to better understand patron demographics and usage patterns. This ongoing evaluation will inform the

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development of a strategic roadmap to ensure high-quality, nutritious meals are accessible across a variety of locations, from base dining facilities to more remote or austere assignments. By leveraging industry best practices and innovative solutions, the Department of the Air Force is creating a sustainable, mission-aligned food service program that balances operational readiness with quality of life, ensuring our Guardians are always fueled and ready for the tasks ahead.

To continue these positive trends, both Quality of Life and Quality of Service challenges must remain our combined focus. We must continue to invest in flexible solutions to improve quality of life, like strengthening licensing portability for spouses and expanding modern tele-health service access for members and our families. Both can provide continuity and enhance readiness.

This brings us to another critical challenge for our growing force: our infrastructure. A significant and growing concern is that we are placing 21st-century missions and a growing, highly skilled force into 20th-century facilities. This is a vulnerability that threatens to undermine our long-term effectiveness and the investments we have made in people and technology. To ensure our Guardians can continue to meet the demands our nation places upon them, we need robust and dedicated resources to build the modern, resilient infrastructure required to support them.

As we continue to navigate these evolving challenges, we must look ahead and ensure our Guardians are equipped with everything they need to succeed. To confront the threats of today and tomorrow, increasing the size of U.S. Space Force is a national security necessity. Achieving a force of just over 10,000 uniformed Guardians in 2025 was a landmark milestone. However, to effectively fulfill our current and future national mandate, we must increase our

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infrastructure and our personnel. Expansion is not only necessary but entirely achievable. A mere five months into Fiscal Year 2026, we exceeded our annual recruiting goal, achieving 125 percent of our target for those who have shipped to Basic Military Training or entered our Delayed Entry Program. We will continue to support this growth and effectively employ of forces and our resources to meet the increased demand.

Our Guardians are entrusted with protecting our nation's interests in an increasingly complex and contested environment. Their dedication ensures our nation and its allies can succeed. The decisions we make today will determine our success for decades to come. We must prioritize the needs of our Guardians by providing the resources they require, which include not just weaponry and systems, but also the family support that ensures their focus and the modern infrastructure that enables their mission.

I look forward to collaborating with Congress to ensure the U.S. Space Force has the tools, the people, and the support needed to expand and continue building a future where space power underpins our national prosperity and security.