

# United States Space Force

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Testimony  
Before the House Armed Services  
Committee

## ***Quality of Life in the Military***

Witness Statement of  
CMSSF John F. Bentivegna  
Chief Master Sergeant of the Space Force

January 31, 2024



## CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT OF THE SPACE FORCE JOHN F. BENTIVEGNA

Chief Master Sergeant of the Space Force John F. Bentivegna serves at the highest enlisted level of leadership and provides direction for the enlisted force representing their interests to the American public and to those in all levels of government. He acts as the personal advisor to the Chief of Space Operations and the Secretary of the Air development of the U.S. Space Force.

Chief Bentivegna entered the United States Air Force in 1994 and has served in both Maintenance and Space Operations career fields. He has held positions at the squadron, division, group, wing, Numbered Air Force, Field Command and Headquarters Air and Space Force levels and served as the Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chief Operations Officer and is the Enlisted Space Systems Operations Career Field Manager, Headquarters Space Force, Washington D.C.

Chief Bentivegna entered the United States Space Force on September 1, 2020.



### EDUCATION

- 1999 Airman Leadership School, Buckley Air Force Base, Colo.
- 2001 Advanced Space Operations Course, National Security Space Institute, Colo.
- 2001 Space in the Air Operations Center, National Security Space Institute, Colo.
- 2002 Associate Degree, Electronic Systems Technology, Community College of the Air Force
- 2002 Associate Degree, Space Operations Technology, Community College of the Air Force
- 2004 Noncommissioned Officer Academy, Peterson AFB, Colo.
- 2008 United States Marine Corps Staff NCO Advanced Course, Quantico, Va.
- 2014 Professional Management Certificate, Community College of the Air Force
- 2015 Enterprise Leadership Seminar, Kenan-Flagler Business School, University of North Carolina, N.C.
- 2015 Senior Enlisted Legal Orientation Course, Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.
- 2016 Leadership Development Program, Center for Creative Learning
- 2016 AFSSO21 Executive Leadership Course, University of Tennessee, Tenn.
- 2016 Enterprise Perspective Seminar, Alan L. Freed Associates, Washington, D.C.
- 2017 Senior Enlisted Joint Professional Military Education II, by distance learning
- 2018 Keystone 18-1 Fellow, National Defense University, Washington, D.C.
- 2022 Bachelor of Arts, Political Science, American Military University

### ASSIGNMENTS

1. August 1994–October 1994, Basic Military Training, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas
2. November 1994–June 1995, Precision Measurement Equipment Laboratory Technical Training School, Keesler AFB, Miss.
3. July 1995–May 1998, Precision Measurement Equipment Lab Technician, McGuire AFB, N.J.
4. June 1998–October 2002, Ground Systems Operator, Defense Support Program, Buckley AFB, Colo.
5. November 2002–November 2003, Noncommissioned Officer in Charge, Operations Training, Clear Air Force Station, Alaska
6. December 2003–November 2007, Superintendent, 527th Space Aggressor Squadron, Schriever AFB, Colo.
7. December 2007–September 2010, Superintendent, Mission Management Division, Aerospace Data Facility, Buckley AFB, Colo.
8. October 2010–June 2013, Superintendent, 76th Space Control Squadron, Peterson AFB, Colo.
9. July 2013–April 2015, Superintendent, 460th Operations Group, Buckley AFB, Colo.
10. April 2015–January 2017, Command Chief, 50th Space Wing, Schriever AFB, Colo.

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11. February 2017–November 2017, Chief, Air Force Enlisted Force Development, Headquarters Air Force, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.
12. December 2017–January 2019, Command Senior Enlisted Leader, Air Force Element, National Reconnaissance Office, Chantilly, Va.
13. February 2019–December 2019, Command Chief, 14th Air Force & Combined Force Space Component Command, Vandenberg AFB, Calif.
14. December 2019–September 2020, Command Chief, Space Operations Command & Combined Force Space Component Command, Vandenberg AFB, Calif.
15. October 2020–January 2021, Command Chief, Space Operations Command, Peterson AFB, Colo.
16. February 2021–May 2022, Senior Enlisted Leader, Space Operations Command, Peterson Space Force Base, Colo.
17. June 2022–August 2023, Senior Enlisted Advisor to Chief Operations Officer and Enlisted Space Operations Career Field Manager, Headquarters Space Force, Washington, D.C.
18. September 2023–Present, Chief Master Sergeant of the Space Force, United States Space Force, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

## **MAJOR AWARDS AND DECORATIONS**

Defense Superior Service Medal  
Legion of Merit with one oak leaf cluster  
Defense Meritorious Service Medal  
Meritorious Service Medal with four oak leaf clusters  
Air and Space Commendation Medal with two oak leaf clusters  
Air and Space Achievement Medal  
Joint Meritorious Unit Award  
Air and Space Outstanding Unit Award with nine oak leaf clusters  
Air and Space Organizational Excellence Award  
Space Force Good Conduct Medal  
Air Force Good Conduct Medal with seven oak leaf clusters  
National Reconnaissance Office Distinguished Service Medal  
National Defense Service Medal with one device  
Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal  
Global War on Terrorism Service Medal  
Nuclear Deterrence Operations Service Medal with two oak leaf clusters

## **OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS**

1997 Senior Airman Below-the-Zone  
1997 Airman of the Year, 305th Air Mobility Wing  
1999 John Levitow Award, Airman Leadership School  
1999 Leadership Award, Airman Leadership School  
2004 Distinguished Graduate, Noncommissioned Officer Academy  
2008 Honor Graduate, United States Marine Corps, Staff NCO Advanced Course  
2009 Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year, Mission Operations Directorate, National Reconnaissance Office

## **EFFECTIVE DATES OF PROMOTION**

Chief Master Sergeant of the Space Force September 2023

(Current as of September 2023)

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Chairman Bacon, Ranking Member Houlahan, and distinguished members of this panel, thank you for your continued support and dedication to the Quality of Life of your Guardians and their loved ones. I am honored to address you and highlight the successes, challenges, and concerns of your Space Force. You have my deepest and most sincere appreciation for your enduring and steadfast support of our country and our service members.

Your support of Quality of Life reviews improves the experience of service for all members and their loved ones, and are directly linked to our continued ability to recruit and retain our warfighting advantage: our Guardians. I also want to thank you for supporting the recent increases in both our Basic Pay and in our Basic Allowance for Housing.

As we celebrated our fourth birthday, our service has achieved several milestones and developed many partnerships along the way. In 2023, we established a Service Component to both U.S. European Command (EUCOM) and U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), which we call Space Force Europe and Africa (SPACEFOREUR-AF). This year they incorporated the execution of orbital warfare into EUCOM's premier Tier-1 Exercise, NEPTUNE EAGLE, for the first time. They also trained more than a thousand personnel from the Joint Force and twenty-five European and African nations.

We stood-up Service Components for both United States Forces Korea and United States Central Command to provide regionally tailored operational effects to the Combatant Commands and to increase the lethality of the Joint Force by sustaining its freedom of maneuver. These are your Guardians providing the warfighting capabilities and problem-solving initiatives above and across the globe.

Thank you also for your support on enacting the Space Force Personnel Management Act as part of the FY24 National Defense Authorization Act. The act is a key part of our Guardian Value Proposition. By providing a new model of service, we can integrate active-component Guardians and Air Force Reservists serving in space-focused career fields into a unified service that offers both full and part-time service options. This allows the service to manage our force more effectively, improve Quality of Life, retention, and capitalize on skill sets and outlooks developed outside the military to continue delivering unmatched space capabilities. This new unified service must remain both competitive and healthy.

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Our ability to properly organize, train, and equip Guardians with the most advanced, realistic, and relevant training and technology is key to their ability to protect our Nation's interest in, from, and to space. But these efforts alone will not secure our success in the space domain. The Quality of Life our Guardians and their families experience has a direct impact on the overall readiness of the force. Their focus, resolve, and willingness to continue their journey as Guardians in the United States Space Force depends, to a great extent, on our commitment and actions taken to care for both them and their families. With all we have achieved, there is still much to accomplish.

Our Guardian Value Proposition is how we describe the ecosystem of all those things we do for, or provide to, Guardians which incentivize their continued service. From targeted pay and compensation to a Guardian's Quality of Life for them and their family, we are looking at all angles and are committed to getting this right for them and future generations serving in the Space Force. We must continue to provide quality care for our Guardians and their families, to enhance their Guardian experience, and continuously highlight our Value Proposition for them.

The Guardian experience begins with our selection process and its prioritization on our foundational core value of Character. Thousands of Americans seek opportunities to enlist in the Space Force each year, going through rigorous screening, capabilities assessments, and a selection board process that prioritizes our values and warfighting needs. In FY23, we connected with more than 4,000 candidates eligible to enlist. We selected 517 aspiring Guardians and are on track to meet our goal to add 659 more in FY24. Though our recruiting efforts have been strong, as our service continues to grow we recognize that how we recruit must continue to evolve so we can remain competitive as the American public's propensity to serve in the military remains a challenge. We will evolve a recruitment strategy that attracts the innovative, technologically savvy, creative problem solving, and critical thinking talent our Space Force requires.

With these sought-after factors, what has historically attracted young Americans to military service in the past is not what will attract or retain them in the future. Our recruits are both older and more educated. The average age of an Enlisted Guardian recruit is 22.1 years with 8% of accessions in FY23 aged between 28-40. They are better educated: 19% entering with an Associate's degree, 16% had a Bachelor's degree, and approximately 5% had a Master's degree.

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A more mature cohort requires an in-depth look at a retention model that will better properly reward fully trained Guardians. With the talent they bring and the requirements and training we levy on our Guardians, education we need to ensure our compensation system is able to continue to recruit and retain the best and the brightest, especially those with the greatest aptitude to innovate in the Space Domain, especially as many entering are not entering service directly after high school. A modernized model to draw in and retain talent is required if we are going to respond to Great Power Competition.

Though a value proposition focused on recruitment is necessary to attract the talent and character our service requires, retention remains one of our most critical areas, both for the future health of the Enlisted force and the Space Force's ability to accomplish its mission. It takes time and deliberate development to grow a space-minded warfighter. With sought-after competencies focused on Intelligence, Cyber, and Space Operations, the breadth and depth we need is vital, and that range of experience takes years to mature. Our technical and warfighting focused service also requires each of our Enlisted Guardians to obtain a successfully adjudicated Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information (TS/SCI) security clearance. By the time a new Guardian has completed Basic Military Training and technical training, we have invested between \$98,000-\$167,000 in each one of them. Because of the quality of their training and certifications they attain after becoming fully-qualified, Guardians quickly learn they have other career options to consider outside of the Space Force. The competition for space-competent talent requires us to take a deeper look into targeted ways in how our service compensates Guardians as it pertains to recruitment and retention and to ensure we can elevate our creative and critical thinking to the next level.

I have visited many of our installations and have looked at the Quality of Life as it pertains to pay and compensation, childcare, housing and dormitories, health care needs, and spouse employment. Several of our Space Force installations are in high-cost living areas, and come with the added strain of long commutes, longer wait times at off-base medical centers, and wait lists to access on-base childcare. When speaking with our Guardians and their families, these are just a few examples of the discussions I am having and the questions that I ask to help our service understand the criticality of the challenges our Guardians have. At many of our locations we are actively addressing these challenges our Guardians face every day, yet more

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work remains. Anxiety and stress over financial and Quality of Life concerns must be taken off the table as much as possible for our Guardians to be ready to fight in an increasingly congested, contested Space domain.

One strategy we are taking is approaching Guardian health in a holistic manner. In October 2023, the Space Force, in partnership with the Air Force Research Lab, began a two-year study of our service's Continuous Fitness Assessment (CFA), which is a component of the Space Force Holistic Health Approach (HHA). Nearly 7,000 of our uniformed Guardians, representing 85% of our total force, registered to participate in the CFA study. The HHA is an innovative, science-based approach to wellness that emphasizes total-fitness, to include continuous physical activity, preventive medicine, education and skill-building to promote positive behaviors. Increasing readiness, reducing absenteeism, judiciously evaluating medical waivers, and giving Guardians flexibility when it comes to their personal health and fitness are paramount to us as a mainly employed-in-place warfighting force.

Guardian Resilience Teams (GRT) are a noteworthy component of the HHA program and are comprised of subject matter experts on human performance, to include a Holistic Health Integrator responsible for coordinating all GRT activities, a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist, a Licensed Mental Health Provider (LMHP), and a Physical Therapist. These teams are located at Space Force bases and will also provide support to our geographically separated units. In 2023, we onboarded 6 Holistic Health Integrators and are actively working to hire all installation mental health providers.

In addition, our installations are working to address some of the limitations in healthcare availability for families. For example, Vandenberg Space Force Base in California partnered with Santa Barbara County to provide on-base occupational and speech therapy at their Child Development Centers. Peterson and Schriever Space Force Bases have also taken similar measures and Patrick Space Force Base in Florida took it one step further with an on-site Behavioral Therapist who supports children with special care needs, integrating this much needed support into the childcare setting.

With regards to childcare, we continue to struggle with capacity limitations as we work to recruit staff at our childcare facilities. Patrick Space Force increased the former 1:12 staff/child ratio to 1:15 for children 6-12 years old. This increased capacity is opening options for service



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members, even as the Childcare Center on base continues to struggle to fill 11 staff vacancies. These vacancies prevent approximately 50 additional children from attending. This is compounded by the unique challenge our Guardians face with being a primarily 24/7 Employed-in-Place force with the preponderance of Guardians execute their warfighting mission from their home installations. Guardians supporting shift work struggle with finding childcare outside of normal business hours and on weekends. While there are several fee assistance services available to military families, the cumbersome processes to seek and access services includes difficulty in the transition of care in-between Permanent Change of Station moves, dual working parents seeking employment, difficulty navigating a non-user-friendly online process to initiate care, and vacancies with Childcare Community Coordinators to help navigate childcare options at each installation. We must look at and resource childcare as a readiness issue and not just a benefit. Without easy to access options or quality care that align to our non-traditional work schedules, Guardians are left with few options which, in many cases, impacts a Guardian's ability to work and continue to serve. Our Guardians should not worry about the decision to leave our service because they are put in the position to choose between taking care of their family and having a career. This holds true for our Guardian spouses as well. They should not have to choose between a meaningful career and the service of their Guardian. We must continue to create pathways to employment for all of our Guardian spouses who desire to work.

Though childcare is an issue for our Guardians with families, where they live is a concern for all members. Many of our youngest and most financially vulnerable Guardians, those who are not married and have no dependents, live in dormitories. We are looking at several dormitory projects to maintain, restore, and improve conditions as outlined in our FY22 Dormitory Master Plan Investment Strategy. Our current average Building Condition Index across our military and training dormitories is 82 of 100 representing an overall 'good' score. Yet we have several projects ongoing and continue to look at areas in need of modernization through our governance process to ensure the housing we furnish is safe and secure. Simultaneously, we are partnering with our privatized housing project owners to ensure the 3,372 family housing units across our installations meet the needs of our Guardians and their families.



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Improving on-base housing options is a good start, but alone are not enough, and many Guardians and their families live in local communities with highly competitive and expensive housing markets. Rising housing and rent prices create several challenges that require a re-look at all facets of compensation. In addition to a volatile real-estate market, several of our installations are in high cost of living areas. I recently visited Los Angeles Air Force Base (LA AFB), the home of our Space Systems Command. The only available military housing is on Fort MacArthur which, during rush hour, is easily 45-50 minutes away from duty stations. The Commissary is also located on LA AFB which makes after hours or weekend shopping trips inconvenient and financially challenging when considering the average price of gas in the local area in December 2023 was \$4.70 per gallon.

The value our Guardians bring to the Nation, our Joint Force, and our Partners and Allies cannot be overstated. That's why we are grateful to Congress for their interest in reviewing how our service members are compensated and cared for. For our Guardians, it is paramount that we conduct a data-driven and holistic look at the Quadrennial Review on Military Compensation, which includes a novel focus on quality-of-life issues tied to compensation, such as childcare access and cost, and military spouse unemployment.

I am extremely proud to serve as a voice for all our Guardians and their loved ones. I have heard many stories throughout my visits, all of which reflect that our Guardians are very proud to serve in your Space Force. Ensuring that they and their loved ones are well taken care of affects their abilities and readiness. Their focus must remain on ensuring our Nation and our joint warfighters always have the advantage in Space.

Chairman Bacon, Ranking Member Houlahan, and distinguished members of this panel, thank you again for this opportunity to represent our incredible Guardians and their families. Our Guardians are the ones who protect and defend our Nation in Space and caring for them and their families must remain a priority for all of us. They are the reason that America's interests, and those of our joint partners and allies, can thrive in an uncertain and increasingly congested, contested, and competitive domain. We owe the Guardians our best, so they continue to give their best. We just turned four, and in the next four or forty years it will be decisions we make today that will ensure the Space Force remains postured to protect the Nation's interests in space, to include safeguarding our free and peaceful access to the Space domain, for mankind and

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modernity itself. We look forward to exploring any ideas you might have to ensure that our Guardians continue to choose to serve; to reviewing the recommendations of the Quadrennial Review on Military Compensation; and to the Congress' enacting or approving the FY24 appropriations to ensure FY24 is a bright one. Thank you.