



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

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Statement for the Record  
Representative Veronica Escobar  
Before the House Armed Services Committee Members' Day Hearing

Dear Chairman Mike Rogers and Ranking Member Adam Smith,

Thank you, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and the distinguished members of the Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony as you begin work on this year's National Defense Authorization Act. It's an honor to engage with this Committee once again—one I previously had the privilege of serving on and continue to hold in the highest regard.

I proudly represent El Paso, Texas, home to Fort Bliss, one of the Army's premier installations and the largest joint mobilization force generation site in the Army. The soldiers, families, and civilians at Fort Bliss play a critical role in ensuring our nation's readiness and security.

In my role on the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, I have seen firsthand both the importance of military construction investments and the challenges of rising costs and limited resources. At Fort Bliss, the U.S. Army Noncommissioned Officer Academy is a prime example. This institution develops the senior enlisted leaders our force depends on, yet the scale and cost of military construction are crowding out mission-critical projects like this one. We are struggling to deliver critical infrastructure across our installations. To tackle this, I am working on legislation to reduce military construction costs, increase flexibility, and expand the use of proven tools like Intergovernmental Support Agreements, which allow installations to partner more effectively with local communities. These authorities can help deliver infrastructure faster, smarter, and more efficiently. I look forward to partnering with the Committee to advance reforms that ensure our military construction enterprise is as agile and effective as the force it supports.

Second, I want to highlight the importance of building a stronger defense workforce pipeline. Defense manufacturers across the country report critical shortages of skilled technicians and machinists. That's why I'm introducing the *Defense Workforce Pipeline Act*. Its goal is simple: to strengthen the pipeline of skilled workers our military and defense industry urgently need. The bill would invest in community and technical colleges, expand training and career pathways, and align education programs with the needs of defense employers. If we want to have the best


military in the world, we need to make thoughtful investments in the workforce that builds and sustains it, and I look forward to working with the Committee to advance this effort.

Third, we must strengthen the connection between installations and their surrounding communities. Programs within the Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation have delivered real value, but they do not fully address gaps in quality-of-life investments for service members and families. Many installations lack off-post spaces where service members and families can engage with and integrate into their local communities, whether that's shared recreational facilities, community centers, or other gathering spaces that help build lasting ties to the communities they serve. To address this, I am advancing a grant program through the appropriations process to support projects that expand access to these kinds of community spaces and shared-use facilities. This initiative, called the Defense Community Recreation, Engagement, and Enhancement Program (DCREEP), will strengthen those base-community ties, improve daily life for military families, and make installations like Fort Bliss better places to live and serve. This is about strengthening readiness through quality of life, and I look forward to partnering with the Committee to formalize these efforts.

Finally, military family child care remains a critical readiness and retention issue. High-demand installations, like Fort Bliss, continue to face unmet child care needs that affect the warfighter and the family unit. Successful pilots, like the program at Peterson Space Force Base, have shown that off-base care models can dramatically reduce waitlists while maintaining quality. I'm working on legislation to expand these pilots across the Department, while strengthening the child care workforce by supporting military spouses with portable employment, reducing barriers to transferring certifications, and creating incentives to retain qualified staff. Expanding access through these pilots and initiatives will directly improve readiness, retention, and quality of life, and I look forward to working with the Committee to ensure these efforts succeed.

Together, these priorities represent a holistic approach to supporting our military. Readiness depends on more than just platforms and programs; it needs strong families, resilient communities, a skilled workforce, and smart, efficient investments. I know the leaders of this Committee share that view, and I remain committed to working with each of you and, through my role on Appropriations, to make sure these efforts receive the support they need to succeed.

Sincerely,

  
Veronica Escobar  
Member of Congress