

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE PRESENTATION
TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBJECT: DEPARTMENT OF AIR FORCE (UNITED STATES AIR FORCE) CHIEF OF
PERSONNEL WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR HEARING ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
TALENT MANAGEMENT MODERNIZATION AND THE EFFECTS OF LEGACY
POLICIES

STATEMENT OF:

LIEUTENANT GENERAL BRIAN T. KELLY
DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR MANPOWER,
PERSONNEL AND SERVICES
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

February 8, 2022

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

INTRODUCTION

Chairwoman Speier, Ranking Member Gallagher, Distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you for your support and the opportunity to appear before this committee.

As the Air Force Chief of Staff has articulated, the United States' national security challenges as outlined in the National Defense Strategy are growing at a rapid pace and it is clear our Air Force must accelerate the changes needed to successfully meet those challenges or face losing. We as an Air Force are fully focused on this imperative and recognize our Airmen and their families form the essential foundation for our ability to change and meet those future challenges. As such, it is essential we also accelerate the creation of the environment, development, and talent management systems needed to ensure we can unlock our Airmen's ability to reach their full potential. Even with world class equipment and training, we know that to develop our Airmen into the best that they can possibly be depends on the skills and resilience of our Airmen as well as their ability to operate in a safe and inclusive environment.

Your United States Air Force is an all-volunteer force and in order to remain an employer of choice for talented individuals, it is important that current and potential members see the Air Force as an agile employer, flexible in meeting the personal needs of its members and families while balancing operational requirements. We realize that continued Congressional support is key as we seek to balance tight fiscal demands with an increasing appetite for talent management modernization.

Air Force retention continues to remain at the highest levels in over twenty years, with some influence from the on-going pandemic and the economy. However, I believe high retention is also a great indicator of the value our Airmen place on serving and ensures we maintain the experience we need to face tomorrow's challenges.

MANAGING TALENT

The Air Force's Talent Management systems continue to transform in order to fully support the National Defense Strategy and Department of Defense guidance, develop leaders of competence and character, and produce the talent we need for the future high-end fight. Most Department of the Air Force talent management initiatives are directed towards a system that enables all Airmen (military and civilian) to reach their full potential within a framework that increases agility, is transparent and simple, improves responsiveness, and empowers performance. This Talent Management framework is centered on defining what we value, measuring those items, and then incentivizing and rewarding those who demonstrate and excel at the valued qualities.

The Air Force is excited about the progress we are making in talent management. Our initiatives enhance the Air Force's ability to better identify, develop, and promote talent to meet occupational, institutional, and joint requirements that ensure we remain a ready, lethal and agile force now and for the future fight.

The Air Force is committed to transforming the way we develop, promote, and retain our officer corps in order to successfully carry out the National Defense Strategy. To meet that task, we must have a force which can adapt, innovate, and demonstrate agility in dealing with today's complex security environment, so we appreciate the additional Defense Officer Personnel Management Act authorities given to us in the FY19 National Defense Authorization Act which allowed us to institute several associated programs.

One of the fundamental tenants of our Talent Management system is to be responsive by ensuring we build our personnel inventory (size, shape, talents) to match our requirements. To that end, the Air Force expanded the previous single Line of the Air Force promotion category into six developmental categories allowing for more agility and a wider range of development paths to ensure officers have the needed skills and expertise to

fight and win. This was first implemented in March of 2020 for all officer ranks and is now entering its third year of operation. This change clearly acknowledges different specialties require different developmental experiences and progression with tailored pathways to better shape the force toward the skills we need for future conflict.

Additionally, we understand the importance of having role models for officers as they navigate the different stages of their career. Recognizing the significance this plays in development, we instituted a new process to screen and select our best officers for formal instructor and recruiting positions. At the same time, we elevated these positions as a critical and an extremely valued component of their career progression, ensuring our officers with the highest potential have the opportunity to serve as positive examples focused on developing the future force.

Furthermore, the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act flexibilities provided by Congress in 2019 have created pathways for us to be more agile in our officer development. One such way is our recent transition away from below-the-zone promotions to merit based promotions to ensure we balanced development time while still providing incentive for those who perform and have potential at the highest levels.

Under this new system, those whose record of performance score the highest at the promotion board, will promote first, reinforcing the importance of performance. This effort is two-fold; first, it provides additional time for officers to gain valuable insight and experience that may have been lost when we accelerated promotions; second, it increases transparency to the force by providing promotion selected officers direct feedback on where they stand in relation to their peers.

We also realize some Airmen miss out on critical career milestones while pursuing other important endeavors for the Air Force. To mitigate any negative impact to an officer's career, we are taking full advantage of the "opt-out" of selection board consideration authority from the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act. We have developed a policy that affords certain officers the ability to "opt-out" of selection board consideration to Major, Lieutenant Colonel, and Colonel and defer to the next year. Not only does it benefit the officer, it will also allow us to better retain and put to use those skills an officer gained while pursuing advanced education or filling an important career broadening position. Last fall, Air Force officers meeting certain boards began using this authority.

Airmen remain our competitive advantage, so it is crucial we stay focused on empowering their performance. A pivotal link to empowering performance is through our evaluation system. While development and implementation are still ongoing, we are currently transforming our officer and enlisted evaluation systems. The transformation is centered on evaluating Airmen against the qualities we value in performance and know we need our Airmen to possess for success in meeting future warfighting requirements outlined in the National Defense Strategy. We designated these valued items as our Airman Leadership Qualities (ALQs) and released them to the force for use in February 2021. The ALQs represent the performance characteristics we want to define, develop, incentivize, and measure in our Airmen. We are striving for our Airmen to embody these ALQs to help them be inclusive and accountable leaders that foster a culture where our Airmen feel safe, valued and have the same opportunity to reach their full potential. This is an integral part of ensuring our Talent Management framework also reinforces the Air Force's commitment to preventing all forms of interpersonal violence by evaluating Airmen on their ability to provide safe climates and lead inclusively, as also recommended by the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault.

Specific to empowering the performance of our enlisted force, the Air Force has published an Enlisted Force Development Plan Action Plan focused on providing continuous, career-long enlisted development by integrating education, training and experience to produce the Airmen needed to defend America...anytime, anywhere. Soon to accompany the action plan is "The Blueprint for Enlisted Force Development", to be released later this year. This will help to better inform and communicate to our enlisted Airmen the

opportunities which exist that are at their fingertips today. This document will serve as a living foundational resource that links all enlisted development from entry to departure, including key concepts to connect enlisted Airmen to the Profession of Arms.

We also have reformed our Senior Non-Commissioned Officer promotion process. In order to put more of an emphasis on performance in primary duties and responsibilities, we eliminated the promotion testing portion of the process that was not always a good indicator of performance. Instead, we instituted a board process to allow more focus to be put on one's record of performance and demonstrated leadership skills.

To complement our efforts at empowering the performance of our enlisted corps we also established an indefinite enlistment policy for our enlisted Airmen with twelve or more years of service. This change allowed for the extension of High Year Tenure for E-4s, E-5s, and E-6s, reduced the administration burden on our Airmen that comes with having to reenlist and increased retention of the skills and experience we need. We recently complemented this effort by increasing the value we place on experience as well as performance. While technical acumen remains important, experience contributes to the proficiency of our Non-Commissioned Officers as leaders and supervisors, and our updates to the enlisted promotion system reflect the same. The direct frontline experience of supervisors shapes the environment for the unit and the quality of service experienced by of our most junior Airmen. Ensuring we value experience, learned from repetition and exposure, helps ensure leadership acumen is purposefully managed and is as equally important as technical competence. In the enlisted promotion system, among Airmen performing at the same level, the one with greater experience carries more value.

We are also ensuring diversity and inclusion are ingrained across all aspects of Talent Management. The Department of the Air Force's Racial Disparity Review, Disparity Review and Disparity Addendum addressed inequalities based on underrepresented groups and across gender and ethnicity lines, sharpening our focus on creating a diverse, inclusive, and accessible culture. We are working to address report findings with actionable countermeasures and assessment metrics to mitigate barriers to equitable service for all.

CAREER FLEXIBILITIES

The Air Force's strategic advantage is our people. It is imperative we challenge existing paradigms and remain open-minded about the way we attract and retain top-talent in our military and civilian ranks. We must inject flexibility into career paths and focus efforts on capitalizing on diversity within the Total Force while testing unconventional ways to ensure the Air Force is a career choice our Airmen are excited to pursue and continue. To that end, we are constantly looking into ways to allow Airmen and Guardians a career path beyond the current paradigms that value who they are, their unique skills, and the perspectives they bring to the fight.

Finally, we recognize there are times when Airmen are seeking to a break from military service to meet personal or professional needs. The Career Intermission Program allows members a one-time opportunity to do so for one to three years with a seamless return to active military service. I would like to thank the committee for the recent provision change reducing the service commitment for program participation to a monthly 1:1 ratio.

PERMANENT CHANGE OF STATION

While the Department of the Air Force is an all-volunteer force, we are also a requirements based force and we must meet our commitments to deliver Airmen and Guardians to combatant commanders in all locations. The Department of Air Force is working hard to balance the needs of the service while accommodating service member requests and maximizing family stability as we are able. In discussing our support and family related programs, the Air Force provides support to both Airmen and Guardians.

In FY21, the Air Force's Personnel Center executed roughly 66,300 permanent change of station (PCS) moves, impacting 18,600 officers and 47,700 enlisted members. Standard Department of the Air Force practice is members remain at the same duty location for at least four years; however, there are times where we are required to move members earlier to support mission and developmental requirements. Further, PCS moves are not required when assignment tours end in all cases. Members may move between organizations at the same installation or geographic area without having to PCS, depending on location, personnel availability and requirements.

Average stateside tour length for officers (O-5 and below) is 39 months and for our enlisted force (E-8 and below) is 50 months. This varies with overseas assignments where tour lengths for unaccompanied assignments are typically 12 months for both officer and enlisted Airmen and Guardians while accompanied overseas assignments are typically 36 months for officers and 48 months for enlisted. We are consistently working to increase our overall tour length averages where we can, knowing it provides family stability and reduces burdens related to military spouse employment and military child education, amongst other challenges. That is consistently balanced against the remote location and unaccompanied requirements we have to limit the tour length of those Airmen and Guardians assigned to these less desirable, but necessary, locations. First and foremost we will look for qualified volunteers to fill these assignments; and, when not available ensure equity in choosing non-volunteers. When selecting Airmen and Guardians for unaccompanied, remote, or less desirable locations we are always cognizant of ensuring transparency within the process and work hard to off-set the hardship through some type of follow-on assignment preference.

Of the 66,300 members who PCS'ed in FY21, 40,500 were married; 12,900 officer and 27,600 enlisted members. For those active duty service members who requested joint-spouse assignments (active duty members married to active duty members), the Air Force's Personnel Center was able to successfully match 98% of those requests, keeping dual-military families together. In any case where a dual-military joint-spouse match cannot be made and was not requested by the members, only the 2-star General in charge of the Center can approve assignments that would separate married couples.

Last year the Air Force's Personnel Center was able to work with 1,061 service members requiring humanitarian assignments to support unique circumstances (e.g., a terminally ill family member). Additionally, last year overall, 7,753 Airmen and Guardians with one or more family members enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) relocated on a PCS.

Additionally, the Department of the Air Force also offers the High School Senior Assignment Deferral Program (HSSAD) program, designed to increase stability for military families with dependent children entering their senior year of high school. Active duty officers (Lt Col and below) and enlisted members (SMSgt and below) are eligible and currently 299 families (289 Airmen / 10 Guardians) are participating in the program.

The Military Family Stability Act bill, signed into legislation in the FY17 NDAA, established the relocation period as 180 days prior, and 180 days after, a PCS which allowed for advance and delayed movement of dependents. This law supports the education of dependents, EFMP and expanded entitlements for spouse education, spouse employment, and the care of critically ill family members. This legislation drove the development of policy to support the relocation of families, up to 16 months in advance, after a member was in receipt of a 365-day extended deployment order.

As awareness continues to grow within the Department of the Air Force, use of flexible housing options continues to increase. In 2021, we approved 401 housing waivers to assist military members and their families achieve a smoother transition during a PCS. This policy was developed to support advance relocation of families, up to 16 months, when a member is assigned a 365-day extended deployment.

Supporting transitions for members and their families continues to be a priority for the Department of the Force.

The Department of the Air Force uses assignment processes to match personnel with requirements. We have adjusted policy to target service members receiving PCS orders at least six-months earlier in the process, allowing additional time to coordinate and plan for a smoother transition. We have also placed more focus on the timing of PCS moves for Airmen, Guardians and their families to areas where housing shortages exist to aid with housing availability and affordability concerns.

In an effort to modernize legacy systems and provide military members more control, the Department of the Air Force developed Talent Marketplace, an IT platform that allows for more transparency in the officer (O-5 and below) assignment process. Designed to optimize assignment matches, Talent Marketplace balances the art and science of talent management. Officers have more input in their assignments and increased insight into what options align with their needs (e.g. career, family needs, etc.). Additionally, hiring officials have more insight into who is interested in the jobs they have coming open and an opportunity to rank who they would like to hire.

Although Talent Marketplace was originally focused on improvements within our officer assignments system, moving forward we are concentrating on expanding Talent Marketplace for our enlisted assignment system and specialized deployments.

Although the Department of the Air Force works hard to match an Airman or Guardian's location preferences against existing requirements, there are examples where we cannot accommodate our members for various reasons – often due to specific skills requirements and timing. For example, for a normal PCS, we cannot place a flight line F-16 integrated avionics technician Airman at Travis Air Force Base since Travis does not have F-16s. However, if the member had a unique situation (e.g., terminally ill family member) that warrant them to be assigned at Travis Air Force base, there are other mechanisms we have to help facilitate that assignment, but it would be outside of the normal assignment process. Commanders work with the Air Force Personnel Center to resolve unexpected issues as they arise to ensure we are taking care of our Airmen, Guardians and their families. While volume dictates requirements and policy drives much of the assignment process, we have worked hard in ensuring judgement is applied to help provide the right Airmen and Guardians at the right time which is key to retention.

FAMILY STABILITY

Spouse employment is a critical element impacting family resilience, financial readiness, quality of life, retention, and mission success. PCS moves may negatively impact a military spouse's ability to maintain employment, or achieve their own career goals and aspirations, and often heighten underemployment. The Department of Defense and Department of the Air Force spouse employment programs provide a robust system of support to help military spouses find meaningful employment and connect with available resources. The Department of the Air Force continues to engage with states on improving spouse employment opportunities and advocating for improved professional license portability or pursuing interstate compacts. In 2021, the Department of the Air Force released results of the "Support of Military Families (SOMF)" initiative which assesses each state's efforts to support military spouse licensure portability and links military quality of life factors to the strategic basing process. The quality of local education is also considered and factored into the SOMF score as part of the basing process. This initiative shifts the strategy from expediting individual state licensing through legislation to encouraging a "universal approach" to licensing and interstate compacts. Results continue to dynamically show positive trends, states continue to enact laws expanding options and removing barriers more efficiently such as universal recognition of all state licenses, reciprocity or entering compacts with other states.

Additionally, the Department of the Air Force reimburses up to \$1000 for re-licensing/re-certification costs resulting from a PCS move for military spouses who require a license or certification in their field of work. There are approximately 5,000 Department of the Air Force spouses in career fields requiring occupational licenses that relocate to or within CONUS annually. Between fiscal years 2019 and 2021, \$295,700 was issued to 823 spouses to off-set re-licensure costs due to PCS, averaging \$360 per spouse. Although the Department of the Air Force remains focused on licensure reimbursement as a critical benefit for military families, its usage is decreasing as the number of states that are waiving fees, entering interstate compacts or providing universal recognition from other jurisdictions grows and eliminates the need for reimbursement.

The Department of the Air Force utilizes several approaches to recruit and appoint military spouses into federal employment. The non-competitive military spouse appointment authority has provided the Department of the Air Force with the ability to hire approximately 956 military spouses to appropriated fund positions in Fiscal Year 2021. Many more spouses were hired and employed into local non-appropriated fund positions. This authority is one of several authorities by which a military spouse could be employed. Additionally, the Department of Defense Military Spouse Preference program provides federal employment hiring preference for spouses relocating due to a military member's PCS move. Spouses exercise their preference by applying for job vacancy announcements through USAJobs.gov. Spouses who are best qualified may be appointed to a federal position over non-military spouse candidates. Employment may be permanent, temporary or term limited.

TELEWORK/REMOTE WORK

In response to COVID-19, the Air Force has been maximizing telework to both protect our personnel and to continue the Air Force mission. COVID-19 was a catalyst that enabled the Air Force to reassess how we conduct business. As a result, we have initiated a complete top-to-bottom review of current Air Force telework policies and have developed a revised program to help posture the Air Force for the future. Our new telework/remote work guidance is a major career flexibility that permits our Airmen, both military and civilian, to meet the Air Force mission in a different way. This flexibility also enables us to attract and retain top-tier talent while generating cost savings in facilities and personnel relocation expenses. The new policies will also provide options and potential stability for members and families who may not want to relocate, but can still perform duties from a remote location. This will be particularly applicable to headquarters staff tours for many Airmen.

CONCLUSION

Resilient and ready Airmen and their families are the bedrock of the Air Force's readiness and lethality. These professionals are evolving to compete, deter, and win with unmatched power in the air, space, and cyber domains. Our ability to remain competitive as an employer of choice is reliant upon prioritizing and resourcing what is most important. We look forward to continuing to partner with Congress in our endeavors to protect and defend our great Nation. We thank you for your continued support of your Air Force.