

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

SUBJECT: MILITARY DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL POSTURE HEARING

STATEMENT OF:

LIEUTENANT GENERAL CAROLINE M. MILLER
DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR MANPOWER,
PERSONNEL AND SERVICES

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, and distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and for your continued support. I'm honored to share the Air Force's enduring efforts to strengthen our value proposition as an employer of choice.

Winning a 21st century fight requires adaptable, resilient, innovative Airmen who are prepared to operate and lead teams able to deliver results in dynamic operating environments. People are our competitive advantage, and the Air Force is focused on creating a future force with human-capital capabilities and competencies needed to win. The Air Force is improving talent management by advancing how we recruit, retain, sustain, and develop Airmen. We are removing barriers to service by modernizing accession policies for military and civilian Airmen. Additionally, operational planning teams are identifying the skills and competencies necessary for the future fight. The Air Force is transforming our Human Resources Information Technology infrastructure to enhance the customer experience and reform Human Resources capabilities across the enterprise.

The Air Force has several initiatives to improve Care Solutions for our Airmen, Guardians, and their families, caregivers, and survivors. We've strengthened our Exceptional Family Member Program with new web-based systems, streamlined processes, and increased staff. We are acutely focused on improving access to child care through staffing initiatives, additional Family Child Care providers, increased community-based fee assistance, and targeted construction investments. To support economic security, the Air Force partnered with states to increase spouse licensure compacts and expanded direct hiring authority for spouses. Air Force Command Teams are actively connecting servicemembers and families in need with necessary resources to fight economic insecurity. The Air Force continues to build a positive work environment by strengthening our prevention and response workforces, expanding survivor care and support, and updating training curricula and delivery methods. We remain dedicated to providing a positive and fulfilling work environment.

IMPROVE TALENT MANAGEMENT

We are actively modernizing Talent Management systems to fully support the National Defense Strategy and DOD guidance, foster inclusive leaders of competence and character, and grow the Airmen We Need while fostering a culture of support and inclusion to our service members and their families.

INNOVATION WORKFORCE

To prevail against a sophisticated peer competitor such as China, we need a network of Airmen with unique expertise to develop game-changing solutions to increase our competitive advantage. The Air Force has efforts underway to create developmental pathways for Airmen with diverse and strategic backgrounds, both military and civilian, within, and across, functional communities. We are exploring efficient ways to identify people with critical operational talent, including cyber, technology, and within STEM arenas to partner with innovators and experts to leverage technology and build multi-capable Airmen.

AIR FORCE TALENT MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES

Our Talent Management efforts center on a two-pronged approach: first, to aggressively define future competencies and skills needed for 2030 and beyond, and second, to modernize talent management

processes and systems.

We are in the middle of a multi-year transformation of our talent management architecture, replacing 111 outdated, legacy, and stand-alone IT systems with 6 modern platforms. These platforms take advantage of industry best practices by expanding self-service actions, enabling single sign-on access, increasing digital security, and granting unprecedented access to talent management data.

As a specific example, we recently launched our new performance evaluation system. The new system is proving its value by reducing administrative burden and time, increasing administrative accuracy, and improving the user experience. Strategically, it produces extraordinary data-driven insight into our Airmen's competencies, skills, performance levels, and cultural tendencies to make data-informed decisions and shape the future force we need.

Concurrently, we transformed how we evaluate our Airmen through the Airmen Leadership Qualities (ALQs). ALQs reflect the attributes and values expected of all Airmen, providing a more accurate, holistic performance assessment. Additionally, the ALQs set clear expectations about our Service values, measure performance and behaviors, and incentivize continued development through meaningful feedback. This transformation is crucial to select our best Airmen for promotion, career advancement, critical command, senior enlisted leader duties, and other assignments vital to maintaining our competitive edge as an Air Force.

The Air Force continues to refine our assessment tools to measure personal, cognitive, and leadership abilities, to include 180- and 360-degree feedback, consistently embedded throughout our professional military education, functional training, and leadership development courses. We consistently improve our assessment programs to ensure that Airmen selected to serve on Command Teams are best suited and prepared to lead in alignment with Air Force Core Values and Airmen Leadership Qualities and promote and safeguard the morale, physical well-being, and general welfare of Airmen under their command.

CIVILIAN TALENT MANAGEMENT

The DAF values the talent and skills of our civilian workforce and fully recognizes the integral role they play to the success of the USAF and USSF missions. The DAF Civilian Strategic Human Capital Plan provides three over-arching human capital objectives: 1) Deliver Talent; 2) Maximize Employee Performance; 3) Enhance and Transform Civilian Human Resources. Several human capital strategies and initiatives designed to increase effectiveness and foster a high-performing and engaged culture to leverage the diversity and talent within the civilian workforce support these objectives.

CIVILIAN SHORT-TERM EXPERIENTIAL PROGRAM

The DAF has numerous civilian education and development opportunities. Many of these require geographic mobility; however, our Racial Disparity Review indicated the expectation for geographic mobility could be a barrier to women and some minorities. In response, the DAF is piloting a new short-term civilian development opportunity called the Civilian Short-Term Experiential Program (CSTEP). The purpose of CSTEP is to allow selectees to 1) Develop cross-functional leadership competencies through a short-term experiential assignment that does not require long-term mobility; 2) Enhance the development of self, others, and organizations; 3) Gain a breadth of experience in a different role; and 4)

Gain access to senior leader mentorship. CSTEP's pilot period begins in academic year (AY) 2023-2024, alongside the rest of the existing opportunities associated with the DAF Civilian Development Education Portfolio, such as in-residence intermediate and senior developmental education, full-time bachelor's, and master's degree programs.

The DAF instituted the Premier College Intern Program (PCIP) in 2018 with several goals. First, recruit 500 post-secondary students for internships annually under Direct Hire Authority, Section 1106 of the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act. Second, focus on STEM career fields. Third, non-competitively place graduating PCIP interns into a permanent position or Palace Acquire/Copper Capstone (PAQ) entry-level position. Annually, approximately 450-500 PCIP students enter our formal intern training programs. Since 2018, the DAF hired 2,317 PCIPs and as of March 2023, the PCIP intern retention rate is 86%. This year, DAF had 560 college students commit to summer 2023 internships. Finally, the DAF recruits approximately 900 PAQ/COPs annually to maintain a steady state of 2,300 interns as of February 2023.

The Science, Mathematics, and Research for Transformation (SMART) Scholarship-for-Service Program, part of the DOD science, technology, engineering, and mathematics portfolio, provides STEM students the tools to pursue higher education and begin, or continue, rewarding careers with the DAF. Since its inception in 2006, the DAF has sponsored 1,284 SMART scholars, with 1,138 scholars completing or pursuing bachelor, master, or doctoral STEM degrees. They were successfully placed as DAF STEM civilian professionals. This program allows the Department to fill critical STEM gaps in organizations such as the Air Force Sustainment Center, the Air Force Research Laboratory, the Air Force Life Cycle Management Center, the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center, the Air Force Test Center, the National Air & Space Intelligence Center, and the Air Force Studies Analysis & Assessments Office. SMART scholars from the last two years were deliberately selected to increase the STEM workforce and developed in critical National Defense Emerging Technology areas to include artificial intelligence, autonomy, hypersonics, 5G, quantum, microelectronics, space technology, biotechnology, advanced computing, and integrated sensing and cyber. In 2022, the Department sponsored 97 SMART scholars.

The DAF identifies new initiatives and advocates for effective hiring and retention authorities to secure mission-critical civilian talent. In 2022, the DAF implemented a dual track "Civilians We Need" career model, identifying the need for functional experts and enterprise leaders. This model will help our civilian Airmen and Guardians plan their job experiences, education, training, and leadership opportunities to meet their professional goals. This dual-track civilian career model also promotes greater diversity and inclusiveness and enhances retention.

This model recognizes the value, contributions, and career development needs of civilians who aspire to serve as functional experts/leaders or as enterprise leaders. Preliminary results are encouraging, with an increased representation at the GS-13 (or equivalent) and above level in underrepresented groups (FY21: 23.8%, FY22: 24.2%) and of females (FY21: 26.6%, FY22: 27.2%) in the first year of implementation.

THE FORCE WE NEED

We are maintaining readiness today while building the Air Force for tomorrow's high-end fight. We appreciate your support, particularly with increases in pay and allowances. Your assistance is key to our

Service's success as we balance tight fiscal demands with the urgent need for force modernization as outlined in the DAF's seven Operational Imperatives.

END STRENGTH

Air Force end strength focuses on closing critical warfighting capability gaps that are necessary to deter and, if necessary, defeat aggression from our pacing challenge – the People's Republic of China. Failure to address gaps today dramatically increases the risk to future warfighters. We continue to seek opportunities to divest capabilities inconsistent with that pacing challenge and our end strength focuses on those capabilities that are most critical to executing the National Defense Strategy.

A smaller end strength in FY24 features a total reduction of 1,044 military manpower from FY23 to divest, terminate, or restructure programs with limited utility. Reductions include the legacy missions to Airborne Warning and Control System E-3, A-10, Joint Surveillance and Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS), C-130, F-15, F-16, and Tactical Air Control Parties. Moving away from legacy platforms redirects manpower to our newest aircraft & platforms, the B-21, E-11, and F15-EX, many of which need experienced maintainers and pilots to ensure that we preserve our competitive edge. Additional manpower increases to Battle Management Command and Control, and Collaborative Combat Aircraft Autonomy support the FY24 President's Budget. All these modifications place the USAF on a sustainable path toward modernization.

Our Total Force end strength goal of 502,700 ensures the critical balance of readiness, modernization, and the ability to resource future capabilities to support the most lethal, resilient, survivable, agile, and responsive Air Force in the world.

RECRUITING GOALS

The Air Force is projected to fall below FY23 active duty recruiting goals by ~4,100. The Air Force has accessed 11,197 recruits with an annual accession goal of 26,877. The ANG and AFR anticipate missing their 2023 mission requirements by ~4,600 and ~3,600, respectively. In FY22, Air Force Recruiting Service met the active-duty accession goal of 26,151 with just over 2,000 in carryover enlistments, a considerable deficit of the ~ 5,000 desired carryover in our qualified recruiting bank. Recruiting Service needs to meet the annual accession goal of ~27,000 and recruit ~8,100 additional members to recover from the current deficit.

The eligible recruitment pool is increasingly disconnected and unfamiliar with today's military, resulting in a much lower propensity to serve. Today, 50% of youth have never considered serving in the Armed Forces. Additionally, only 23% of 17 to 24-year-old men and women in the United States are eligible to serve in the military without a waiver, and only one in 11 have the propensity to serve.

The Air Force is keenly aware of our recruiting challenges. We are pulling all available levers: growing enlistment incentives, increasing public affairs and marketing campaigns, expanding diversity and inclusion efforts, and making quality of life and service enhancements. The Secretary of the Air Force directed the Vice Chief of Staff to lead a team to identify and remove barriers to service. Additionally, the team is chartered to develop accession per policies to increase the qualified pool of applicants without decreasing our high standards. The team has revised our tattoo policy to allow for

small hand and neck tattoos, modified our body fat accession policy, and promoted citizenship for lawful permanent residents at Basic Training. Additionally, we reinstated the Enlisted College Loan Repayment Program and are reevaluating driver's license requirements for specific career fields.

We continue to strengthen diversity recruiting efforts with ongoing Total Force marketing improvements focused on underrepresented female, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Native Alaskan populations. We are also focusing on academic institutions, affinity-based professional organizations, and untapped geographic regions. Our General Officers are heavily engaged in recruiting efforts, supporting community and event engagement through the 'GO Inspire' initiative, partnerships with industry and external organizations to reach diverse STEM-minded personnel.

The Air Force continues to attract, recruit, and engage eligible candidates from diverse backgrounds for military aviation through the Air Force ROTC "You Can Fly," AIM High Flight Academy, the Rise Above Aviation Mentorship platform, and Civil Air Patrol programs. We are also focusing efforts on K-12 youth programs with the intent to inspire youth in underrepresented groups to pursue STEM and aviation careers. Our national marketing strategy includes outreach through streaming services. We continue to expand "Inspire Operations," a program pairing high school students and strategic partners nationwide involved in youth aviation and STEM, with pathways to aviation through accession sources such as USAFA and Air Force ROTC, OTS, and Civilian Service.

Additionally, the Air Force leverages predictive tests to ensure that applicants are compatible to serve in certain Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSCs), with Cryptologic Language Analysts as the latest career field to implement a model. The assessments include the risk of disciplinary and counterproductive workplace behaviors that might harm well-being, morale, and mission effectiveness. We administer the Tailored Adaptive Personality Assessment System to all recruits, identifying and measuring an applicant's suitability and adjustment potential for life in the military. This assessment also provides data for ongoing research and development to improve utility.

The Air Force continues to see the benefits of the Air Force Work Interest Navigator (AF-WIN) Survey tool, designed to match enlisted recruits with Air Force career fields based on individual interests. AF-WIN is a web-based tool presenting a series of questions to recruits on functional communities, job contexts, and work activities. It uses an algorithm to create customized career fit reports on more than 135 enlisted Air Force careers, tailored to the recruit's interests. Recruiters use the survey results with their recruits to enhance job counseling and provide comprehensive information on specific career paths to improve job satisfaction and retention efforts.

The Air Force Personnel Center's Develop, Redistribute, Improve, Vault Expose (DRIVE) Program continues to leverage the skillsets of medically disqualified Active Duty, Guard, and Reserve Accession Program candidates (those attending BMT, Tech School, USAFA, College AFROTCs, etc.), to enter the Department of the Air Force's Civil Service. We've placed 28 candidates and another 12 are working through the civil service hiring process in diverse career fields such as civil engineering, public affairs, and cyber security.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there will be no single demographic majority by 2045. We must

draw from the best and brightest talent across our nation to recruit, develop and retain a force of diverse backgrounds, experience, and skillsets. Innovation thrives when Airmen and Guardians are valued and can fully contribute to their organizations. Valued individuals take more responsibility, contribute exponentially, and apply moral courage to lead when faced with complex national security challenges.

RETENTION

Recruiting remains a top priority for the Air Force, and equally critical is the importance of retaining our lethal and ready force. The Air Force experienced unprecedented high retention rates in 2022. However, that is now normalizing, and some areas are experiencing retention challenges.

The Air Force offers targeted monetary incentives to address retention challenges. We have programmed \$179M for the FY23 Selective Retention Bonus Program to target critical capabilities in the enlisted Air Force Specialty Codes with low manning percentages, low retention, and high training costs such as special warfare, aircraft maintenance, cyber and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance.

We use the Aviation Bonus as a strategic talent management tool, tailored annually, and specifically designed to retain the proper number of experienced aviators to maintain the readiness and lethality of the force. The flexibility of the bonus allows the Air Force to annually consider career field health stressors, such as aggressive airline hiring movements, economic recovery, projected Field Grade Officer (FGO) shortages in FY25, aircraft onboarding and divestitures, major aircraft upgrades, Company Grade Officer and FGO manning imbalances, and absorption challenges brought on by increased pilot production. The FY23 program, with a budget of \$238M, will focus on manned pilots and our most experienced aviators, and offers both short-term (defined as 3 years minimum) and long-term (defined as 5 years or more) contract options and incentivizes long-term contracts with increased annual amounts and larger lump-sum payments in the longer-term contract categories.

Incentive programs are modified annually to shape the rated force while practicing thoughtful and deliberate fiscal responsibility. Data garnered from the Rated Pilot Demonstration will inform our ability to forecast needs and remain deliberate in our offerings.

FORCE MANAGEMENT

As anticipated, Air Force retention is declining from the historic highs experienced during the pandemic and is normalizing to pre-pandemic levels. We continue to focus on balancing retention while sustaining the force over time, in order to access and promote the talent we need year after year. We continue to remain responsive knowing we must preserve our ability to recruit new, and retain, existing talent as we focus on the Air Force of 2030 and beyond.

FAMILY CARE

While we recruit individual Airmen, we retain families. The DAF is focused on designing solutions for our military families, to include child and youth program capacity improvements, military spouse support, and family stability in line with the Department of Defense's priority of "Taking Care of People." While the Air Force offers deliberate monetary incentives to alleviate retention challenges, these incentives are only one small piece of our overall retention portfolio. Many retention efforts are non-

monetary and focus on improving quality of life, quality of service, and mitigating operational tempo. Non-monetary incentives include programs such as declination of Professional Military Education without retribution; advancing inter-state compacts for reciprocal spouse re-licensure/certification requirements due to Permanent Change of Station (PCS); Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Caregiver Separation provisions and the Career Intermission Program, which allows members a one-time, temporary transition from active duty to the Individual Ready Reserve to meet personal or professional needs.

In January, we announced the expanded Military Parental Leave program, which eliminated Caregiver leave designations and authorized 12 weeks of parental leave for all service members after a child's birth, adoption, or long-term foster placement. This critical provision provides added flexibility for Airmen to remain on active duty and provides both parents the necessary time to find career and family balance before returning to duty. Additionally, to provide further support during the process, the DAF offers the option for members to use MyVector, a creative and innovative online mentoring system available for new parents, to find mentors who can provide support and guidance as they navigate service and family.

EXCEPTIONAL FAMILY MEMBER PROGRAM

The DAF continues to advance our Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), helping the 55,000 family members and 36,000 total force members enrolled. We are approximately 70% complete in our multi-year transformation efforts including centralization, process improvement, significant automation efforts, streamlined requirements, reduced timelines, and increased access to information and services for our families.

The centralization of EFMP co-located multi-disciplinary resources generated efficiencies, improved process transparency, and reduced family member appointment and paperwork requirements by 90 percent, improving the travel screening process by an average of 14 days. We've also modernized the intuitive online application process. Further, we've partnered with the Army and share the same Case Management System Platform, a key element to meet statutory standardization requirements across the Services.

We appreciate your assistance to increase our EFMP workforce. The DAF enhanced the program and added 54 new EFMP-Family Support positions to support our largest EFMP populations. Additionally, the EFMP workforce collaborates with the Defense Health Agency and help Air Force Surgeon General to ensure the availability of medical resources for our special needs families and provide adequate manning at Military Treatment Facilities. Further, installation legal assistance attorneys can represent our EFMP families at Individualized Education Program and similar meetings with school administrators.

The DAF continues to partner with the DOD Office of Special Needs to implement standardization efforts and respite care services efforts by the end of fiscal year 2024.

CHILD AND YOUTH PROGRAMS

Available, affordable, quality childcare programs support families, enable our servicemembers to focus on the mission, and are both a readiness and retention focus area. In 2022, the DAF provided childcare for over 48,100 children at installation child development programs. However, at some installations, the

local demand for this type of care exceeds program capacity. Our Family Child Care home network offers additional care solutions to this critical issue. In addition, community-based fee assistance supports families waiting for on-base care, or for those who do not reside near an installation. In FY22, the Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood (MCCYN) program served 6,299 children with \$22.9M in fee assistance.

The DAF addresses the availability and delivery of Child and Youth Programs (CYP) with targeted efforts to maximize available childcare options, expand childcare capacity, increase DAF childcare program awareness, and leverage customer feedback to determine needs as outlined in the DAF 2021 Child Care Strategic Plan. The plan was updated in 2023 to further address staffing challenges and improve communications and marketing strategies with our Airmen, Guardians, and families.

Pandemic challenges (such as local health conditions, staff availability, and social distancing guidelines) illustrated that we must develop innovative ways to expand capacity and improve access to childcare for Airmen and Guardians while continuing to advocate for resources to fund childcare facility requirements.

While the DAF is exploring every effort to reduce the unmet demand and provide childcare to those who need it, it is important to note that we define unmet demand as requests for on-base childcare, either an on-base Child Development Center or DAF certified Family Child Care home. As of March 2023, 4,971 children five years of age and under had an unmet on-base childcare need with more than half of these children located at ten of 74 installations. The average wait time was 134 days.

Many of the 4,971 have alternative childcare in use while waiting for on-base care, to include those matched through DAF subsidized care through the Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood (MCCYN) fee assistance program. Although the unmet demand of 4,971 does not imply all these children do not have childcare, these temporary or alternate care solutions may not be viable long-term options for parents and we will continue to pursue multiple strategies to support our Air and Space families.

Last year, the DAF implemented the online Child and Youth Programs Business Management System to improve program operations, facilitate communication between the program and parents, and create a seamless and paperless registration process for families. This new system allows the DAF access to real-time data needed to identify critical childcare space requirements, improve wait list monitoring, and establish improved enterprise decisions on child and youth program resourcing more effectively.

To increase childcare options and spaces, we developed targeted recruitment and retention incentives for Family Child Care providers at 68 installations. Although the pandemic challenged our ability to increase the number of Family Child Care homes, the DAF deployed targeted efforts to recruit and retain FCC providers through various incentives, resulting in 381 certified homes in FY22. These homes support hourly and full-time care, non-traditional childcare, and other specialized care for our Air and Space families. Additionally, we offered a robust Recruitment, Retention, and Special Employee Recognition Program for non-appropriated Child and Youth Program staff members at all installations, which will continue in 2023. The DAF also implemented a 100% childcare fee discount for the first child of Direct Care Staff and a 25% discount for additional children and the children of all other CYP staff.

Five of our top DAF child development center military construction projects – Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas; Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas; Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston, Texas; Wright Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio; and Royal Air Force Lakenheath, United Kingdom were authorized and approved in FY22. In addition, child development centers at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph, Texas, Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, and Wright Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, were approved in FY23.

The DAF dedicates appropriations for child development center planning and design to military construction projects to address facility shortfalls. The Department issued planning and design funds for child development centers at Hanscom Air Force Base, Massachusetts; Luke Air Force Base, Arizona; Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana; and Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho.

Seven minor construction expansion projects to increase capacity through the addition of classrooms or alteration of existing space are currently in planning, with execution projected for Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024. The seven addition/alteration projects will enhance child development centers at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas; Joint Base Charleston, South Carolina; Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota; Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri; Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas; Vandenberg Space Force Base, California, and Peterson Space Force Base, Colorado.

SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT

Spouse employment is a critical element to family resilience, financial readiness, quality of life, retention, and mission success. PCS moves may negatively impact a military spouse's ability to achieve career goals and aspirations, often leading to reduced employment opportunities or underemployment. Military & Family Readiness Centers (M&FRC) serve as a connector to the extensive DAF and DOD resources available to assist with spouse employment. In 2022, M&FRCs partnered with the Air Force Aid Society to provide cost-free career training to 538 DAF spouses for a total of \$350K.

The DAF uses the results from the "Supporting our Military Families" initiative to assess each state's efforts to support military spouse licensure portability and connects military quality-of-life factors to the strategic basing process. This initiative takes a holistic look at individual state licensing efforts and provides the ability for our spouses to quickly resume their professional career; either through expedited licensing, a "universal acceptance approach," or interstate compacts. Results are continually positive as many states identify ways to remove barriers and offer easier portability for military spouses.

Additionally, thank you for your support in passing the Military Spouse Licensing Relief Act, as part of the Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022, which the President signed on January 5 of this year. We are optimistic that this will provide spouses needed relief when transferring occupational licenses between states and encourage states to quickly take necessary steps to implement the spirit and intent of the law to improve career portability for military spouses. The DAF continues to reimburse up to \$1,000 for re-licensing/re-certification costs because of a Permanent Change of Station move for spouses of military members and we look forward to informing spouses and family members of the FY23 NDAA allowance to reimburse spouses for small business costs.

The DAF uses several approaches to recruit and appoint military spouses. The non-competitive military

spouse appointment authority allowed us to place 767 spouses in FY22. Additionally, the DOD 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 of their choosing and spouses who are considered best qualified may be appointed to a federal position over non-military spouse candidates. Employment may be permanent, temporary, or term limited. In 2022, the DAF employed 333 military spouses through this program. The DOD and DAF issued policy guidance in October 2022, implementing Section 625 of the FY2022 NDAA, Pilot Program on Direct Hire Authority for Spouses of Members of the Uniformed Services at Locations Outside the United States. This pilot is to assist military spouses with federal employment at OCONUS locations using a Direct Hire Authority (DHA) for appropriated fund positions. The pilot will run through the end of 2026. As of 28 February, 2023, One military spouse has been employed and we expect many more spouses will benefit through the pilot.

Lastly, we are supporting the recently launched Military Spouse Career Accelerator Pilot program, which provides active, National Guard, and reserve spouses with a 12-week paid fellowship program to expand employment opportunities and connect employers with this diverse, highly skilled, and educated workforce.

COMPENSATION AND ECONOMIC INSECURITY

We appreciate your support through the FY23 NDAA Basic Pay, Basic Allowance for Housing, and Subsistence increases. These pay raises provide much-needed relief to Airmen, Guardians, and their families, who are managing increased cost-of-living and inflation expense challenges.

Additionally, the DAF implemented the FY22 NDAA Basic Needs Allowance. This provides supplemental income for military members and dependents whose gross household income falls below 130% of federal poverty guidelines. The allowance ends when members' income rises above that cap.

Food insecurity has many contributing factors, including finding spouse employment, frequently changing geographic locations, growing families, unexpected expenses, and rising cost of living. No single solution can address all situations, which is why we provide multiple solutions to aid DAF service members and families. Through our command teams, First Sergeant network and Military & Family Readiness Centers (M&FRCs), we connect those who are affected with available resources, including financial readiness counseling and spouse employment support. Additionally, servicemembers are offered referrals to relief programs such as the USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Federal Subsistence Supplemental Allowance program (for members overseas where SNAP benefits are unavailable), and the AF Aid Society (which has expanded the availability of food security-related grants and loans).

Taking care of our people is a top priority for the Department. We acknowledge that compensation is a key factor in recruiting an all-volunteer force as well as a method to retain top talent, and we look forward to deeper dialogue on this issue to ensure that we implement the tools necessary to care for the needs of our Airmen and their families.

MAINTAINING A CULTURE OF CARE

Our Airmen, Guardians, and families are our most significant competitive advantage. The DAF is focused on providing the absolute best care for our Air and Space Forces and their families, caregivers, and survivors while taking necessary steps to create an inclusive environment in which all can reach their full potential. The Air Force provides much of the member and family support for the overall Department, allowing the Space Force to remain operationally focused.

COMBATTING SEXUAL ASSAULT & SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The overall DAF strategy to address sexual assault and harassment focuses on prevention, response, and accountability. We must focus on the entire continuum of harm to maintain the ready, diverse, and lethal force necessary to defend our Nation. Despite strong efforts over several years, the DAF recognizes that we have more work to do to detect changes in climate, and to identify individual and environmental factors responsible for creating toxic conditions that degrade our culture of care. Effective change relies on a complex systems approach, implementing and integrating multiple actions at every organizational level to reinforce concrete values-based behavior and accountability practices for problematic behaviors that are inconsistent with our core values and ideals. We remain focused on, and persistent in, identifying and addressing the continuum of harm in the ranks using effective, research-informed prevention strategies to provide a comprehensive support and response system for Airmen and Guardians who are victims of sexual harassment or sexual assault.

Sexual assault reporting across the DAF has steadily increased since 2008. Increased reporting suggests that individuals are electing to seek help and connect to supportive care and services. In addition, increased Unrestricted Reporting enhances DAF's ability to engage in investigations and accountability processes. Between 2008 and 2021, our sexual assault reports increased from 624 to 1,701, with FY21 recording the highest number of reports in the 14-year history of the SAPR program. Several common themes for electing a Restricted Reporting option emerged over the past five fiscal years: the desire to avoid retelling a story; concern that reporting could have negative career impacts; or the thought of not being believed.

The DAF implemented the FY22 and FY23 NDAA requirements to establish an independent Office of Special Trial Counsel (OSTC) to oversee the investigation and prosecution of sexual assault and other victim-based offenses. We have established the organizational structure, and allocated personnel and resources, to meet full operational capacity by December 27, 2023, exactly two years from the enactment of the FY22 NDAA. Additionally, we are actively engaged increasing OSTC operating capacity to 82 personnel through FY27 to support an estimated 12% annual increase in caseload. We are on track to fulfill all first-year Congressional OSTC program stand-up reporting requirements. Additionally, the DAF is partnering with OSD to maximize the overlap of Independent Review Commission implementation and NDAA provisions to address sexual harassment by actively using the new Article 134, Uniformed Code of Military Justice, offense in investigations and prosecutions of sexual harassment and educating the force on its punitive nature.

Moreover, we are developing a dedicated sexual harassment investigation function to enable effective, independent investigations in accordance with the NDAA and IRC requirements. Additionally, we updated our military leave program to provide non-chargeable time off to victims of sexual assault to

assist with their recovery. Finally, we continue to train and educate commanders and update policies to enhance victim notification, consultation, and input during the military justice process.

The DAF is committed to strengthening the full-time response workforce structure. We've increased the number of our full-time victim advocates by 125% to strengthen the full-time response workforce structure to ensure critical support and experienced advocates to provide continuity of care; 197 Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Victim Advocate (VA) billets were added. To eliminate perception of commander bias or influence, the DAF is developing an independent reporting structure to align supervision and oversight to SAPR subject-matter experts and ensure that full-time personnel have the knowledge, expertise, and skills necessary to provide high-quality and competent responses. This also promotes best practices in trauma-informed victim advocacy, while maintaining direct access to, and operational support from, Commanders.

The DAF developed a Spectrum of Resilience to encourage help-seeking behavior before incidents/situations occur or worsen. The Spectrum of Resilience starts with the resilience skills we use to take care of ourselves—to strengthen the mental, physical, social, and spiritual domains that comprise Comprehensive Airmen Fitness. From there, the Spectrum expands to include supportive opportunities and resources available to us all—family and friends, peers and support groups, front-line leaders, and Chaplains, as well as clinical or medical health services when needed. The Spectrum of Resilience serves as a reminder that we don't have to go it alone and should engage support resources early to strengthen our ability to cope with stressors.

Although many DAF agencies provide resiliency services, offerings are often disconnected, which impedes help-seeker access to the continuum of care needed. In response to IRC recommendations and to streamline access to these critical services, DAF brought all 32 agencies together by formalizing a “No Wrong Door” concept and released a “Connect to Care” policy, guidance, and training to operationalize a person-centered approach to ensure that individuals seeking assistance are immediately referred to the appropriate service by way of a real time, face-to-face referral. “Connect to Care” training and implementation guidance was delivered to service providers and leaders at all levels (medical and non-medical) in 2022. “Connect to Care” is expected to be fully functional across the DAF in 2023.

Further, the DAF launched a pilot program to examine the results of the co-location of providers supporting Victims/Survivors of sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence, stalking, and cyber harassment. The DAF collaboratively designed and launched the Integrated Response Co-location Pilot, centralizing SARC, SAPR VA supporting sexual harassment advocacy, Domestic Abuse Victim Advocate (DAVA), Victim's Counsel (VC), and Religious Support Teams (RST) support. The pilot is operational for six months at 6 installations while retaining traditionally separated providers at another 7 control site installations. The DAF selected sites using a range of criteria, including a mix of Air Force and Space Force installations, higher headquarters interest, location (overseas, remote, and within the United States), installation size, capacity to co-locate, the prevalence of sexual assault, and various support abilities. The co-location design targeted decreasing barriers, improving access to services, and positive outcomes for help-seeking individuals and support providers with enhanced collaboration and cross-training. Initial findings suggest increased use of services at pilot installations between August 2022 and the end of January 2023. Response advocates report a 22% increase in collaboration,

coordination, consistency, awareness, and access since the start of the pilot (measured through surveys and installation situational reports). In addition, the average monthly rate of initial sexual assault reports increased from 2.6 to 4.4 per 10,000. Data shows co-location is the most likely and compelling explanation for this difference. The pilot team uses stakeholder feedback and lessons learned to inform guidance and support necessary to enable the potential DAF-wide rollout of co-location.

Our prevention framework includes identifying risks and protective factors for our population, addressing negative attitudes and beliefs that can lead to an environment that tolerates unethical behavior, designing actions to mitigate key sexual assault risk factors while promoting protective factors, and designing ways to equip leaders at all levels to foster protective factors and reduce risk factors, growing bystander intervention skills, and promoting positive unit culture to eradicate sexual assault. In addition, we believe that effective training can reduce violence and harm while recognizing that inadequate training can be unhelpful and counterproductive and can lead to training fatigue.

As part of the DAF's ongoing prevention efforts and IRC recommendations, across the Future Years Defense Program, we are adding 324 dedicated prevention personnel who are focused on support and activities to prevent all forms of interpersonal and self-directed violence, address local risk factors, and enhance protective factors of our Airmen and Guardians. In addition, the DAF is moving towards proficiency-based targeted training designed to provide appropriate content while recognizing an individual's knowledge and skills to build on existing competencies. For example, the Sexual Communication and Consent training targets accessions and addresses attitudes and beliefs, and is followed by Wingman Intervention Training, which develops bystander interventions and leadership skills to promote a healthy culture and climate.

In support of our ongoing Prevention Workforce enhancement efforts, we recently held a 3-day virtual summit connecting more than 250 prevention personnel, DAF senior leaders, and subject-matter experts. The summit offered an opportunity for current and new workforce members to forge connections and receive information and resources specific to prevention roles. Participants left the summit with a reinforced understanding of the enhanced Prevention Workforce purpose, goals, changes, policies, and impacts.

Our Air Force Academy sexual assault reporting was consistent from academic year (AY) 2016-2017 to 2017-2018, with 23 reports each year involving actively enrolled cadets as either the victim or the subject. Sexual assault reports at the Academy continued to increase; 40 in AY 2018-2019; 41 in AY 2019-2020; 55 in AY 2020-2021; 57 AY 2021-2022. We have implemented several programs and policies to reduce barriers and encourage seeking support; the "Teal Ropes" Cadet liaison program and the "Safe to Report" policy. Additionally, like an expedited transfer policy for military members, the Military Service Academies (MSA), including ROTC, have also been executing an interim transfer policy as directed by the FY2020 NDAA. USAFA is also expanding and professionalizing prevention and response positions and sunseting volunteer victim advocates in AY 2024-2025 as required by the IRC.

The AY 2021-2022 Sexual Harassment & Violence (MSA) report shows that the rates of prevalence of Unwanted Sexual Contact (USC) increased from 2018 to 2022; 15.34% to 22.3% for women and 1.8% to 4.3% for men. Although individual program metrics indicate positive outcomes, holistically our current

programs are not driving prevalence down. The Academy is doubling the Prevention and Response workforce from 12 to 24 employees. This increase will improve data-driven prevention, evaluation, and outcomes. An Academy Superintendent-directed review of current programs, leveraging input from cadets, subject-matter experts, alumni, permanent party, and leadership is on-going. This review will evaluate the prevention activities to ensure that we are providing a targeted approach aimed at reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors and we anticipate a plan of action in the near term.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

In 2021, the DOD Active Component suicide rate was 24.3 per 100K; the DAF Active Component suicide rate was 15.3 per 100K. Using a firearm continues to be the most common method of suicide. After controlling for differences in age and sex, the Active Component (22.8 per 100K) and National Guard (23.7 per 100K) suicide rates are comparable to U.S. population rates, while the Reserve rate (18.8) is lower. In years since 2011, suicide rates for the Active Component, Reserve, and Air National Guard were similar to the U.S. population after accounting for age and sex differences. The adjusted suicide rate for Active Component DAF personnel in 2021 was 13.9 per 100K, lower than the historical U.S. rate for a comparable demographic pool. The largest demographic subset of 2021 DAF suicides consisted of single enlisted men, under the age of 30, in the rank of E1-E4, who die by suicide using a firearm. Data through quarter three of 2022 show the DAF Active Component suicide death trends regressed to reflect the average of the previous 5 years and are now roughly consistent with pre-2019 levels as published by the Defense Suicide Prevention Office. We anticipate that the 2022 DOD Annual Suicide Report will be available in September 2023 and will provide a more thorough analysis of 2022 suicide trends.

Male Airmen and Guardians are 3.3 times more at risk of dying by suicide compared to female Airmen and Guardians. In addition, Airmen and Guardians 30 years or younger are at an increased risk of suicide than those over 30. After considering gender and age, suicide risk does not significantly differ by AFSC. The AFSCs with the highest number of suicide deaths generally are the largest AFSCs and are disproportionately filled with young men. Over 60% of the Airmen who died by suicide in the DAF had access to some form of lethal means in their household. However, data from 2021 reveal that less than 15% of these members safely stored their firearms in a manner consistent with the “Go SLO” (in Safes, with Locks, or Outside the home) recommendations provided by the DAF lethal means safety effort – Time-Based Prevention. The Time-Based Prevention initiative helps eliminate the hazard of firearms and other lethal means being readily accessible when an Airman or Guardian is distressed. However, continued work is required and Time-Based-Prevention remains a DAF suicide prevention priority.

To enhance our Time-Based Prevention efforts, we established a central contract in 2022 to expedite the purchase of gun locks, distributing over 202,000 locks, safe storage educational and training materials, and firearm retailer tool kits. Additionally, in March 2022, the DAF launched a comprehensive implementation and evaluation plan for lethal means safety. Continued implementation, expansion, and leadership support for the “Go SLO” campaign will build a culture in which safe storage is commonplace, accelerating our efforts to save lives by reducing immediate access to firearms for those in distress, as well as preventing firearm-related accidental injuries and deaths among our Air Force and Space Force families.

Due to the heightened risk for distress and suicide associated with being under investigation for alleged crimes under the Uniformed Code of Military Justice, the DAF retained the Limited Privilege Suicide Prevention Program and the Investigative Interview Warm Hand-Off policies. Last year alone, 18% of Airmen and Guardians who died by suicide were facing legal and administrative problems at the time of their death. With the transition to Defense Health Agency, both policies were at risk of being dissolved. The DAF is the only service to retain these policies and remains steadfast to ensure that Airmen and Guardians under investigation can speak confidentially with mental health providers and receive the necessary care to enable them to effectively handle the stress of the legal process, as well as to mitigate the possibility of perceiving their potential prosecution as a barrier to accessing the care they need.

The DAF commissioned a first-of-its-kind suicide analysis board (SAB) in 2022. In partnership with suicide researchers at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS), the DAF looks to enhance our practices by systematically analyzing factors, identifying aggregated findings and lessons, and delivering generalizable and actionable recommendations to reduce suicide. Researchers draw information from four sources, including personnel records, investigation reports, medical records, and Department of Defense Suicide Event Reports (DoDSER), collecting over 1,000 data points for each suicide decedent. USUHS researchers piloted the SAB process this past year on 117 suicide deaths from 2020. We anticipate their final report this spring and are prepared to implement its recommendations. Moving forward, we intend to examine all suicide deaths from 2018 – 2021 and each year after as we strive toward zero deaths by suicide.

To combat suicide trends, the DAF established prevention priorities for 2022 in alignment with the White House Strategy for reducing Military and Veteran Suicides. These priorities build on prevention strategies tied to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Building Connections, Detecting Risk, Promoting Protective Environments, and Equipping our Airmen and Families to mitigate risk and build resilience.

In late February, the Suicide Prevention & Response Independent Review Committee (SPRIRC) released its report, which offered 127 recommendations focusing on stressors affecting quality of life and suicide prevention enhancements within the DOD. The DOD Suicide Prevention Implementation Working Group (SPIWG) is developing an implementation plan based on those recommendations for approval by the Secretary of Defense by mid- May 2023. The DAF stands ready to immediately begin implementation of numerous SPRIRC recommendations upon conclusion of the SPIWG.

CONCLUSION

We are the employer of choice because of our mission, our dedication to serve and protect the freedoms of the United States. We continue to have an unbeatable value proposition to offer opportunity, community, and purpose to willing Americans. We look forward to our continued partnership and appreciate your advocacy of the Department of the Air Force — those in uniform, our civilian professionals, and the families, caregivers, and survivors who support them.