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ON

PROTECTING BENEFITS FOR ALL SERVICEMEMBERS

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INTRODUCTION:

Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Bilirakis, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, we appreciate the opportunity to testify on National Guard and Veterans Affairs matters. On behalf of the Chief, National Guard Bureau (NGB), General Joseph Lengyel, thank you for your support of and commitment to our National Guard Soldiers, Airmen, their families, and supporting employers.

The National Guard consists of the nearly 450,000 citizen Soldiers and Airmen of the Army and Air National Guard. They represent the finest National Guard force in our nation's history, and I am honored to be here today to advocate for them along with their families, their communities, and their employers who support them.

The National Guard of today is not the National Guard of yesterday. Today's National Guard, in fact today's Reserve Component Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors, and Marines, are an integral part of this Nation's military capability. The Department of Defense cannot meet the objectives outlined in the National Defense Strategy without a robust National Guard and Reserve. Unique to the National Guard, however, is our dual capability to be used in a Federal or State status. In addition to providing forces to Combatant Commanders for the overseas warfight, the National Guard stands ready to assist local and State authorities in responding to natural and other disasters at home. Tens of thousands of National Guard Soldiers and Airmen are on duty at home and overseas on any given day in support of national security.

The foundation of our National Guard's strength, and a key to our readiness, is our people: the team of Soldiers and Airmen we build through recruiting and retention programs. Men and women join our ranks and continue to serve out of patriotism, a sense of duty, and love of country and community. The benefits and entitlements provided to them as a result of their service are critical to retaining this all-volunteer fighting force.

The men and women who serve in the National Guard are always ready to meet America's needs. Knowing that their employers and families will have the necessary support they need will allow them to focus on their training to build a more ready and lethal force. Legislation such as the USERRA and the Department of Defense's Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program not only incentivize Guard members continued service, but provide peace of mind to Soldiers, Airmen and their families.

To the members of this subcommittee, thank you for your time today to discuss these important topics and I look forward to your questions.