

**TESTIMONY OF THE
NATIONAL GUARD ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES**

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity

March 9, 2023

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and other distinguished members of the committee:

On behalf of the almost 45,000 members of the National Guard Association of the United States and the nearly 450,000 members of the National Guard, we truly appreciate this opportunity to share our thoughts on today's topic for hearing. We thank you for your oversight and the attention paid to the issues affecting those who have served and are currently serving our nation.

The operational tempo for the National Guard has increased significantly over the past 20 years, and even more so recently. From overseas deployments in support of combatant commands, the pandemic, civil unrest, wildfires, and floods, the National Guard has remained "Always Ready." In 2021 alone, the National Guard executed over 10 million man-days. This has put an immense strain on our servicemembers, families, and employers. National Guard Soldiers and Airmen are unique in that they simultaneously manage a civilian career alongside their military careers. This has become ever more challenging as military requirements expand.

Regardless of what the law says, we know Guard members' ability to find and maintain steady employment has been impacted and challenged. USERRA is in place to protect against discrimination of our Soldiers and Airmen. Employers must be educated regarding existing law and USERRA protections should be expanded where gaps exist. The 116th Congress made great progress with the Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act which ensured coverage for specific areas of State Active Duty. However, those protections only cover duty beyond 14

days. State National Guard response missions are often less than two weeks. We ask that the committee remove this limit to protect all State Active Duty, regardless of length.

Another area of concern is time off for treatment of service-connected disabilities. Military duty can be physically strenuous, and injuries can occur. As members return from missions, they should be given time for appointments, rehabilitation, or physical therapy, whether at the Department of Veterans Affairs or other private health care facilities. The service member should focus on improving their health without concern of retribution from their employer.

That said, a healthy Soldier or Airman is one that has health care coverage. There are currently 60,000 National Guard members that do not have health care of any sort. This is a key readiness issue. It is imperative all service members have access to the health care needed to meet medical deployability requirements. We ask all members to support the **Healthcare for our Troops Act**. Affording zero-cost TRICARE coverage will dramatically increase readiness, solve turbulence moving on and off health plans, and ultimately save money. It will also provide an additional cost-saving benefit to the employer who would not need to provide coverage to that employee.

We understand the challenges military service can place on employers. An additional way to encourage our employers is through the **Reserve Employers Comprehensive Relief and Uniform Incentives Act**. The **RECRUIT Act** would authorize an annual tax credit for small business employers who employ Guard and Reserve members and would go a long way in supporting our communities. NGAUS supports and encourages the reintroduction of this bill in the 118th Congress.

I thank you again for inviting NGAUS to testify. Your efforts are critical to the well-being of our service members and the success of our National Guard. I look forward to continuing our work together and sincerely appreciate the steadfast leadership from the members and their staffers in advocating for the men and women of the National Guard.