

**RECORD VERSION**

**STATEMENT BY**

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**COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS**

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**QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE MILITARY**

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## **Introduction**

Chairwoman Wasserman Schultz, Ranking Member Carter, distinguished members of this subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of nearly one million Soldiers, their Families, and the Army Civilians who make our all-volunteer force the world's premiere organization. I am truly honored to provide an update on the quality of life for the men and women of your U.S. Army with whom I so proudly serve.

America's Army is lethal and effective. Lethality provides the assured capability to compete, deter and win, in order to defend U.S. enduring national interests. Today, Soldiers within our Army must be manned, trained and equipped so they can deploy, fight, and win. We must also build greater capacities and increased capabilities to ensure the readiness of our future Army. We must efficiently build current readiness, modernize, and restructure our Army for the future.

To achieve these imperatives, we will concentrate our efforts on our focused priorities – Readiness, Modernization, and Reform – to ensure that America's Army is always ready. Our enduring priorities – people and values – remind us that as we build the requisite readiness to succeed in combat, we must take care of our Soldiers and remain true to the principles of our Army values and warrior ethos which guide us.

We are grateful to Congress for its steadfast support, which has improved the Army warfighting capability. However, it is essential the Army receive timely, predictable, and sustained funding to preserve these readiness gains now, and in the future. The Army's fiscal year 2019 (FY19) budget aligns our priorities and resources based on the President's guidance and confirms our commitment to the National Defense Strategy.

In this year's budget, we seek to maintain a ready force, build our future force through key modernization efforts, continue to take care of our tremendous workforce, and institute reforms creating efficiency and allowing us to be better stewards of taxpayer dollars. Army leadership, with the support of Congress, is committed to ensuring America's Army is ready now and modernized for the future.

## **Status of Quality of Life**

As public servants of this great Nation, we are obligated to provide our service members with the best training, equipment and facilities we possibly can. It is critical we ensure they are prepared to accomplish the mission. We also must ensure Soldiers and their Families are appropriately compensated and receive the level of support commensurate with their service and sacrifice. Just as they've answered America's call to serve, we are obligated to care for them and responsibly help them and their families during their transition to post-military service life.

As you all know, serving in this position, I have the great honor of traveling everywhere our Soldiers and their Families are serving around the world. As such, I have had the opportunity to talk to thousands of Soldiers, across every rank and most Military Occupational Specialties, gauging their quality of life.

After these visits with Soldiers across our formations over the past year, I believe that the quality of life for our Soldiers and their Families is improving. Two years ago, I reported to this subcommittee that quality of life was good. Over the past two years, we have seen more improvements due to the help of Congress. We are continuing to make great strides across the board to meet the needs of our ever-growing formations. By maintaining a steady flow of promotions and schooling opportunities, providing ample career options, and continuing quality of life programs, we are delivering on our pledge to the Total Army Family. Through our combined efforts, we reached historic retention rates of over 90 percent of the eligible population last year.

Accordingly, we will ensure their well-being through world-class medical services, quality housing and workplace facilities, and childcare and youth services, where we've rebalanced our resources to reduce waiting lists and improve access for Soldiers. We will continue to create and improve upon programs such as Army Warrior Care, and transition assistance through our Soldier for Life program. We remain committed to our promise of taking care of our Soldiers and veterans while accomplishing the country's national defense goals. If we want to continue to retain and attract quality people to our

all-volunteer force, we will have to sustain the progress we have made in all areas of Soldier Quality of Life and remain progressive. The Army revolves around our people. Continued investment and prioritization of quality of life programs proves the Army is genuine when saying our Soldiers and Families truly do matter. By taking care of our Soldiers, we ensure that the Army has combat-ready Soldiers to fill the formations to deploy, fight and win our nation's wars.

## **Background**

For nearly two and a half centuries, the U.S. Army has been a lethal and effective fighting force called upon to preserve democracy around the globe. Thanks to some of the finest leaders, dedicated professionals and most selfless people the world has ever seen, we have been able to answer that call. But we quickly learned defending our national interests and global partnerships are not without their own costs. A constantly changing and dangerous security environment has required us to make tough decisions to remain an effective instrument of national military power. Subsequently, we have sought to rebuild readiness, streamline our modernization and acquisition processes, strengthen our defense partnerships and be more prudent stewards of resources and funding. We have made investments in key programs to ensure our troops are receiving the best training, equipment, leadership and quality of life possible to succeed on the battlefield.

Over the past year, we have supported the fight against the Islamic State of the Levant throughout the Middle East, conducted stability operations in Afghanistan, security assistance in Africa and South America, and deterrence in Eastern Europe and the Republic of Korea. Our Army is in high demand across the world because of our leadership, professionalism and ability to constantly evolve to meet our own and our defense partners' security needs.

Now, as we shift our focus toward cyber and full spectrum operations, we must continue to demonstrate the ability to be agile and adaptive on the world stage as new challenges arise.

We have the Army to do that, thanks to the efforts of Congress and through the guidance of leaders such as Secretary Esper and General Milley. The other Army senior leaders and I cannot find the words to express our admiration for what our Soldiers, Families and Army Civilians do on a daily basis. They have been the key to our success in confronting near-peer competitors, transnational terrorist organizations and opposing regional powers who use instability to disrupt the peace process. Given the continually challenging global security environment, our Army must remain ready to strike anytime, anywhere in the world at a moment's notice.

### **The Army's Budget Request**

The Army is grateful for Congress' support for the FY18 and FY19 appropriations. This funding will go a long way in advancing Army readiness and modernization consistent with the National Defense Strategy (NDS). Based on budgetary increases, the Army has more units, more ready, more often than any time in recent years past. Our budget requests reflects the Army's priorities: grow and maintain a ready high-end force, build our future force through key modernization efforts, continue to take care of our people, and institute reforms that lead the Army to be even better stewards of taxpayer dollars. One of the Army's focused priorities is reform to ensure we are earning the trust of the American people, prudently spending our allocated resources and aggressively seeking opportunities to improve our business efficiency.

### **Maintain Readiness**

Ready forces ensure that the Army can compete against our adversaries, deter conflict and win decisively. So, it is no surprise my Secretary and Chief continue to emphasize readiness as our number one priority. We build readiness by sufficiently manning, training and equipping our Soldiers. Building readiness is predicated upon every Soldier being able to deploy. We have made strides in reaching that goal over the past year. Unit commanders improved medical tracking, implemented unit injury prevention and physical therapy programs, and established enhanced readiness personnel accounts.

The outcome of these commander-led efforts is more units prepared for war. By focusing our training efforts, we have increased Soldier lethality and maintained our competitive advantage in the current security environment.

FY17 and FY18 authorizations and appropriations enabled readiness improvements in training – we thank you. We will continue to train to standard as a means of maintaining readiness. The Army’s combat training centers remain focused on training units for major combat operations. Specifically, the use of simulations has enabled multiple training repetitions for small units, enabling greater proficiency at unit collective tasks. Barring a significant increase in demand for land forces, coupled with continued stable and sufficient funding, we will remain on track to meet our readiness recovery goals by FY22. In order to meet those goals, we will continue to require predictable, consistent funding.

### **Maintaining the Momentum**

The Secretary, Chief and I recognize that every dollar spent on Quality of Life is a dollar spent on readiness. We have put considerable effort into giving our Soldiers, Families and Civilians the Quality of Life they deserve, and we will continue to do so.

On-post housing is one of the most valued benefits in our Army. Established programs over time have vastly improved our ability to provide our Soldiers and Families with quality housing. We understand our responsibility and we remain committed to preserving these critical resources, taking advantage of command interaction with our Soldiers and Families to keep us on the front lines of this effort.

Taking care of our Families and Soldiers is critical to our future. To protect that future, we must provide our Soldiers and Families critical resources, and we are committed to providing those resources. We continue to review policies and processes to ensure priority access to the highest quality childcare programs for all our Soldiers.

Families are a critical part of our team and are vital to the Army’s success.

Understanding the challenges of Spouse Employment and Total Army Sponsorship, the Secretary has been a driving force for improved spousal employment opportunities, pushing reviews of internal hiring and transfer processes, as well as partnerships with the communities outside our gates. By including our spouses in the Total Army

Sponsorship program, they are afforded more opportunity for information and resources that ease the transition for Soldier and their Family.

As the Chief of Staff of the Army often says, taking care of our Soldiers and Families is non-negotiable. The Army's *Soldier for Life Transition Assistance Program* (SFL-TAP) provides a variety of counseling services and classes to help prepare our Soldiers for successful transitions and connect them to their post-active duty goals. We work very closely with our interagency Transition Assistance Program (TAP) partners to provide an array of counseling, training, and assistance resources to ensure that every Soldier leaves the service career ready. The Army is committed to continuously improving SFL-TAP because it is the right thing to do for our Soldiers, our families, and our nation.

### **Credentialing Assistance Program**

Leveraging our *Soldier for Life* program has allowed the Army to continue attracting quality recruits by offering credentialing opportunities to earn licenses for technical training. Through their military service, our Soldiers become trusted and experienced professionals who rejoin their community after honorable service. One of their resources is the Army Credentialing Program which allows them to capitalize on training and development opportunities throughout their military careers.

Through this program, Soldiers obtain industry-recognized credentials demonstrating individual competence that contributes to improved capabilities and readiness in our Army and local communities. It also empowers them to serve as representatives of the Army in those communities, promotes the hiring of Army veterans and inspires the next generation of Soldiers.

The Army takes great pride in enhancing our Soldiers' transition to civilian life through innovative ideas such as the Credentialing Limited User Test (LUT). As the first phase of implementation of credentialing assistance, Secretary Esper, based on my recommendation, recently directed a LUT for self-directed credentialing to occur during FY19 at Fort Hood, Texas. With tremendous help from Under Secretary of the Army

Ryan McCarthy, this test began in the first quarter of FY19 to validate processes and systems that will administer the program, gauge Soldier demand, validate counselor training and forecast future requirements.

The credentials available, as vetted by Human Resources Command, are expected to have minimal pre-requisites or education requirements, will be valuable for post-service employment, and obtainable by enlisted Soldiers in their first or second term of service. All Soldiers at Fort Hood are eligible to participate, and there are no restrictions to participation based on rank or component. Our Army Credentialing Assistance Program provides financial assistance for voluntary, off-duty training and education programs in support of a Soldier's professional and personal self-development goals.

The requirements for eligibility and participation are almost identical to those for the Army's Tuition Assistance Program, and participation will be subject to approval by a Soldier's chain of command. Pending the success of the Credentialing Limited User Test, the Army is considering follow-on locations for additional testing, with implementation Army-wide as early as FY2020.

### **Preserving Benefits and Family Programs**

One of my biggest concerns is the potential diminishing of benefits and family programs as budgetary decisions are made about the Army's future.

As the Army continues to balance its priorities for lethality, readiness and modernization in a complex environment, we must remain vigilant and flexible to sustain the readiness of families and Soldiers. We need Congress's support to fully fund Soldier and Family programs, and allow our commanders the adaptability to deliver specific programs for specific unit and geographical needs.

We should clearly distinguish between benefits and compensation. It is of the utmost importance to not only keep faith with our Soldiers, but their families as well, as Army Families are the strength of our men and women who serve.



Family readiness is Army readiness; it's important to all Army senior leaders. The unique challenges a military family faces requires us to invest and safeguard a wide variety of family programs to ensure their needs are met. In addition to the support from the Army, our local communities and businesses often provide additional services to military families to ensure that together we reduce stress on families.

### **Closing**

The topics I have highlighted here carry one common thread – our people. All of our actions are intended to take care of our people in uniform now, those that have transitioned to being Soldiers for Life, and future Soldiers who will defend America. It is imperative that we keep the impacts on these people in mind as we make decisions about which programs to keep, facilities to maintain, services to provide and people to retain.

That said, we thank Congress for the FY19 budget that permits us to continue to guide those changes, improve readiness and make an increased investment in our future Army. That investment starts with our number one resource – Soldiers, their families and Army Civilians. Our current security environment is teeming with growing challenges. With timely, sufficient, predictable funding, we can increase capacity, train advisory forces, improve modernization, and take care of our Total Army Family. We are a standards-based organization accountable to Congress and the American people. We know that the only acceptable result of our efforts is a lethal, well-prepared Army ready to carry out its mission.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today and I look forward to continuing our dialogue. *This We'll Defend.*