

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE PRESENTATION

TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

SUBJECT: DEPARTMENT OF AIR FORCE CHIEF OF PERSONNEL WRITTEN
TESTIMONY FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL POSTURE HEARING FOR FY22

STATEMENT OF:

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INTRODUCTION

Chairwoman Gillibrand, Ranking Member Tillis, Distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you for your continued support and for the opportunity to appear before this committee. America's Air and Space professionals remain steadfast in providing Global Vigilance, Reach, and Power to protect and defend our Nation.

As the Air Force Chief of Staff has articulated, the nation's 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's 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 success squarely depends on the skills and resilience of our Airmen and on them having the ability to operate in a safe and inclusive environment that allows them to be the best Airman they can possibly be.

If the past year has taught us anything, it's that the world is still full of uncertainty and it is imperative our Air and Space Forces and their families remain ready and resilient at all times. COVID-19 has changed the way we work and live, forcing us to address challenges with Permanent Change of Station moves, recruiting and production, unforeseen retention impacts, Basic Military Training capacity, and increased care needs for our families who have all been hit hard by COVID-driven impacts to school, childcare, work-life balance, and increased demands at home. As we continued to work through mitigation of these COVID-19 concerns, other events over the year brought new and significant topics to the forefront, causing us to take a hard look at ourselves and double our efforts to ensure every Airman has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The death of George Floyd sparked a renewed focus on the barriers minority groups face within our force. The death of Army Specialist Vanessa Guillen at Ft Hood Texas, as well as our own Airman First Class Natasha Aposhian, reminded us we must double down, explore new ideas, and accelerate our efforts to eradicate sexual assault and other forms of interpersonal violence from our ranks. As we turned the calendar into 2021, the January 6th events at our nation's capital revealed yet another potential blind spot that can act as a derailer to creating our desired environment—extremist ideologies that exists both inside and outside our forces. Needless to say, it was an eventful year that added challenges to the high operations tempo of our forces, both home and abroad, and increased demand for military medical personnel to support our national civil response to COVID-19.

Despite the challenges presented over the past year, the Air Force continues to accomplish our assigned missions and our Airmen continue to shine. We are prioritizing and accelerating our ability to optimize Airmen and family performance. We are developing the Air Force we need to defend our nation and managing the talent we have to help unleash the full power of the world's greatest Air Force. It should also be noted the United States Air Force continues to provide much of the member and family support efforts for the overall Department, including the newest military service, the United States Space Force. In discussing all of our support and family related programs, we are providing support to both Airmen and Guardians. This approach allows the Space Force to remain a lean, operational-focused service. We are also operating under a single military and civilian personnel appropriation and a common authorized end strength although we internally manage end strength between the services, with plans to separate both authorization and appropriations in 2023.

HELPING AIRMEN REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

Our Airmen, Guardians and families are our greatest advantage. Keeping them first allows our mission capabilities to be limitless. Over the last 12-14 months the Department of the Air Force sharpened its focus on providing the absolute best care for our Airmen and their families, while taking all steps necessary to create an environment where every Airman can reach their full potential. The Air Force launched two major initiatives in 2020—the Racial Disparity Review and an Interpersonal Violence Task Force—both focused on identifying areas of immediate concern for the well-being and development of our Airmen.

RACIAL DISPARITY REVIEW

Following the death of George Floyd and the ensuing protests in the summer of 2020, and the PODs report on justice disparities the Secretary of the Air Force launched a Racial Disparity Review to get an independent assessment of racial disparity in military discipline, personnel development, and career opportunities as they pertain to Black/African American Airmen and Guardians. This scope has since been expanded to include other minority groups and a second survey and data collection effort was launched to look at potential disparities across gender and ethnicity lines as well.

Findings from the initial review were released in December 2020 and confirmed we still have much work to do to address disparities in a number of key policy areas. The review validated 16 disparities for Black/African American Airmen and Guardians in areas such as military justice/discipline, apprehensions, investigations, promotions, developmental opportunities, senior leader representation for military and civilians, trust in chain of command, trust in Equal Employment office actions and others. According to the report, the data does not address why racial disparities exist in these areas, and that while the data show race is a correlating factor, it does not necessarily indicate causality.

Disciplined and detailed root-cause analysis is underway for each finding. This analysis includes identifying mitigation actions to address each root-cause with associated measurements and metrics designed to track progress for each implemented action. Some actions and measures produce early visible results, while others require longer term longitudinal reviews to observe improvements over time. We will monitor implementation to ensure these disparities are removed to the fullest extent possible and provide assurance to all of members that the Department of the Air Force is a place where they are valued and provided with every opportunity to succeed.

INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE TASK FORCE

Interpersonal violence of all types is counter to Department of the Air Force culture and our core values. These actions negatively impact victims, the bereaved, and their units. As a result, unit cohesion, mission effectiveness, and ultimately the Department of the Air Force's readiness are threatened. In July 2020, following incidents at Fort Hood and within the Air Force, the Department of the Air Force established an Interpersonal Violence Task Force focused on our ability to keep Airmen safe when they had identified ongoing harassment, bullying, or hazing type activities. While we have programs that respond and support victims of sexual assault and have a variety of prevention efforts, we were concerned we did not cover the space in between these events where our Airmen were already unfortunately enduring some type of negative behavior. We wanted to understand this space better and understand our ability to identify these Airmen and keep them safe. To do this we garnered feedback from more than 68,000 Airmen—both military and civilian—using a total force survey and individual sensing sessions about multiple types of interpersonal violence, including sexual assault. Out of this Task Force, focus groups were formed to look deeper into issues respondents witnessed. Currently, the Task Force is analyzing those responses and we expect a final

report in late May 2021.

COMBATting SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sexual assault is a crime and its impact undermines our force lethality, readiness, and mission success. The Department of the Air Force recognizes, despite strong efforts over many years, that we have not made significant, measurable progress in preventing or reducing the prevalence of sexual assault. As a result, we remain focused and persistent in our efforts to combat sexual assault in the ranks using effective, research-informed prevention strategies and ensuring comprehensive support and response for sexual assault victims. Sexual assault reporting across the Department of the Air Force has steadily increased since 2010, jumping from 1,271 in FY18 to 1,388 in FY19, from Service members for incidents that occurred during military service. This increase in reporting is concerning—every sexual assault is deeply troubling. There is also a positive aspect to increased reporting as it's an indication that more victims of sexual assault are willing to come forward to receive care and aid efforts to hold alleged perpetrators accountable. Another concern is the increase in prevalence of sexual assaults and the increasing gap between reporting levels and prevalence levels. This gap was closing from 2012-2016 when it again began to diverge to include a large increase in estimated prevalence in 2018. Examining our most current data, the Department of the Air Force sexual assault prevalence numbers increased aligning with Department of Defense patterns. From 2016 to 2018, prevalence among women increased from 2.8% to 4.3%. Rates among men remained relatively low, but still increased slightly .3% to .5%. The Department of Defense experienced an increase in prevalence for women and men, rising from 4.3% to 6.2% and .6% to .7% respectively. Each of these rises also created a greater gap between reported prevalence and the actual number of reports we received. We want our environment and trust in the system to drive reporting and prevalence to match each other where we then drive both indicators toward zero.

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, but rose to 40 reports in AY 2018-2019 and 41 reports AY 2019-2020. We have yet to attribute any causality to this increase, but the initiation of the “Teal Ropes” Cadet program and a “Safe To Report” policy change have been linked to reducing barriers to reporting. We continue efforts to monitor and reduce incidents across the force to include the Air Force Academy.

Our overall Department of the Air Force strategy is focused on prevention, response, and accountability. Our sexual assault prevention framework includes assessment tools for identifying and screening out those at high risk for unethical behavior, addressing key sexual assault risk factors with long-term goals focused on equipping leaders at all levels, Wingmen intervention skills, and promoting positive unit culture to eradicate sexual assault.

We have several ongoing training initiatives leading our prevention efforts. The Sexual Communication and Consent (SCC) Program, an innovative, evidence-informed sexual assault prevention training developed specifically for delivery during Basic Military Training includes both universal and tailored content. Over 8,000 trainees went through the SCC Program Pilot between September 2019 and April 2020. After the training the trainees had increased knowledge of sexual assault (4.4%), knowledge of consent (1.8%), and self-efficacy to resist sexual assault (6.8%) along with decreases in date rape myth attitudes (-4.2%), dating risk behaviors (-3.9%), and social risk behaviors (-4.5%). The Air Force Academy is building on these Basic Military Training efforts and will initiate a three-year pilot study beginning with the incoming class of 2025. The Department of the Air Force also requires annual, Air Force-wide training consisting of three

components: Bystander Intervention Training, Wingman Intervention Training, and Total Force Sexual Assault and Prevention Training. Bystander Intervention Training provides foundational concepts of safe and desired bystander behavior to all Airmen and Guardians across the total force. Wingman Intervention Training in Technical School and at the First Term Airman Center targets the most at risk age group population for sexual assault. The Total Force Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Training is refreshed annually to ensure continual engagement of this critical issue.

As part of the Department of the Air Force's response programs, we have established 92 dedicated, installation-level, prevention experts with direct access to command leadership charged with targeting local risk factors based upon collected data to implement tailored prevention strategies at the tactical level. We have Sexual Assault Response Coordinators, Special Victim Advocates, restricted and unrestricted reporting processes, and medical care for victims. We are also an active participant in the Department of Defense's Catch a Serial Offender program to identify serial offenders via anonymous reporting of sexual assault. As of February 2021, we have 13 of the 24 Department of Defense matches of offenders, with a total of 599 Department of Defense entries from victims.

We expanded our accountability programs, implementing the Sexual Assault Accountability and Investigation Task Force's recommendations to enhance collaboration among legal offices, military criminal investigators, and circuit trial counsel for investigations of sexual assault, domestic violence and child abuse from investigation through the termination of trial proceedings if applicable. Moreover, we continue to train and educate commanders as well as update policies to enhance victim notification, consultation and input during the military justice process.

Finally, the Department of the Air Force is also exploring the potential of an Air Force Compatibility Assessment designed to assess the risk of disciplinary and counterproductive workplace behaviors in potential recruits that might negatively impact well-being, morale and mission effectiveness. As is common practice in industry, we are looking to ensure those we recruit are not only medically and physically qualified to join, but are also compatible with serving.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

Department of the Air Force active duty suicide rates were stable from 2015 to 2018, increasing in 2019. In 2019, the Department of Defense active duty suicide rate was 25.9 per 100,000; and the Department of the Air Force suicide rate was 25.1 per 100,000. In response, in the Fall of 2019 the Air Force conducted a Resilience Tactical Pause to help the force focus on small group discussions and sessions designed to identify ways to help prevent suicides. The Department will release official suicide counts and rates for CY 2020 this fall.

In the spring of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic began to heighten, we implemented a COVID playbook and provided tools and lessons from the previous tactical pause to help maintain social connections during a time of physical distancing. The new tools included our first ever training for family members. This training provides greater awareness about resources and programs available and equips family members to identify warning signs and act as another sensor in our detection and prevention methods. Since implementation, more than 4,785 family members have connected to the site and taken the training. While early and unofficial, our suicide rates to date in 2021 are back at pre-2018 levels.

The largest demographic of Department of the Air Force suicides last year were single men, between the ages of 23-30, and in the rank of E1-E4, who used a firearm as means of death. Leading stressors associated with suicide seem to remain stable over time. Relationship issues are the leading stressor associated with suicide deaths, approximately 40% percent of suicide deaths are preceded by significant relationship problems or failure. An estimated 20-30% of Airmen and Guardians who died by suicide were experiencing two or more stressors. Another ~40% who die by suicide have no apparent risk factors.

Personally-owned firearms are the most common means of suicide deaths by far. Since 2015, personally-owned firearms are involved in over 70% of Department of the Air Force suicide deaths. Over 90% of Department of the Air Force suicides occur in the continental United States. Continuing the “Go SLO (Safes, Locks, or Outside the home)” campaign will help build a culture where safe storage is commonplace, reducing immediacy of access to firearms for those in distress and preventing firearm accidents for Air and Space families. Between 2020 and 2021, we distributed 202,000 gun locks along with educational and training materials on safe storage options.

To combat suicide trends, the Department of the Air Force has established five prevention priorities for 2021, all of which nest within the prevention strategies established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Building Connections, Detecting Risk, Promoting Protective Environments, and Equipping our Airmen and their Families to mitigate risk and build resilience. The first priority is Leadership Development that provides our leaders with the information, tools, and resources necessary to combat suicide. We are challenging leaders to build unit connection and purpose. Our second prevention priority is improving and increasing our communications and marketing messaging about resilience and prevention tools and resources.

Our third priority is focusing on time-based prevention; increasing safe storage by encouraging “going SLO” and building time and space between personnel in distress and access to lethal means, helping to prevent accidents. Our fourth priority is empowering and equipping families. We will continue our efforts to engage and equip spouses and family members in resilience and prevention activities. Lastly, we want to evaluate our efforts, assessing implementation and effectiveness of all major resilience and prevention efforts in order to drive program improvements. These priorities are based on program self-assessment results, suicide analysis board results, and latest research within a continuous process improvement framework.

The Department of the Air Force’s True North program continues to support mission readiness by providing commanders resources and guidance to empower assigned personnel to seek assistance from embedded Mental Health providers and Religious Support Teams. Access to mental and religious support teams within a unit is designed to build trust and confidence in help-seeking actions for unit members. Under the True North initiative, mental and spiritual support teams are being embedded in squadrons and groups at 16 installations determined as having the highest need based on tracked negative outcomes over the last five years. These additional support teams should positively influence Airman and family well-being, increasing resilience, and decreasing negative outcomes such as suicide, sexual assault, domestic violence, workplace violence and child maltreatment as well as improve mission readiness and optimize human performance.

RESILIENCY

The Department of the Air Force has 32 agencies providing Resiliency services to help our members and their families thrive in both their personal and professional lives. These resiliency resources, that are available to help with physical, mental, social, and spiritual needs, include the Chaplain Corps, Mental

Health, Airman & Family Readiness Centers, Employee Assistance Program, Deployment Transition Center, Wingman Connect, Sexual Assault Response Coordinators and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Programs. The Air Force is committed to forming solid partnerships with supporting organizations based on individual installation needs and expanding support options to bolster all pillars of resilience for our Airmen, Guardians and their families.

Although the Department of the Air Force has a large number of agencies providing resiliency services, these offerings are often not connected, making it more difficult for members and their families to get the continuum of care needed quickly. Recently, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and the Chief of Space Operations chartered a Resiliency Task Force, to perform a top-to-bottom review of current Department of the Air Force Resiliency Programs and develop a new robust, consolidated Resilience Strategy which creates new, or expands existing support and develops sustainable resource and action plans. We are excited about the work this Task Force is doing and hope to improve resiliency for all Airmen, Guardians, and their families.

FAMILY CARE

The Department of the Air Force remains committed to continued strengthening of our Exceptional Family Member Program further through resourcing, automation and standardization for case management, respite care policy, assignment coordination, education and legal assistance support. Today, there are more than 55,000 family members enrolled in our Exceptional Family Member Program and over 36,000 total force members coded as sponsors. The Air Force identified this program as a key priority and retained a transformation expert from private industry to work full time on program improvements.

Exceptional Family Member Programs

The Department of the Air Force conducted a rapid improvement event in February 2020 utilizing family feedback to identify problem areas and create solutions focused on improving transparency, automation and communication, resulting in a new “one stop shop” division located at the Air Force Personnel Center. This Exceptional Family Member Program Central Cell integrates multi-disciplinary support subject matter experts in medical, assignments, special education, and legal matters with both a special education attorney and a special education specialist provided to assist our families and school liaisons. Additionally, we added a TRICARE Liaison, Respite Care Coordinator and additional medical and assignment personnel to better facilitate centralized travel screening.

Through the newly launched DAF Family Vector website, the Exceptional Family Member Program cell provides a two-year historical review of travel recommendations by location and specialty, providing families greater visibility of potential duty locations that meet individual family needs. DAF Family Vector provides resources on medical, moving, special education, respite care, frequently asked questions and contact information for the central cell and local base resources and is available without the need for a Common Access Card.

The Department of the Air Force continues to improve Exceptional Family Member Program families’ access to support for their special needs family members. Presently, 105 Airman & Family Readiness Center Exceptional Family Member Program Family Support Coordinators are spread across 78 installations, working to enhance the quality of life of special needs families. Continuing our commitment to strengthening Exceptional Family Member Program support capabilities, 15 DAF attorneys attended a

formal, five-day structured Special Education Course along with providing Special Education law training to 197 school liaisons, Family Support Coordinators and Headquarters staff.

The Department of the Air Force also stood up two Developmental and Behavioral Health Family Readiness Centers with pediatric development and psychological clinicians targeting smaller and remote bases through telehealth, teleconsultation and provider travel.

Working through the pandemic, we maintained a connection with our families by hosting several Facebook broadcasts to provide updates on current and upcoming initiatives as well as fostered open communication with families on their needs and concerns. In partnership with our sister services, we held a Respite Care Rapid Improvement Event in late 2020 to identify problems, implement meaningful solutions, and benchmark and utilize sister service best practices to assist with the National Defense Authorization Act 2021 requirement for standardized of respite care services.

Family member feedback is key. We continue communication with families via social medial platforms and local outreach efforts. The Exceptional Family Member Program Facebook page has 8,000+ followers and over one million views, to date. The Department of the Air Force is committed to continuing efforts at to strengthen the program and to balance family needs with career progression and mission requirements.

Child and Youth Programs (CYP)

Available, affordable, quality child care programs support families and enable our members to focus on the mission. In Fiscal Year 2020, the Department of the Air Force provided child care for over 39,400 children at installation child development programs. However, at some installations, the local demand for this type of care exceeds program capacity making alternative sources of care instrumental in meeting the needs of Airmen and Guardians. Our network of Family Child Care homes and providers offer additional care solutions and community-based fee assistance helps support families on a wait list for on-base care or not living near an installation. In FY20, 5,199 children were served through the Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood fee assistance program.

The Coronavirus pandemic negatively impacted unmet demand and the wait time for on base child care due to local health conditions, availability of staff, quarantine requirements, and social/physical distancing guidelines. The pandemic challenges illustrated that we must find innovative ways to expand capacity and improve access to child care for Airmen and Guardians in addition to advocating for resources to fund child care facility requirements. As of the beginning of April 2021, 3,909 children five years of age and under had an unmet child care need with more than half of these children located at ten of 74 installations. The average wait time to satisfy the demand was 153 days.

While we are working to accommodate all child care needs, it's important to recognize the full nature of what is represented by the 3,909 children with unmet demand. These are requests for on-base child care, meaning location in either an on-base Child Development Center or an on-base Family Child Care home. Many of the 3,909 have alternative child care available and in use, to include those matched through Air Force subsidized care via the Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood (MCCYN) fee assistance program. Many families prefer to have child care on-base and sign up for it by identifying a date care is needed. While that request shows up as unmet demand, it is not always accurate nor does it imply there are 3,909 children who do not have any child care. Based on new data collection being done during sign-up and requests, there are 284 children being serviced temporarily via a military childcare facility and 208

serviced temporarily through a community-based child care provider via MCCYN. This leaves 3,417 children without an alternative Air Force-facilitated child care solution while on the wait list. This is the capacity shortfall number we particularly focus on in our various efforts. It includes 1,419 children cared for at home with a parent; 672 in the care of family, friends, or a nanny; and 576 in a family-identified community based childcare program. 750 of the 3,417 indicated they cannot find a childcare alternative or did not indicate how their child would be cared for while on the wait list. The Air Force is making every effort to reduce the unmet demand and provide childcare to those who need it.

The Department addressed the availability and delivery of Child and Youth Programs with targeted efforts to maximize child care options, expand child care capacity, and leverage customer feedback in determining emerging and ongoing needs. We developed a robust communication strategy with online resources that educates supervisors and family members about available care solution options and how to access them. To increase child care options and spaces, we developed targeted recruitment and retention incentives for Family Child Care providers that were implemented at 68 installations from September to November 2020. Although the COVID-19 environment challenged our ability to increase the number of Family Child Care homes, we have been able to retain an average of 300 homes to support hourly and full-time care, 24/7 child care, and other specialized care for our Air and Space families.

Improvements in human resources processes have positively impacted Child and Youth Programs by reducing on-boarding time and facilitating employee transfers. The utilization of the Direct Hiring Authority has continued to positively impact the on-boarding process for appropriated child care staff members, decreasing time required to on-board new appropriated fund staff members by 120 days. To retain trained staff, we implemented a non-appropriated fund employee transfer assistance program that enables transfer of employment from one Department of the Air Force location to another, eliminating the requirement to apply for employment after a relocation.

Seven minor construction expansion projects are currently in the planning process. In addition, the Department of the Air Force is applying funding to the planning and design of child development center construction projects that address child care capacity shortfalls; five projects are currently postured for execution when funds become available.

Spouse Employment

Spouse employment is a critical element impacting family resilience, financial readiness, quality of life, retention, and mission success. Permanent Change of Station moves may negatively impact a military spouse's ability to achieve their own career goals and aspirations, often leading to reduced employment opportunities or 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 2020, the Department of the Air Force released results of the "Supporting our Military Families" 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. This initiative shifts the strategy from expediting individual state licensing through legislation to encouraging a "universal approach" to licensing and interstate compacts. Results show positive trends, driving many states to look for ways to remove barriers and make portability easier for military spouses.

Additionally, the Department of the Air Force reimburses up to \$1000 for re-licensing/re-certification costs resulting from a Permanent Change of Station move for spouses of military members.

The Department of the Air Force utilizes several approaches to recruit and appoint military spouses. The non-competitive military spouse appointment authority has provided the Air Force with the ability to hire approximately 1,800 military spouses from Fiscal Year 2019 to March 2021. This authority is one of many authorities by which a military spouse could be employed with. Additionally, the Department of Defense Military Spouse Preference program provides federal employment hiring preference for spouses relocating due to a military member's Permanent Change of Station move. Spouses exercise their preference by applying for job vacancy announcements of their choosing. 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. Additionally, the Department of Defense has authorized a pilot program at some foreign overseas locations to permit spouses to exercise their authority up to 30 days in advance of their arrival in order to further increase their opportunity to obtain employment. The Department of the Air Force launched the 18-month pilot in February 2021.

The Department of the Air Force is fully engaged in ensuring our members and their families have awareness and access to care solutions through a Care Solutions Communication Plan. Maximizing awareness and effectiveness of the support available are driving objectives of the plan. We remain engaged at all levels to communicate and deliver Care Solutions that help Airmen, Guardians and their families reach maximum performance potential.

THE FORCE WE NEED

As the world around us continues to inject uncertainty and rapid change, the Air Force is focused on maintaining readiness today while building the Air Force we need for tomorrow's high-end fight. A fresh look at the foundational competencies and skills we will need to deter and defeat our pacing threats show us that we are on track. We are appreciative for your support and realize that continued Congressional support is paramount as we seek to balance tight fiscal demands with an increasing appetite for digitization and force modernization. Our end strength targets reflect this balancing act and ensure a minimal viable force to compete and win in the high-end fight, both today and tomorrow.

END STRENGTH

We have successfully increased the size of the force by 26,000 since a low in 2015 of 485,000, bringing us into alignment with the objectives outlined in the 2018 National Defense Strategy. Increased retention since March 2020, largely due to COVID-19, helped the Department meet and exceed FY20 end strength targets. This retention trend continued into FY21 and has put the Department in position to exceed FY21 authorized end strength levels. High retention is a great indicator of the value our Airmen place on serving and ensures we maintain the experience we need to face tomorrow's challenges. Despite this positive outcome, we are monitoring retention trends closely to see how a post-COVID environment impacts our Airmen's decisions to stay or leave and to ensure we have plenty of room in our allowed force size to continue to recruit and access fresh talent that will sustain us into the future. We will continue to monitor these trends throughout the year and take prudent steps to maintain readiness and continue to provide our Airmen with flexible voluntary force management options, as needed.

Our small military end strength growth includes the establishment of the USSF as a service and balances

USAF force structure between legacy and the future force. The USSF growth includes mission transfers from Air Force, Army, Navy, and headquarters growth. The USAF growth from FY21 includes temporary restoral of end strength associated with the continued delay of medical manpower reductions, while factoring for decreases to legacy force structure requirements such as C-130H and F-16 modernization, as well compensating for USSF mission transfers. USAF end strength is currently projected to come back down once the temporary restoral for medical manpower expires at the end of FY22. This request also grows the Air National Guard for logistics, deployable security forces and ANG recruiting missions; balancing reductions in legacy C-130 aircraft with funding enduring missions such as the A-10. We thank you for your continued favorable Congressional support of the FY 2022 President's Budget request to ensure the USAF and USSF can access the talent we need to compete in a world defined by ambiguity, rapid change, and great power competition.

RECRUITING GOALS

The Department of the Air Force achieved its FY20 Recruiting Goals of 26,398 regular component Enlisted (100% of goal) and regular Officers of 4,553 (100% of goal). We also met our Air National Guard combined Officer and Enlisted goal by recruiting 11,620 Guard members (108 % of goal), and our Reserve combined Officer and Enlisted goal of 7,000 (100% of goal). Additionally, the Department of the Air Force is on target to reach our FY21 recruiting goals of 27,053 regular Enlisted and 4,318 regular Officers; Air National Guard combined Officer and Enlisted goal of 11,428; and Reserve combined Officer and Enlisted goal of 8,800.

While these numbers are good, we are keenly aware of a growing competition for talent and expect the recruiting environment to become even more challenging. Today only 29% of 17 - 24 year old men and women in the United States are eligible to serve in the military and only one in eight have a propensity to serve. Within this eligible population, the Department of the Air Force seeks to increase our pool of diverse candidates and reach the best and brightest from across our nation while making sure every eligible member who wants to serve has the opportunity to compete to serve.

To enhance our diversity; we have focused on increasing our female applicant pool within the officer accession sources, setting an initial target to achieve growth in applicants to 30% female. We surpassed that goal at the Air Force Academy for the class of 2024, and 30.2% of the entering class were women. Last year's graduating class was more than 29% female, a 3% increase from 2019. Within our ROTC program, we raised our applicant pool to 28% female with an actual cadet class of 25.5%, marching toward the initial 30% applicant pool goal. The 2020 ROTC class consisted of 25% female, a 1.5% increase since 2012. Finally, our 2020 OTS classes were 18.7% female across the Total Force, which is a 2.5% increase since 2012.

Recruiting diverse talent is also dependent on our Department being an inclusive organization. Since June 2018, we have accessed and made accommodations for more than 29 practicing Sikh, Muslim, Heathen, Jewish, Norse, Easter, and Russian Orthodox individuals to allow these talented members to serve while still respecting their religious dress and appearance requirements. We've also partnered with academia to provide \$19M in Flight Scholarships at historically black universities and colleges. These professionals serve as role models for other talented Americans who can potentially see themselves serving in our force as well.

In the future we plan to invest in the Regular Component's recruiting operations in a multi-year effort, allowing for year round recruiting efforts to meet Total Force accessions goals. The DAF is committed to improving how we recruit tomorrow's Airmen and Guardians. We have added 159 recruiters and established a Recruiting Squadron specifically focused on areas where we continue to experience shortfalls such as Special Warfare Airmen, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, and Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape. COVID taught recruiting that going virtual expanded reach capabilities that the traditionally store front office lacked. Additionally, we are working with OSD on potentially implementing the DAF Compatibility Assessment, an integrity test to screen out accessions at high risk for unethical behaviors, including sexual assault.

RETENTION

As important as recruiting is, retention within our high-tech force is equally important. While the DAF is experiencing unprecedented high retention rates in both the Enlisted and Officer Corps, the aggregate success may mask areas with retention challenges. To help ameliorate these retention challenges, the USAF continues to offer targeted monetary incentives. For Enlisted skills, the FY21 Selective Retention Bonus program's \$200M targets critical capabilities in enlisted Air Force Specialty Codes with low manning percentages, low retention, and/or high training costs, such as special warfare, aircraft maintenance, cyber, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance.

Focusing on pilots specifically, the DAF has a FY21 budget of \$194.1M for the Aviation Bonus (AvB). While the take-rate for pilots steadily declined from 68% in 2013 through 2020 mainly due to an unprecedented major airline hiring boom, COVID-19's impact on the travel industry resulted in a larger number of pilots continuing to serve and an increased take rate of 51.3% in FY20, up from 45% in FY13. Given that we do not expect airline hiring to pick back up until late 2021-2022, or reach pre-COVID-19 hiring rates until 2023-2024, FY21's AvB program focuses on targeting specialties with low manning while providing incentives for those who accept longer term contracts to help take advantage of the temporary airline hiring freeze.

FORCE MANAGEMENT

Overall Air Force retention is the highest it's been in over twenty years, likely influenced by COVID and the economy. While high retention has helped the Department of the Air Force maintain immediate readiness levels, we ended FY20 approximately 990 over our authorized end strength and started FY21 at 333,790, higher than our FY21 year-end authorized end strength of 333,475. As a result, our focus is on balancing high retention with the need to sustain the force over time, ensuring enough headspace to access the talent we need year after year. Recognizing many members have delayed retirement or separation plans during COVID's peak, the Air Force wants to remain flexible to allow Airmen to transition from the force as their family situation allows. To provide options we implemented a number of voluntary force management programs to create space for needed accessions within our authorized end strength. We also provided opportunities to waive some limited active duty service commitments and expanded the PALACE CHASE transfer program to allow members the opportunity to affiliate and serve their commitments in the Reserve Components. Additionally, we paused the Voluntary Retired Return to Active Duty and the Voluntary Limited Period of Active Duty accessions programs given our high retention levels. We are monitoring retention closely to manage impacts to future readiness levels. We are preparing for FY22 and the possibility of continued high retention, recognizing we may need additional flexibility. We want to remain agile as we look to the future, knowing we need to preserve our ability to recruit and access new talent.

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 empowers all Airmen (military and civilian) to reach their full potential within a framework that increases agility, improves responsiveness, empowers performance, and provides transparency and simplicity. This framework is centered on defining and knowing what we value, measuring those key items, and 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. Some Air Force initiatives include our Space Force partners while they continue to develop and mature their independent service-specific Human Capital Strategy.

AIR FORCE TALENT MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES

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 an 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 and have instituted several associated programs.

One of the fundamental tenants of our Talent Management system is to be responsive by ensuring we drive our 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 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 ranks and is now entering into our second year of operation. Active component line officers are now managed in six developmental categories for promotion instead of a single category. 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 tomorrow's high end fight.

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 reward those with the highest potential.

Under this new system, those whose record of performance score the highest at the promotion board, pin-on 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, as well as increases transparency to the force by providing promotion selected officers direct feedback on where they stand in relation to their peers.

Staying with the theme of promotion flexibilities, the Air Force is also postured to capitalize on the Temporary Promotion authority that was provided in 2019. This flexibility offers us the opportunity to temporarily promote officers into a designated position that requires a skill the Air Force has a critical shortage of in-grade personnel. The ability to execute this authority puts us in a much better position to place talent when and where it is needed while incentivizing Airmen possessing such skills. The Air Force adaptation of this authority is set to launch in the Fall of 2021.

Likewise, 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. Current plans allow officers meeting certain boards starting in October of 2021 to utilize 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 early use in February 2021. The ALQs represent in 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 reach their full potential.

Specific to empowering the performance of our enlisted force, we 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.

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.

As you can see from the sampling of initiatives we have provided, talent management is a priority for us and

we are working diligently to build the Airmen we need for the future. We also recognize there is much more work to be done in this arena. For instance, we are currently exploring how to modify our promotions and evaluation systems in light of the Racial Disparity Review findings. We must make certain every Airman can realize their full potential and compete fairly for promotion opportunities within the Department of the Air Force—we are committed to seeing every Airmen succeed.

CIVILIAN TALENT MANAGEMENT

We are also excited at the progress we've made in managing our civilian talent, most notably in our hiring timeliness. The Department of the Air Force has dropped average days of hiring from 114 days in 2019 to 85 days in 2020. This is much needed progress, but still not where we would like to be. We continue to work on hiring timeliness while leveraging Direct Hire and Expedited Hiring Authorities the Congress has generously provided us. In 2020, utilization of these authorities was up to 81.2% when eligible which yielded great results, bringing qualified hires into the Department of the Air Force in 75 days on average with many hiring actions taking as little as 10 days from beginning to end.

Additionally, we will continue to leverage two new and impactful programs to reach the civilian talent we need:

In response to our former Secretary of the Air Force's initiative to establish outreach to colleges/universities and focus on recruitment, we instituted the Premier College Intern Program (PCIP) in 2018 with the following goals. First, recruit 500 post-secondary students for internships annually under Direct Hire Authority 1102 National Defense Authorization Act. Second, make the program more STEM focused. Third, non-competitively place graduating PCIP interns into a permanent position or Palace Acquire/Copper Capstone entry level positions. Additionally, the PCIP graduates feed into our formal intern training programs and each year the formal intern training program hires between 450-500 interns; since 2001, 7,774 have been hired and the DAF currently has 1,412 on board.

We also developed a program to allow individuals that become medically disqualified at Basic Military Training a second opportunity to serve. The "DRIVE" Program is a newly established program that provides medically disqualified candidates an opportunity to enter civilian service. DRIVE is a Total Force talent recruiting initiative which benefits the entire Air Force. Using special appointing authorities such as direct hire authority, the Department of the Air Force is able to match candidates to hiring needs. Since August 2020, the initiative has already successfully placed seven candidates in diverse career fields such as civil engineering, public affairs, and cyber security.

The DAF continues to identify new initiatives and advocate for new and expanded hiring and retention authorities to secure mission critical civilian talent. We recently obtained a temporary direct hire authority as well as a temporary qualification waiver for our 2181 series pilots and simulator operators recognizing the dated qualification specifying significant flying hours did not adequately address changes in technology that allow for civilian flight instruction to be accomplished in a simulator.

The Department of the Air Force values the talent and skills our civilian workforce brings to the fight and fully recognize that Air and Space Force missions cannot succeed without them. In light of this, we continue to pursue initiatives and authorities that enable us to recruit and retain top tier civilians as a critical component of our force.

CAREER FLEXIBILITIES

The Air Force's strategic advantage is our people and to be postured for the future high-end fight, 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 about embarking on. To that end, we are currently looking into an array of options to allow Airmen and Guardians a career path beyond the current paradigms that values who they are, their unique skills, and the perspectives they bring to the fight.

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

While our overall population diversity and recruiting numbers have improved, we have not been as successful in retaining women and diverse Airmen for longer careers. To improve diversity, the DAF created several barrier analysis working groups to identify barriers to retention of women and diverse Air and Space professionals, and we made several policy adjustments based on their findings.

In 2020, we adjusted policy so new mothers could defer making a decision on separating from the service for up to 12 months after delivery, providing ample time to decide if military service was still compatible with their growing family. We're working towards updating this policy to be more inclusive to all families. This policy impacts approximately 3,500 Airmen per month. Additionally, the Department of the Air Force directed units to provide nursing mothers with access to a lactation facility.

The Department of the Air Force updated hair grooming standards in February 2021, allowing women to wear one or two braids, or a single ponytail as well as longer bangs that touch their eyebrows so long as the bangs do not cover their eyes. These changes which responded to safety and medical concerns are also targeted at improving diversity and inclusion in the ranks by giving women from a variety of races more options that might better suit their hair & health concerns. To that point and to show our commitment to listening and evolving as required, our February 2021 female hair policy will soon undergo modification number one. Shortly after we launched our policy, and despite having diverse race, ethnic, and gender representation on the policy development team, we discovered our new policy was not as inclusive as we desired. As written, the bulk standard established with the braids and pony tails did not allow some women to comply with the standard without damaging their hair or making significant investments to have it straightened. The soon to be released modification will make allowances for those hair types to ensure we are truly being inclusive in our application of policies when possible.

Further, dress and appearance policies were adjusted to allow accent marks and hyphens on name tapes and tags, and qualifying male airmen are now able to receive five year shaving waivers. These changes were part of our on-going efforts to create a more inclusive culture.

The Department must continue to operationalize diversity and inclusion to fully leverage the Nation's greatest strength, it's remarkably diverse citizenry for decisive, lethal advantage.

TELEWORK/REMOTE WORK

In response to COVID-19, the Department of 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've 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 will empower our Airmen to meet the Air Force mission and enable 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.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The Air Force continues to make strides transforming a portfolio of outdated systems that consume our Airman's time, energy and flexibility when handling their Human Resource business affairs. We are now beginning to really provide our Airmen with cutting edge cloud based technologies that drastically improves their experience, enhances data protection, and opens the opportunity for mobile access; however, there is much more to do. We need our Airman to have the ability to remain mission focused, and are ensuring they have a streamlined end-to-end experience with this much needed upgrade. Your continued support in our Digital Transformation efforts are appreciated.

CONCLUSION

Resilient and ready Airmen and Guardians, both military and civilian, are the bedrock of the Department 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 Department of the Air Force — those in uniform, our civilian professionals, and the families who support them.