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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Good afternoon Chairmen Nelson and Akaka, Senators Graham and Ensign, and distinguished members of the Subcommittees. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today to discuss the family readiness for Army families of Active Duty, Army National Guard and Army Reserve personnel.

In an all-volunteer force, caring for Army families plays a vital role in sustaining the commitment of our Soldiers. As General Casey, Chief of Staff Army, stated when speaking to the Army on April 11, "You and your families carry a heavy burden in today's war, with a hard road ahead." For deployed Soldiers, it is essential that they know that their families have strong support networks while they are away. Our leaders from installation level to the Chief of Staff Army recognize the importance to not only sustain our robust family programs, but also to augment them as necessary to address emerging needs. One of General Casey's initiatives is to "Enhance quality support to Soldiers and families to preserve the strength of an all volunteer force." We continuously analyze feedback from a variety of Soldier and family surveys, senior spouses, and commanders to ensure our Soldiers and their families are well taken care of and their needs are met.

In light of the recent policy change to extend all Army tours to 15 months, General Casey has mandated an immediate assessment of the impact of this extension on all Army programs and policies. We recognize that never has the importance of family readiness and supporting programs been greater. It is even more critical that Army Family Programs and Child and Youth Services continue to meet the needs of our Active Duty and Reserve Component families. As articulated in the 2007 Army Posture Statement, the Army honors our commitment to care for our Soldiers and their families and unceasingly works to match the quality of life that our Soldiers and families enjoy to the quality of service they provide to the Nation.

Continued engagement in the long war is transforming the way the Army delivers family readiness programs, particularly for those families not living on or near military installations. Our programs can no longer be solely installation centric.

We have integrated numerous Army-wide well-being functions into a comprehensive framework to better enable us to focus resources, measure success, and address the needs of an Army at war that is simultaneously transforming. These programs help to reduce the stress of daily challenges as well as provide assets to assist families to cope successfully and sustain their resilience.

FAMILY READINESS

Services delivered through Army Family Programs are critical to the well-being of Soldiers and families, and directly influence the Army's ability to sustain mission readiness during times of peace, war and national crisis. We do not want to put Soldiers in a position of having to choose between the profession they love and the well-being of the families they love. The successes of our past in responding to the diverse needs of Soldiers and families, along with our roadmap for the future, create an environment where Soldiers have confidence in the systems we have developed to provide that support. The following serves to highlight a few of our key programs and services.

Our Army Community Service (ACS) organization has the primary responsibility to provide personal and family readiness support to commanders, Soldiers, and families. Extremely proactive in preparing and sustaining families, the ACS staff teaches life skills and provides ongoing training for the Unit Family Readiness Team (unit commander, rear detachment commander, Family Readiness Group (FRG) leaders, and family members). FRGs provide mutual support and assistance, and a network of communications among the family members, chain of command and community resources. FRGs conduct activities that support the unit's mission, ease the strain and stress associated with separations due to military missions, and provide a

communication network. We have published guidance on FRG operations and provided useful and practical techniques for handling deployments for commanders, Soldiers, spouses, and children.

The Operation Resources for Educating about Deployment and You (OP READY) training program assists commanders in meeting family readiness objectives. Training programs include: Family Readiness Group Leader, Rear Detachment Commander, Family Assistance Center Operations, Army Family Readiness, Trauma in the Unit, Soldier/Family Deployment Survival, Reunion and Homecoming and Children and Deployment. OP READY is available through ACS and Reserve Component Family Program staff. Each OP READY topic includes separate materials for units, families and instructors.

Family Readiness Centers are places where families of deployed Soldiers can gather for meetings, receive the latest information, and socialize with other family members. Facilities may contain computer equipment with web and e-mail access to facilitate family member communication with the deployed Soldier, as well as video teleconferencing equipment linking on a coordinated schedule with the deployed unit. These are controlled and manned by either the Army Community Service or the major deployed unit's rear detachment, or a combination of both, and in some communities are co-located with Army Community Service.

Implemented Army-wide in February 2006, the Virtual Family Readiness Group (vFRG), currently supports about 650 Army units and continues to receive positive feedback from users. The vFRG web system provides all of the functionality of a traditional FRG in an ad-hoc and on-line setting to meet the needs of geographically dispersed units and families across all components of the Army. The unit's vFRG links the Soldier, family, FRG leader, unit commander, rear detachment, and other family readiness personnel on their own controlled access web portal to facilitate the exchange of information and provide a sense of community, using technology to automate manual processes and provide enhanced services and communications. The unit commander is responsible for maintaining the vFRG content and user access.

The Army Family Team Building Program builds stronger, more self-reliant families by providing education and readiness training that is particularly targeted to family members at every level, to include junior enlisted spouses who are new to the Army and its ways. Demand for classes increases during deployment and times of crisis when families need current information and strengthened coping skills.

Our 95 garrison ACS directors reach out to the Army National Guard and Army Reserve units in their geographic areas of responsibility to assist Reserve Component family program personnel with providing information, training, and other deployment readiness assistance. Our Integrated Multi-Component Family Support Network (IMCFSN) provides a seamless customer-focused network of services to Army families, regardless of component. The IMCFSN delivery concept is accomplished by training Active Army, Army National Guard, and U.S. Army Reserve service providers on all authorized services and programs available to Soldiers and families by each component. When fully implemented, the IMCFSN will provide a comprehensive multi-agency approach for community support and services to meet the diverse needs of Active and mobilized Guard and Reserve Army families. It will reduce duplication of effort and provide geographical support where families live. Networked systems will contribute to information superiority by providing families access to online knowledge sources and interconnecting people and systems independent of time, location, or Service component. The IMCFSN will ensure services are available throughout the Army for predictable full spectrum support.

One of our concerns is that the Army's current deployment posture has taxed the resources of Rear Detachment (RD) and FRG leaders. Although spouse volunteer leaders are using a variety of strategies to share the workload, the nature of today's expeditionary Army makes running FRGs a daunting task. Family Readiness Support Assistants (FRSAs) provide administrative and logistical support to volunteer FRG leaders, (e.g., maintaining telephone trees, family data cards, scheduling speakers for FRG meetings, etc), which allows FRG leaders to focus on assisting families. Commanders are currently absorbing the cost of these assistants. The Army is working

to institutionalize this support resource and establish battalion level FRSA positions Army-wide.

Another valuable online tool for families is MyArmyLifeToo.com. Launched in 2005, it provides single portal access to current information about Army life. Heavily used by families, the site has had over 28 million “hits” since its inception. In addition, over 55,000 Soldiers and families have signed up to receive the monthly e-newsletter. Military families also have two additional Department of Defense resources - Military Family Life Consultants (MFLC) and Military OneSource (MOS). The MFLCs provide much needed, on-demand personal support to Soldiers and families by providing outreach through direct consultation, classes, groups, and individual sessions. Extremely flexible, the program allows the Army to deploy and redeploy these consultants where and when needed for up to 90 days. Topics include: emotional well being; relationships; marriages; parenting; deployment; change management; stress management; and grief and loss. When an installation identifies specific needs, they may request consultants with these specific skills. The consultants also provide assistance to ACS and Child and Youth Services staff to alleviate emotional burnout and family distress.

Another DoD resource, Military OneSource (MOS), is a 24/7 toll free information and referral telephone line and Internet/Web based service that is available to Soldiers, and their families. This service augments our installation family support services by providing telephonic and Internet access to families living off installations. MOS can also arrange for up to six face-to-face counseling sessions if requested. A very valuable resource, MOS staff disseminated information at 384 Army pre- and post-deployment briefings and events attended by more than 150,000 Soldiers and family members last year.

We also recognize the wealth of resources available in the civilian sector. As a result, we have aggressively cultivated partnerships to improve services to families. For example, the Army Spouse Employment Partnership (ASEP) initiative focuses on

improving spouse employment opportunities for our Army spouses, especially our career spouses who often must quit their jobs to accompany their active duty Soldier spouse to the next assignment. We believe increased spouse employment opportunities support Soldier retention and contribute to family financial stability by helping spouses maintain careers. Since its inception in 2003, ASEP has linked 26 corporate and military employers with us to provide job and career opportunities to military spouses. Current Partners are: Adecco USA; Affiliated Computer Services, Inc.; Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES); Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP); Army Civilian Personnel Office; BellSouth; Boys & Girls Clubs of America; Computer Sciences Corporation; Concentra, Inc.; CVS/pharmacy; Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA); Dell, Inc.; EURPAC Service Inc.; H&R Block; Home Depot; Humana Military Healthcare Services; Lockheed Martin; Manpower, Inc.; Sabre Holdings/Travelocity; Sears Holdings; Social Security Administration; Sprint; Starbucks Coffee Co; Stratmar Retail Services; Sun Trust Bank; and United Services Automobile Association. One ASEP partner, Dell, Inc., established a Virtual Call Center pilot at Fort Hood, Texas in 2005 allowing spouses to work from home. The company has now implemented a "From Home Program", hiring 29 spouses and providing them training and equipment to work in virtual customer service from their homes.

MyArmyLifeToo.com and the military spouse job search website, www.msjs.org, provide portals for military spouses to develop their resumes and apply for jobs. In fiscal year 2006, ASEP partners hired over 5,000 military spouses, bringing the total of spouses employed by ASEP partners to 16,000. The Council of Better Business Bureaus, a key community partner, works with military installations and local Better Business Bureaus to resolve consumer issues affecting military personnel and their families.

Recognized as a driving force behind hundreds of legislative, regulatory and policy changes, and program and service improvements over its 24-year history, the Army Family Action Plan (AFAP) enables our Soldiers and families to raise issues to senior leadership for resolution. AFAP is recognized and strongly supported by local commands as well as senior Army leadership. Installations and headquarters monitor issues and their progress through regular guidance, direction, and leadership approval.

AFAP recognizes that as the operational tempo of the Army changes, we need to adapt our programs and policies to continue to meet the needs of our Soldiers and families. Each year, the conference pursues resolution of critical quality of life issues. For example, at the November 2006 world-wide AFAP conference, we added a workgroup to this vital process to represent our Wounded Warriors. Our Soldiers and families know AFAP is their “voice” in the Army’s future.

Another program the Army has initiated to obtain relevant and current feedback from families is the Army Family Readiness Advisory Council (AFRAC). Meeting twice yearly, the AFRAC is co-chaired by the spouses of the Chief of Staff Army and Vice Chief of Staff Army. Membership is comprised of the following: spouses of Army Command Deputy Commanders/Chief of Staff; Command Sergeants Major; Director, Army National Guard and Chief, Army Reserve; Army National Guard and Army Reserve Command Sergeants Major; rotating Army Service Subordinate and Direct Reporting Units reps (Commander, Command Sergeants Major Spouses); rotating Army 2-star Joint Command representatives (Commander and Command Sergeant Major Spouse); Sergeant Major of the Army (DA-level) representative; and a selected junior spouse. The AFRAC members look at issues that impact quality of life from a strategic and global Army-wide perspective and advise senior leadership on the direction of Army Family Programs; assess and recommend solutions for evolving family issues; establish short and long range goals and objectives; serve as advocates for Family Program services, initiatives and volunteers; and assist in the implementation of family programs. The Council serves to enhance Soldier readiness, retention and mission efficiency, increase program effectiveness, and connect families to the Army.

The Survey of Army Families (SAF) is another tool the Army uses to gauge the attitudes and behaviors of civilian spouses of active duty Soldiers. Recent in-depth analyses of 2004/2005 SAF V data, provided by the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences and the Army’s Family and Morale Welfare and Recreation Command (FMWRC), confirm the importance of MWR and family programs to Soldier readiness and retention. Significant findings include:

- Spouse knowledge and use of Army support assets and being comfortable dealing with Army agencies are keys to positive deployment adjustment.
- Army recreation services are the second most commonly used non-medical service during deployment, with 42 percent of spouses using this installation program. Thirty-four percent indicated they increased their use during the deployment, and 62 percent said they are satisfied with the services they received.
- Sixty-eight percent of spouses who used Army Community Service (ACS) personal and financial assistance programs during deployment found these services helpful, the highest rating of satisfaction for deployment related services in the survey.
- As a result of deployment, depression and school problems affect about one in five children. Parents believe their youngest children cope most poorly with the deployment separation, especially preschoolers under age six.
- Perceptions about the Army as a good place for younger children are linked to Soldier retention: 86 percent of the spouses who think the Army is good for younger children want their Soldier to stay in the Army, while only 51 percent of spouses who think the Army is not good for their children want their Soldier to remain in the Army.

The Army's Recreation program provides a variety of activities designed to support the families of deployed Soldiers. Begun at Schofield Barracks when the 25th Infantry Division was notified that they would be deploying, Army libraries now offer "Read to the Kids." This program allows the families to stay connected through a deployed parent recorded story time during their months of separation. Soldiers deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan and their families are also able to share "video messages" during the deployments. Automotive Centers provide auto storage areas

where spouses can store vehicles with problems until their spouse returns. Some installations also provide auto repair and towing services for family members of deployed Soldiers to insure they have safe, reliable service. Sports and Fitness offers targeted classes for family members, scheduled at times and locations which best meet their needs.

To support our Wounded Warriors, the Army Wounded Warrior (AW2) program employs specially trained personnel in the role of Soldier Family Management Specialists (SFMS). As the Soldier's primary advocate, the SFMS assists in meeting the Soldier and family's needs throughout the treatment, rehabilitation and transition processes. Support offered includes assistance with financial issues, pay problems, administrative support requirements, and explanation of the physical disability evaluation process. When the Soldier transitions from the Army into the community, the SFMS serves as the Soldier's Veterans Affairs (VA) advocate. They also provide a link for the Soldier and family to various federal, state and local aid programs, benefits, and support organizations. After the Soldier and their family have completed transition, the SFMS continue to reach out to the Soldier and family to ensure continued advocacy and support.

The Department of the Army is dedicated to providing the highest level of support to Soldiers, family members and Installation infrastructures upon the announcement of involuntary extensions. Army deployed a multi-disciplinary Tiger Team from Headquarters Army to 172nd Stryker Brigade at Fort Wainwright, Alaska and 10Th Mountain Division at Fort Drum, New York to support these Commander's efforts to successfully deal with the myriad of family issues resulting from the unit deployment extensions. Incorporating lessons learned, we have developed a Tiger Team Smart Book as a tool for commands at every level to anticipate and determine the support necessary in the event of a deployment extension. The primary objective of the Tiger Team Smart Book is to synchronize, standardize, and streamline procedures to effectively and efficiently support Soldiers and families through this difficult time. The

Tiger Team will continue to provide assistance as needed to the additional units facing extended deployments.

Although families are resilient, they are not on their own. They are part of the Army family and we take care of them by providing support and meaningful opportunities for social bonding. There must be sufficient infrastructure, independent of volunteer support, properly resourced to deliver consistent quality services in a seamless manner.

The Army will continue to offer quality programs and services to families, which will positively affect retention. Family well-being and quality of life are critical to the readiness of our Soldiers and have a profound effect on decisions regarding whether the Soldiers will remain in the Army or leave it when their enlistments or obligations are over. Adaptive and resilient, the Army family will continue to thrive as the expeditionary Army sustains an operational tempo that continues to be challenging.

CHILD AND YOUTH SERVICES INITIATIVES

Quality, available, affordable, and predictable child and youth programs, delivered in an integrated system of facility based, home-based and off-post programs, allow Soldiers to focus on their missions, knowing their children are thriving in our child and youth programs and are adjusting as they move from school to school. As a quantifiable force multiplier, these programs are crucial in reducing the conflict between Soldiers' parental responsibilities and unit mission requirements. The 2005 *Survey of Army Families* indicated that the "predictable and consistent services provided by Army Child and Youth Programs reduce the stress children and youth experience when a parent is deployed". Further, parent responses in the Survey indicate the "Army provides a supportive environment and services designed to promote positive adjustments and strengthen child well-being during the period of deployment separation".

There are many military-unique factors that make child care and youth supervision options a necessity to support our Soldiers. For instance, military families are often younger families with children and are living away from their own extended families and neighborhoods. Military families need care for infants and toddlers which is the very age group that care is least available off post. Military duties require child care and youth supervision options 10-14 hours per day including early morning, evenings, and weekends as well as round-the-clock care — sometimes for an extended period of time. The lack of care options at remote sites and overseas creates challenges between mission requirements and parental responsibilities. Parents who are either single and dual military and those families whose spouses are deployed making them temporarily single parents have distinctive needs. One additional military unique factor includes the mobile military lifestyle with its frequent relocations resulting in challenging school transitions - especially for teens.

Child and Youth Programs play a vital role in supporting families affected by the Global War in Terror. Families tell us that the extraordinary efforts our Child and Youth staff and Family Child Care providers make a difference in their ability to cope with the stress of family separation. Telling, too, is the fact that many of the staff and providers are also dealing with the deployment of their own spouses.

As the need for Child and Youth programs for both deployment support and day to day workforce child care continue to increase and change, the Army has taken a number of actions not only to meet this need but also to meet extended deployment needs and close installations in Europe.

The Army has provided over 2 million hours of free and reduced patron fee hourly and respite child care to families of deployed Soldiers since the beginning of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. Installation Child Development Centers and Family Child Care Homes have extended operating hours. Often beginning as early as 4:30 a.m. and going until late into the evening to support shift workers, Child and Youth employees and Family Child Care Providers support families

of deployed Soldiers. The staff often works at night and on weekends to provide care during family readiness group meetings and special events held by the installation to support families of deployed Service members.

Family Child Care providers frequently provide additional evening hours of care taking the children to ball practice, choir, helping with homework, and volunteering to coach youth sports teams whose coaches are deployed. In short, Child and Youth employees and Family Child Care providers are making every effort to provide a predictable and consistent level of program availability to enhance the lives of children who desperately need this support. The respite care provided gives parents time to attend to personal needs or take breaks from the stresses of parenting. Partnerships with organizations like the Boys & Girls Clubs of America and 4-H enhance School Age Services programs, and Teen and Youth Centers and offer value-based programs to help youth deal with the stress associated with parental deployments.

Army also responded to the child and youth requirements resulting from the deployment extensions of the 172nd Stryker Brigade at Fort Wainwright, Alaska and 10Th Mountain Division at Fort Drum, New York. At each location, Child and Youth Services programs and hours of operation were expanded to meet the unique needs of these families. In Alaska, Child and Youth Services staff from other Army installations volunteered to be temporarily assigned to Fort Wainwright to ease the burden and stress of the existing Child and Youth staff, many of whom had spouses who were extended. The lessons learned are applicable to the recently announced 15 month deployment requirements.

To support deployment requirements, Active Duty geographically dispersed and Reserve Component deployed families are able to access child care support and pay reduced child care fees when Soldier parents deploy. *Operation: Military Child Care*, a Department of Defense partnership initiative with a national non-profit organization, helps families locate child care at reduced rates in their local community when they are unable to access child care on military installations. Since the inception of *Operation:*

Military Child Care in February 2005, over 5,000 Department of Defense children have participated. Army currently has over 2,200 children receiving the child care subsidy.

In conjunction with the National 4-H Office, the Army's Operation *Military Kids* (OMK) initiative is a collaborative effort in 34 states to support the children and youth of our Reserve Component Soldiers. This vital Army partnership with the Department of Agriculture is a success story that engages main stream America in directly supporting our military youth. Most recently, the *Operation: Military Kids* team in Minnesota responded to the child and youth needs of families affected by the extension of its National Guard Soldiers. Mobile Technology labs are used to communicate with deployed parents, provide professional development for school personnel, and support other Operation Military Kids activities to help ease the stress on families. In Fiscal Year 2006, more than 29,000 youth participated in Operation Military Kids events and services conducted in their local communities.

While providing extensive deployment support to active and reserve component families, Army transformation and the expeditionary force is altering the way the Army has traditionally delivered child care services. Increasingly, we find the on-post, Army-operated child care programs insufficient to meet the growing demand for services. To increase child care availability, several community initiatives have been developed to meet the child care needs of our families.

Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood assists geographically dispersed Active Duty families locate child care spaces in their community. These child care spaces are targeted to meet the child care needs of recruiters, ROTC instructors, MEPCOM personnel and Soldiers on independent duty assignments living in communities that are not within reasonable commuting distances to military installations.

Army Child Care in Your Neighborhood supports families living in the immediate catchment areas surrounding some of our installations where there are long waiting lists for care on the installation. Army has programs underway at the most heavily impacted

transformation installations: Fort Riley, Kansas; Fort Carson, Colorado; Fort Drum, New York; Fort Hood, Texas; Fort Campbell, Kentucky; and Fort Bliss, Texas.

Under these programs, services are outsourced through a national non-profit organization that assists families locate child care when they are unable to access child care on military installations. Families pay reduced fees based on total family income for child care services delivered through state licensed/regulated and nationally accredited or credentialed community child care programs.

As part of the 2006 Department of Defense emergency intervention strategy, nine highly impacted Army transformation locations procured 18 Child Care Interim Facilities to serve as a viable solution to meet the child care needs until permanent facilities can be constructed (a total of 1800 additional spaces). The facilities are located at Fort Bliss, Texas; Fort Campbell, Kentucky; Fort Carson, Colorado; Fort Drum, New York; Fort Hood, Texas; Fort Lewis, Washington; Fort Riley, Kansas; Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield, Georgia. Permanent construction projects are programmed in the Future Years Defense Plan to replace these interim facilities by 2013. Using the authority granted by section 2810 of the Fiscal Year 2006 National Defense Authorization Act, Army is adding 10 permanent modular child care facilities at Fort Bragg, North Carolina; Fort Lee, Virginia; Fort Lewis, Washington; Fort Polk, Louisiana; Fort Sill, Oklahoma; Tobyhanna Army Depot, Pennsylvania; Anniston Army Depot and Redstone Arsenal, Alabama; Detroit Arsenal, Michigan; and Picatinny Arsenal; New Jersey.

Another factor in retention of Soldiers and families is the availability of quality schools in the civilian community. Army is working with the Department of Defense and Department of Education to ensure that its families are prepared for successful school transitions from one location to another in support of the mobile and transforming Army. Developed in 2005 to address Base Realignment and Closure and Army transformation needs, the Army School Transition Plan includes strategies for successful transition of more than 55,000 Army-connected students from schools in continental United States

and overseas locations to be able to adapt to the mobile and changing military lifestyle. Better transitions mean a smoother move and settling in for the family, which in turn supports their stability and security. The Soldier, therefore, can concentrate upon the unit's mission.

The plan focuses on coordination with national, state, and local education agencies to integrate military-connected students into local school systems. The Army, the Department of Defense and Department of Education are working in partnership with affected local education agencies to identify best practices on how to accommodate the influx of transitioning students.

During the past few years, many school systems have demonstrated their commitment to respond to the needs of our Army children. Superintendents, principals, and counselors welcome information about how to support our children, including military support services available for their use. Teachers and counselors are extremely positive and demonstrate a genuine interest in the well-being of our Army children.

Army Child and Youth Programs are vital to the readiness, retention and well-being of Soldiers and their families. Army must continue on a path to meet the enduring child care and youth supervision needs of a transforming and growing Force and also meet the mobilization and contingency child and youth needs of an Army at War. To do this requires robust programs delivered by a system of Army operated programs on post and by Army sponsored programs provided off post. Only through this integrated approach can Army provide the child and youth services and programs our Soldiers need and deserve.

CONCLUSION

Army family readiness and child and youth programs are absolutely essential to the well being of our Soldiers and their families and ultimately the sustainment of the force. Army leadership is committed to providing a comprehensive framework of

predictable and available programs and services on and off the installation that prepare and support Soldiers and families to successfully meet the challenges of current and future deployments.

The Nation has received an excellent return on its investment in our families. On behalf of Army families all over the world, I ask for your continued strong support of our family, child and youth programs.

I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to answering your questions. **ARMY STRONG!**