

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 FY23

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 you today. America's Air and Space professionals remain steadfast in providing Global Vigilance, Reach, and Power to protect and defend our Nation.

The nation's 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. Winning a 21st century fight will require adaptable, resilient, innovative Airmen comfortable leading and flourishing as members of a team capable of easily delivering results in a dynamic operating environment. 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.

Current world events remind us that the only constant is change, and it is imperative our Air and Space Forces and their families remain ready and resilient at all times. Pandemic recovery continues to force us to address new challenges with supply chains, rising inflation and the "Great Resignation" phenomena creating critical staffing shortages in industries such as mental health and child care. As we continue mitigation of these concerns, we are working hard to ensure every Airman has every opportunity to reach their full potential.

Through all the challenges, the Air Force continues to accomplish our assigned missions and our Airmen continue to shine. 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 be noted the United States Air Force (USAF) continues to provide much of the member and family support efforts for the overall Department. 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, operationally-focused service.

HELPING AIRMEN REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

Our Airmen, Guardians and families are our greatest competitive advantage. We buy things, we invest in people. Over the past year, the Department of the Air Force (DAF) continued its focus on providing the absolute best care for our Airmen and their families, while taking all steps necessary to create an inclusive environment where every Airman has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

COMBATTING SEXUAL ASSAULT & SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual assault and sexual harassment are crimes and their impact undermine our force lethality, readiness, and mission success. It is part of a continuum of harm that too often begins with sexual harassment, which must also be priority if we are to maintain the ready, diverse, and lethal force necessary to defend our nation. The DAF recognizes that despite strong efforts over many years, we have not made significant, measurable progress in preventing or reducing the prevalence of sexual assault or sexual harassment. We have more work to do. We remain focused and persistent in our efforts to combat this continuum of harm in the ranks using effective, research-informed prevention strategies and ensuring comprehensive support and response for sexual assault and sexual harassment victims.

Sexual assault reporting across the DAF has steadily increased since 2010. Between 2019 and 2020, our sexual assault reports from Service members rose slightly from 1388 to 1390 for incidents occurring during military service.

The 90-Day Independent Review Commission (IRC) directed fundamental changes to prevention of and response to sexual assault and sexual harassment. The DAF has begun implementing the IRC's recommendations in alignment with Department of Defense (DOD) guidance. We are increasing our full-time advocates to strengthen the response workforce that must be in place to ensure critical support and care of victims; we are developing a plan to ensure an independent reporting structure for our Sexual Assault and Response Coordinator (SARC)s outside of the chain of command to provide independent oversight and empowerment to support victims while maintaining direct access to Commanders; and we are enabling sexual harassment victims to access victim advocacy support from Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) advocates. Additionally, we are implementing the Safe-to-Report policy throughout the DAF. Directed by Congress and originally developed by the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), this policy removes barriers to reporting by eliminating punishment for minor collateral misconduct, like underage drinking or fraternization. We are also an active participant in the DOD's Catch a Serial Offender program that identifies serial offenders of sexual assault via anonymous reporting of sexual assault. As of February 2022, the DAF was able to identify 18 matches through this program; two reports converted to unrestricted reports.

Further, the DAF is addressing environmental factors of climate and culture, such as sexist attitudes and beliefs that are associated with increased risk of sexual harassment and sexual assaults. The Sexual Communication and Consent and Wingman Intervention Trainings address attitudes and beliefs that promote a healthy culture and climate. In July 2020, the Secretary of the Air Force requested the formation of an Interpersonal Violence Task Force to examine the Department of the Air Force's ability to keep Airmen and Guardians safe once they had experienced interpersonal violence. This request was, in part, triggered by tragedies involving U.S. service members, including the murders of Airman First Class Natasha Aposhian at Grand Forks Air Force Base and Specialist Vanessa Guillen at Fort Hood. The Interpersonal Violence (IPV) Task Force Final Report, published in November 2021, laying out recommendations addressing environmental factors of climate and culture, such as sexist attitudes and beliefs that are associated with increased risk of sexual harassment and sexual assaults. We are conducting a study to provide additional insight from the Interpersonal Violence Taskforce data to inform future prevention activities. Our goal is to create trust in both our response and support services, flexibility for victims to access the care and support they want and need through a warm hand-off approach that strengthens coordination across our Family Advocacy and SAPR programs, as well as in our accountability programs in order to eliminate any gap between reporting and prevalence, while trying to reduce both to zero overall. Until that time, we have work to do.

The Task Force designed and administered an anonymous, online survey to Department of the Air Force personnel—Regular Air Force and Space Force, Guard, Reserves, and civilians—over a six-week period during fall 2020. Survey items addressed whether respondents experienced any of 81 behaviors across what is commonly known as the “continuum of harm” in the two years preceding the survey. The Task Force also conducted focus groups and collected qualitative feedback via online questionnaires from DAF personnel who were interested in offering more detailed feedback regarding their experiences with interpersonal violence. According to the report, analysis showed that many victims do not report the behaviors, or when they do, they do not believe anything will be done. The report also highlights most victims were not satisfied

with support service agencies. The Task Force made three major recommendations based on its findings, which the DAF is currently working on implementing and ensuring our MAJCOMs are a well. In response to the findings in the report, the DAF Special Victims' Counsel Program instituted a pilot program to expand legal services and representation available to Airmen and Guardians who have experienced interpersonal violence. Additionally, the DAF is taking steps to institutionalize a "warm hand off," or "No Wrong Door" policy, to address sexual assault, domestic violence, harassment and stalking. This concept ensures anyone seeking help receives a warm hand off between helping agencies as the right support and guidance within our organization is determined. Supportive service agencies will also ensure victims and their families have support from initial reporting through resolution and post-care. The Secretary of Defense's Independent Review Commission (IRC) on Sexual Assault in the Military, which stood up after the DAF Interpersonal Violence Task Force, incorporated many of the findings and recommendations of the Task Force into its final report. Our goal is to create trust in both our response and support services, flexibility for victims to access the care and support they want and need through a warm hand-off approach that strengthens coordination across our Family Advocacy and SAPR programs, as well as in our accountability programs in order to eliminate any gap between reporting and prevalence, while trying to reduce both to zero overall.

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, 41 reports AY 2019-2020, and 55 reports AY 2020-2021. 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 are based on evidence-informed best and promising practices to reduce barriers to reporting. In AY 2021-2022, the "Safe To Report" policy was cited by 22 cadets as an influence on their decision to report. We continue efforts to monitor and reduce incidents at the USAFA and across the force.

Our overall DAF strategy is focused on prevention, response, and accountability. Our prevention framework includes using assessment tools to identify risk and protective factors for our population, addressing negative attitudes and beliefs that can lead to an environment that tolerates unethical behavior, designing actions to mitigate key sexual assault risk factors while promoting protective factors, and designing ways to equip leaders at all levels to foster protective factors and reduce risk factors, growing Wingmen intervention skills, and promoting positive unit culture to eradicate sexual assault.

Our prevention efforts feature several ongoing training initiatives. The Sexual Communication and Consent (SCC) Program, an innovative, evidence-informed sexual assault prevention training developed specifically for delivery during Basic Military Training (BMT), includes both universal and tailored content. Over 8,000 trainees went through the SCC Program Pilot between September 2019 and April 2020. After completion, the trainees increased knowledge of sexual assault by 4.4%, knowledge of consent by 1.8%, and self-efficacy to resist sexual assault by 6.8%. We also saw desired decreases: date rape myth attitudes decreased by -4.2%, dating risk behaviors by -3.9%, and social risk behaviors by -4.5%.

The SCC curriculum was revised based on the 2019-2020 pilot, and over 1,200 BMT trainees completed the revised, tablet-based training. After the training, the trainees showed a 9.3% increase in knowledge of sexual assault, a 4.2% increase in consent knowledge and an 8.5% increase in self-efficacy to resist sexual assault. Additionally risky dating behaviors decreased 10%. The study also found the training appeared to reach sexual assault survivors and potential victims with content that might reduce their future risk for victimization while improving knowledge and attitudes that could prevent harmful behaviors among potential

perpetrators. The USAFA is building on these BMT initiatives and initiated a three-year pilot study that just began with the class of 2025.

The DAF 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 updated annually to ensure continual engagement on this critical issue.

The On Site Installation Evaluation (OSIE) began as a part of Secretary Austin's Immediate Actions to Address Sexual Assault and Harassment. The DAF supported the efforts to review policy compliance and the OSIE. The OSIE concluded with recommendations to revise and develop policies to support a dedicated primary prevention workforce, institutionalize OSIEs, issue prevention policy, ensure leaders at OSIE sites enhance authentic engagement and responsiveness to the military community's needs, reinforce healthy climates, define the local prevention system, enhance military community engagement and help-seeking, and address compliance deficiencies. The DAF continues to support OSD in efforts to address the recommendations. We have a dedicated prevention workforce and dedicated prevention policy. We are enhancing our prevention workforce to meet new and emerging requirements. The workforce is focused on data informed prevention activities aimed at reducing interpersonal and self-directed violence. DAF plans to incorporate recommendations in DAFI 90-5001 and implement yearly compliance reporting.

As part of the DAF's ongoing prevention efforts and IRC recommendations, we established 175 dedicated, installation-level, prevention experts focused on support and activities to specifically address the prevention of all forms of interpersonal and self-directed violence, address local risk factors, and enhance protective factors of our Airmen and Guardians. Beginning in 2022, and also part of the IRC recommendations, the DAF is expanding the prevention workforce by adding 227 full-time dedicated prevention professionals; they will be onboard by the end 2023. We anticipate recruiting for 103 positions beginning in the summer of 2022 and 124 positions in the summer of 2023.

Department of the Air Force response programs include Sexual Assault Response Coordinators, Special Victim Advocates, restricted and unrestricted reporting processes, and medical care for victims.

The DAF is implementing the FY22 NDAA requirements to establish an independent Office of Special Trial Counsel (OSTC) to oversee the investigation of and prosecution of sexual assault and other victim-based offenses. We are close to a proposed organizational structure, to include identification of personnel and resourcing requirements for the OSTC construct. We are working aggressively and on track to fulfill all first-year Congressional reporting requirements during the OSTC program stand up. In addition to the implementation of the OSTC, the DAF is partnering with OSD to maximize overlap of IRC implementation and other NDAA provisions involving military justice. We are using the authorities granted in the NDAA and contemplated by the IRC to address sexual harassment by actively utilizing the new Article 134, UCMJ, offense in investigations and prosecutions of sexual harassment and educating the force on its punitive nature.

Moreover, we are working toward developing a dedicated sexual harassment investigation function that will enable effective, independent investigations in accordance with the NDAA and IRC recommendations. Finally, we've updated our military leave program to provide non-chargeable time off to victims of sexual assault to assist with their recovery. 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.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

In 2020, the DOD Active Component suicide rate was 28.7 per 100K; DAF Active Component suicide rate was 24.3 per 100K. After controlling for differences in age and sex, the Active Component and National Guard (27 per 100K) suicide rates are comparable to US population rates, while the Reserve rate (21.7) is lower. The largest demographic of 2020 DAF suicides are single men, between the ages of 23-30, and in the rank of E1-E4, who use die by suicide using a firearm. Data through quarter four of 2021 shows the DAF Active Component suicide counts have reduced and are now consistent with pre-2019 levels, as published by the Defense Suicide Prevention Office. We anticipate the 2021 DOD Annual Suicide Report release in Sep of 2022 and will be able to complete a more thorough analysis of 2021 suicide trends upon receipt of the report.

Death by firearm is the most common means of DAF suicide (over 70% since 2015, 61% for CY20) for personnel living in the Continental United States (CONUS) and over 90% of DAF suicide deaths occur in the U.S., making firearms by far the most prevalent method for suicide in the DAF (this pattern is similar to the national population as well). The overwhelming majority of firearms used in DAF CONUS suicides are personally owned. Death by asphyxiation is the most common means of DAF suicide when personnel are located outside of the Continental United States (OCONUS). The stark difference between firearm and asphyxiation methods of suicide-deaths based upon location are likely due to the fact that personally-owned firearms are generally not permitted for OCONUS DAF personnel (varies by location and type of firearm).

Over 60% of the Airmen who died by suicide in the DAF had access to some form of lethal means in their household. Data from 2020 reveals that less than 15% of these members had their lethal means safely stored in a manner consistent with the "Go SLO" (Safes, Locks, or Outside the home) recommendations consistent with the DAF lethal means safety effort – Time-Based Prevention. Clearly more work is needed in this area, which is why lethal means safety is a DAF suicide prevention priority. Between 2020 and 2021, we distributed over 202,000 gun locks along with educational and training materials on safe storage options. In March 2022, the Department of Air Force launched a lethal means safety comprehensive implementation and evaluation plan. The Time-Based Prevention initiative is intended to eliminate the hazard of firearms and other lethal means being readily available when an Airman or Guardian is in distress. Continuing the "Go SLO" 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.

Male Airmen have a 3.3 times greater risk of dying by suicide compared to female Airmen and Guardians. In addition, younger Airmen and Guardians are more likely to die by suicide than older personnel. Airmen and Guardians 30 years or younger are at higher risk of dying by suicide than those over 30. In the U.S. population, the rate of suicide deaths among non-Hispanic Whites is more than twice the suicide rate of Blacks, Asians, or Hispanic Whites. Due to low counts, ethnicity rates cannot be calculated for DAF in any detail, however general trends suggest that Hispanic/Latino/a/x are less likely to die by suicide than those

who identify as not-Hispanic/Latino/a/x or those who decline to respond. There is no difference in suicide rates between White and Black Airmen. Asians and All Other Races/Mixed Race are at increased odds of dying by suicide compared with other racial categories. While it may appear that race and ethnicity are significant risk factors for suicide-death in the DAF, it is important to recognize that there are insufficient numbers at this time to make predictions of risk based on race or ethnic category. This should remain an emphasis of investigation as more data becomes available.

Once gender and age are taken into account, suicide risk does not significantly differ by Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC). The AFSCs with the highest number of suicide deaths generally are the largest AFSCs and AFSCs that are disproportionately filled with young men. Between 2015-2020, the Aerospace Maintenance and Security Forces populations were 64% males 30 and under, whereas the rest of the DAF career fields were only 44% men of this age. This population variance is reflected in slightly higher suicide deaths in those career fields.

Relationship issues are the leading risk factor for suicide deaths; consistently over 40% of deaths by suicide were of individuals who experienced relationship issues. Additionally, between 20-30% of decedents experienced problems in more than one of the following areas: relationships, legal trouble, financial issues, administrative problems, and workplace issues. There is still a gap between identifying someone at risk and taking effective action to intervene or refer for help.

In the spring of 2020, the DAF provided tools and lessons to help maintain social connections during the pandemic. These tools included our first-ever suicide prevention 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 in late CY20, more than 20k family members have connected to the site and completed the training. Over 6.5k who connected to the site stayed to earn a certificate of training completion. Eighty-five percent of those who visited the site indicated being more likely to intervene with someone in distress.

Airmen and Guardians (AD, Reserve, and Guard) under investigation for Uniformed Code of Military Justice violations are at increased risk for suicide death. Between 2017 and 2021, 11% of Airmen and Guardians who died by suicide were accused of, or had been found to have perpetrated interpersonal violence within a year of their death. For these reasons, the Air Force is continuing its application of the Limited Privilege Suicide Prevention Program, ensuring that Airmen under investigation have confidentiality with mental health providers such that they don't see their prosecution as a barrier to accessing the care they need, particularly during the height of a stressful investigation.

Emotional abuse was the leading type of interpersonal violence experienced by Airmen and Guardians across the Total Force who attempted or died by suicide. Between 2017 and 2021, 15% of those who attempted suicide experienced one or more forms of interpersonal violence within a year of their attempt. Females are more likely to attempt suicide due to higher reports/incidences of interpersonal violence within their gender.

Most Airmen who attempt or die by suicide have no recent deployment history. In examining suicide deaths between 2016 and 16 September 2021, 2% of decedents were currently deployed and 4% of decedents had deployed less than 3 months prior to their death. Among attempts in this same timeframe, 3% of Airmen and Guardians were currently deployed and 3% of Airmen and Guardians had deployed less than three months

prior to their attempt. The average yearly total force Airmen and Guardian deployment rate is 18%.

Between 2016 and 2021, 31% of DAF Airmen that attempted suicide had a documented Invisible Wound (IW); categorized as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and/or Major Depression. Of those who had a documented IW, 85% received medical or mental health care (in-patient or out-patient) in the 90 days before their attempt (66% received medical and mental health care, 10% received only medical care, and 9% received only mental health care). Eighteen percent of DAF Airmen and Guardians that died by suicide between 2016 and 2021 had a documented IW. Seventy-three percent of suicide deaths that had a documented IW received medical or mental health care (in-patient or out-patient) in the 90 days before their death. Forty-eight percent received both medical and mental health care, 14% received only medical care, and 11% received only mental health care.

To combat suicide trends, the DAF established prevention priorities for 2022 that align with the White House Strategy for reducing Military and Veteran Suicides. These priorities build upon prevention strategies tied to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Building Connections, Detecting Risk, Promoting Protective Environments, and Equipping our Airmen and Families to mitigate risk and build resilience.

Our first 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 second priority is engaging, empowering and equipping families. We will continue our efforts to engage and equip spouses and family members in resilience and prevention activities. Our third prevention priority is reducing stigma and barriers to accessing care. As an extension of our communications and marketing messaging about resilience and prevention tools and resources, this renewed emphasis will be focused on positive outcomes that result from accessing the care already available.

Our fourth priority is to address upstream risk and protective factors. Nationally-recognized experts, with published seminal research, have partnered with our team to create group-strength and peer-to-peer networking content that has proven impact. Incorporating these facets into our resiliency training will have a far-upstream effect on both resilience and well-being of our force, which will then impact suicide prevention, affecting our Airmen and Guardians long before distress manifests into negative behaviors.

Last, we want to emphasize data sharing, evaluation and research. Accelerating the identification and dissemination of those programs that are truly effective, combined with sharing data on these efforts with the field, will amplify our results. In addition, we will use rigorous evaluation of our existing programs to assess implementation and effectiveness of all major resilience and prevention efforts in order to drive program improvements. We’ll establish priorities using program self-assessment results, suicide analysis board results, and latest research within a continuous process improvement framework.

The DAF’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 builds trust and confidence in help-seeking actions for unit members. Under the True North initiative, mental and spiritual support teams are permanently embedded in the highest need units at 16 bases, all Air Support Operations, Rescue, and HQ OSI units. These True North support teams work with unit leadership to positively influence Airman and family well-being, increase resilience, and decrease negative outcomes such as suicide, sexual

assault, domestic violence, workplace violence and child maltreatment while improving mission readiness and optimizing human performance.

On March 22, 2022, the Secretary of Defense released a memo establishing the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee (SPRIRC) to identify actionable improvements. Secretary Austin approved 9 installations as the initial designated locations for review. DAF installations include Nellis AFB, Nevada; Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska; and Eielson AFB, Alaska. The SPRIRC will visit these installations and conduct focus groups, individual interviews, and a confidential survey of the Service members. The Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness will issue further guidance including SPRIRC members, charter, and timeline of events. The SPRIRC work will begin by mid-May and installation visits will begin by August 2022. The DAF will assist in every way possible at our three locations to ensure full compliance with the SPRIRC and to communicate all we do to help Airmen and Guardians with their mental health and well-being.

RESILIENCY

The DAF has a robust Resiliency Program, with 32 agencies providing services to help our members and families thrive in their personal and professional lives. Resources are available to help with physical, mental, social, and spiritual needs including, but not limited to, the Chaplain Corps, Mental Health, Airman & Family Readiness Centers, Employee Assistance Program, Deployment Transition Center, 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 DAF 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. Based on recommendations from the IRC, we have brought together the 32 agencies to develop a “Warm Handoff” approach strategy. The “Warm Handoff” approach will ensure individuals seeking assistance are referred to the appropriate services through a warm hand-off. In support of the “Warm Handoff” approach, we are building training and resources for leaders at all levels, command teams, and service providers (medical and non-medical) to standardize the process for conducting a warm hand-off (i.e., person-to-person referral).

We improved the community action planning process to help our installation/MAJCOM community action personnel provide the resilience programs and services that Airmen/Guardians and their families need. HAF worked with RAND to streamline the Getting to Outcomes (GTO) process and tools for community action planning, along with a new guide, training videos, and resources to assist the field use the GTO process more effectively and efficiently.

The DAF is also evolving the Resiliency Skills Training and the Master Resiliency Training programs to enhance resiliency and psychological well-being across the enterprise. We are collaborating with Air University to evolve these programs to in two areas – impact and implementation. These programs will provide our resiliency workforce with skills need to enhance protective factors and skills for dealing with adversity. In addition, the programs will prepare the resiliency workforce to provide Airmen, Guardians and their families with additional skills in forming and enhancing peer-to-peer relationships.

Additionally, our Airmen, Guardians, and family members must be provided with the tools and techniques to help them adapt to changing conditions and prepare for, withstand, and rapidly recover from stress, disruption, or adversity. The DAF Integrated Resilience approach is helping to bring about a renewed understanding and approach towards an integrated care and support system of care approach across the DAF that addresses well-being, quality of life issues, diversity and inclusion actions, resilience activities, personal and professional development, and clinical and non-clinical intervention and response. Through the DAF Community Action Team and Senior Leader engagements, four key themes of connections matter; there is no wrong door; placement and access builds trust; and accountability, innovation, flexibility, and continuous evaluation are being addressed. Furthermore, the DAF continues to aggressively pursue effective and innovative solutions to move us closer to making an environment where Airmen, Guardians, and family members can reach their full potential a reality. The Department is aware of the link between sexual assault and sexual harassment retention risk and therefore investing in implementation of IRC recommendations will also serve to support climates that are safe, inclusive and respectful and will ultimately help with retention across the force.

FAMILY CARE

While we recruit to the individual airmen, we retain families. The DAF is committed to designing solutions that take care of our military families including improvements to child and youth program capacity, military spouse support, and family stability.

EXCEPTIONAL FAMILY MEMBER PROGRAM

The DAF remains committed to continued improvement of our Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), positively impacting 55,000 family members and 36,000 total force members enrolled in the program. We are approximately 60% complete in our multi-year, transformational journey, to modernize the program. Key accomplishments include centralization of resources; staffing and manning studies; and automation initiatives.

The DAF established the EFMP Central Cell at the Air Force Personnel Center in June 2020. The EFMP Central Cell integrates multi-disciplinary support subject matter experts in medical, assignments, special education, and legal matters. The Cell has on its team a special education attorney as well as 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.

Additionally, in August 2021, we implemented an automated Case Management system through which families apply for family member travel screening. The online application replaces several complex multi-page forms with intuitive, easy-to-navigate software focused on the user experience. Families are no longer required to submit a new application with each Permanent Change of Station, and Service members can track their case via the platform dashboard and follow up as needed. Additionally, the online application through DAF Family Vector is accessible via username and password versus Common Access Card, allowing family members to access and complete this digital application together with the Service member.

The centralized travel screening process facilitates collaborative case reviews, consistent decisions, and an unbiased, comprehensive view of care availability. Our medical provider team review each case utilizing the families' electronic medical records, and insurance claim information from the central cell, resulting in

minimal or no appointments as civilian medical records are no longer required. The Central Cell contacts families if additional medical documentation is required. Finally, a Healthcare Benefits Analyst reviews all potential travel disapproval determinations to assess whether alternative care solutions are available. If such care is available and the member is moving between regions, the Cell coordinates care between TRICARE regions. If disapproved, families have an appeals process; Assignment Navigators assist families' locally when medical and/or educational care is unavailable at the gaining base.

The DAF also continues to improve EFMP families' access to support for their special needs family members at installations. Presently, 105 Airman & Family Readiness Center Exceptional Family Member Program Family Support Coordinators are spread across 82 installations, working to enhance the quality of life of special needs families.

Further, DAF EFMP Medical Offices at installation Medical Treatment Facilities provide 83 primary-duty Special Needs Coordinators and 78 primary-duty Special Needs Technicians to assist families locally with EFMP enrollment, PCS, and disenrollment concerns.

The DAF remains engaged with the DOD Office of Special Needs on implementing respite care services and looks forward to full implementation of standardization efforts by the end of fiscal year 2024.

CHILD AND YOUTH PROGRAMS

Available, affordable, quality child care programs support families and enable our members to focus on the mission. In 2021, the DAF provided child care for over 43,816 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 critical. Our network of Family Child Care homes 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 FY21, 5,581 children were served through the Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood program with \$17.6M in fee assistance.

The 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 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 2022, 5,042 children five years of age and under had an unmet on-base 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 128 days.

The Air Force is making every effort to reduce the unmet demand and provide childcare to those who need it. However, it is important to note that unmet demand is defined as requests for on-base child care, either an on-base Child Development Center or an on-base Family Child Care home. Many of the 5,042 have alternative child care available and in use, to include those matched through DAF 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 5,042 children who do not have any child care. Based on data collection being accomplished during sign-up and requests, there are 327 children being serviced temporarily via a military childcare facility and 338 serviced temporarily through a

community-based child care provider via MCCYN. This leaves 4,377 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 1,625 children cared for at home with a parent; 991 in the care of family, friends, or a nanny; and 843 in a family-identified community based childcare program. Nine hundred and eighteen of the 5,042 indicated they cannot find a childcare alternative or did not indicate how their child would be cared for while on the wait list.

The DAF is addressing 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 have 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 used at 68 installations. Although the pandemic 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. The DAF Child and Youth Programs Business Management System is currently being rolled out across the enterprise in 2022. This management tool will improve program operations and facilitate communication between the program and parents. This cloud-based data management system enables the Department to access real-time data to effectively utilize critical child care space requirements, improved wait list monitoring and establish improved enterprise decision support on resourcing for child and youth programs.

Improvements in human resources processes have positively impacted Child and Youth Programs by reducing on-boarding time and facilitating employee transfers. To retain trained staff, we implemented a non-appropriated fund employee transfer assistance program that enables transfer of employment from one DAF location to another, eliminating the requirement to apply for employment after a relocation. In addition, in response to staffing challenges, we are offering a robust Recruitment, Retention, and Special Employee Recognition Program for non-appropriated Child and Youth Program staff members at all installations.

Five of our top DAF child development center military construction projects – Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas; Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas; Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston, Texas; Wright Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio; and Royal Air Force Lakenheath, United Kingdom were authorized and approved in Fiscal Year 2022 and should be awarded in the coming months. The DAF continues to dedicate appropriations for child development center planning and design to military construction projects that address facility shortfalls. The Department has issued planning and design funds for child development centers at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph, Wright Patterson Air Force Base, Hanscom Air Force Base, Scott Air Force Base, Luke Air Force Base, Barksdale Air Force Base and Mountain Home Air Force Base; the child development center projects at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph and Wright Patterson Air Force Base will be ready for award in Fiscal Year 2023 should funds become available. In addition, seven minor construction expansion projects to increase capacity through addition of classrooms or alteration of existing space are currently in planning with execution projected for Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023. The seven addition/alteration projects are for child development centers at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Joint Base Charleston, Minot Air Force Base, Whiteman Air Force Base, Laughlin Air Force Base, Vandenberg Space Force Base, and Peterson Space Force Base.

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 his or her own career goals and aspirations, often leading to reduced employment opportunities or underemployment. The DOD and DAF spouse employment programs provide a robust system of support to help military spouses find meaningful employment and connect with available resources. The DAF continues to engage with states on improving spouse employment opportunities and advocating for improved professional license portability or pursuing interstate compacts. In 2020, the DAF 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 DAF reimburses up to \$1000 for re-licensing/re-certification costs resulting from a Permanent Change of Station move for spouses of military members.

The DAF 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 2590 military spouses from Fiscal Year 2019 to March 2022. This authority is one of many authorities by which a military spouse could be employed with. Additionally, the DOD 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 DOD 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 DAF launched the 18-month pilot in February 2021.

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

COMPENSATION AND FOOD INSECURITY

It is important to note that in the context of the DOD, the term food insecurity is not synonymous with hunger; rather, the term is defined more broadly to also include access to healthy food options.

Through unit First Sergeants, the DAF was able to confirm that food insecurity may be a challenge for small portion of our junior ranks, younger families and single income families. We use a number of different available resources to ensure the well-being of Airmen, Guardians and families who need assistance.

First Sergeants and Airmen & Family Readiness Centers assist with referrals to programs such as: USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Federal Subsistence Supplemental Allowance program (for members overseas where SNAP benefits are unavailable), and the AF Aid Society (who has

expanded the availability of food security related grants and loans). We also offer financial readiness training, free access to personal financial counseling and spouse employment support.

Additionally, the DAF is working with DOD to implement new policy supporting the FY22 NDAA new Basic Needs Allowance legislation. This will provide supplemental income for military members and dependents whose gross household income falls below 130% of federal poverty guidelines. The allowance will end once members' income rises above established threshold.

Although the DAF determined that food insecurity has not significantly impacted our recruiting or retention efforts; taking care of our people is a top priority for the Department. The DAF continues to support Airmen, Guardians and families with of multiple solutions to support financial readiness and opportunities to promote food security across the force.

A recent study conducted by OSD found that military compensation was very robust, grows quickly and compares favorably with the private sector. For example, the report states that a single, 18-year old, high school graduate who enlists earns \$43,500 (annual rate) beginning in the very first month of service. However, the DAF acknowledges that compensation is a key factor in recruiting an all-volunteer force as well as a way to retain top talent so we are look forward to deeper dialogue on this issue to ensure we have all the tools necessary to take care of the needs of our Airman and their families.

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 between readiness and modernization and resourcing future capabilities to compete and win in the high-end fight, both today and tomorrow.

END STRENGTH

The United States Air Force end strength is tied to force structure and our ability to rapidly transition to a wartime posture against a peer competitor. It is necessary to divest or end programs not fully aligned with the National Defense Strategy in order to fund accelerated change in critical operational capabilities and functions required to protect the United States' ability to deter conflict and project power against pacing challenges. Our military end strength reductions in FY23 are commensurate with proposed force structure and divestitures. Smaller end strength in FY23 features 6,020 Total Air Force military manpower reductions from FY22 to divest, terminate, or restructure programs with limited utility. Reductions include the legacy missions of Airborne Warning and Control System, Tactical Air Control Parties, Combat Rescue Helicopter (HH-60), F-22, KC-10, F-15 C/D, and Joint Surveillance and Target Attack Radar System along with continued divestiture of military medical manpower. Additionally, the FY23 President's Budget includes reduction in the number of unencumbered Individual Mobilization Augmentees for the Air Force Reserve and a small increase for the Air National Guard to support the F-35 mission.

Military medical manpower reductions are a continuation of the Air Force Defense Health Program (DHP) reductions in overall medical wartime requirements. They started in the FY20 PB as part of the DOD

reduction. Based on demands for pandemic support and congressional concerns over the level of military medical manpower associated with health care delivery, the requested initial decrease of 947 AF medical end strength was delayed from FY20 to FY23. Further delays could impact operational Air Force missions.

In order to execute the planned FY23 manpower reductions and not face involuntary force management actions, the Air Force likely will end FY22 1-2% below the congressionally mandated end strength.

We thank you for your continued favorable Congressional support of the FY 2023 President's Budget request to ensure the USAF can access the talent we need to compete in a world defined by ambiguity, rapid change, and great power competition.

RECRUITING GOALS

The Air Force achieved its FY21 Recruiting Goals of 26,656 regular component Enlisted (100% of goal) and regular Officers of 4,318 (100% of goal). We also met our Air National Guard combined Officer and Enlisted goal by recruiting 9,428 Guard members (109% of goal), and our Reserve combined Officer and Enlisted goal of 8,856 (104% percent of goal). Although the Air Force is challenged in maintaining a robust Delayed Entry Program membership, we are capable of reaching our FY22 recruiting goals of 26,201 regular Enlisted and 4,111 regular Officers. We continue to see upward progress in our Active Duty processing and Delayed Entry Program but lag behind the number of new applicants we need to feel comfortable about meeting recruiting goals in FY23 and beyond. Additionally, projections remain lower than the necessary applicants needed to meet the Air National Guard combined Officer and Enlisted goal of 9,199; and the Reserve combined Officer and Enlisted goal of 8,200.

The Air Force is 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. Additionally, the percentage of young Americans interested in joining the military is trending downward: a 2% drop from 13% to 11% in the last few years; a reduction of over two million candidates. Within this eligible population, the DAF 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 enhance our diversity we focused on increasing our female applicant pool within officer accession sources, setting an initial target to achieve growth in female applicants to 30% percent. We surpassed that goal at the USAFA for the class of 2025, and 32.5% percent of the entering class were women. Last year's graduating class was more than 29.4% female, a 0.4% increase from 2020. Within our Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program, we raised our FY24 applicant pool to 30% female, with 25.2% female representation in the most recent commissioning class (FY21), a 3% increase since FY16. Our FY21 Officer Training School (OTS) Active Duty Air Force Line commissions were 19.2% female, a 2.5% increase since 2016. OTS additionally commissions Air Reserve Component Line officers, with FY21 female representation of 19.8% percent, up 3% from FY16, and conducts officer training for all Total Force Direct Commissions, with FY21 female representation of 48%, up 3 percent from FY16. The high participation of women in many of the medical career fields drives the large female ratio in this non-line accessions group." Finally, we launched "Inspire Ops", a STEM-based, aviation-focused, motivation and mentorship program designed to increase diversity and mitigate the pilot shortage across rated career fields. The program pairs high school students involved in youth aviation and STEM with students nominated by USAFA and Air

Force ROTC. Events encompass a wide range of engagements from strategic partnerships with national level aviation and youth organizations to supporting base level and local community youth outreach. From FY21 leading into FY22, we executed 95 events, reached 1.2M individuals, engaged 280K candidates, and increased audience by 6.5K on social media.

With a diverse pool of applicants it's imperative to have a talent management system to put Airmen in a position to succeed while also improving diversity in under-represented career fields. In 2022, the DAF increased its focus on the Air Force Work Interest Navigator (AF-WIN) Survey tool designed to match enlisted recruits with Air Force career fields based on their own unique interests and skills. AF-WIN is a web-based tool that presents a series of questions to Airmen on functional communities, job contexts and work activities. It uses an algorithm to create a customized career fit report on more than 130 enlisted Air Force careers tailored to the recruit's interests. Recruiters use the survey results for enhanced job counseling to provide more resources and information on career paths to potential recruits to help increase diversity in under-represented careers, improve job satisfaction, and retention efforts. Additionally, we expanded our job matching window, providing opportunities up to 5 months in the future (previously, we only made jobs available about 60-90 days in advance), with the goal of encouraging and placing recruits in the right job. Due to pandemic-related lockdowns, reduced interest in our target age range (18-24) and changes in medical processing, our job match window has reduced to a little over 30 days.

The Air Force is committed to improving how we recruit tomorrow's Airmen. An assessment of recruiting squadron procedures and environmental challenges determined that the aggregate effects of two years of COVID (limited or no access to schools and lack of public engagement) atrophied significantly the required skills recruiters need to successfully communicate and sell the Air Force. Currently 62% of Active Duty recruiters have never recruited in a non-COVID environment. Toward the beginning of 2022, the DAF implemented an aggressive training plan to address training deficits and increase community presence. We are investing in a multi-year effort allowing the Regular Component year-round recruiting operations in order to meet Total Force accessions goals. Additionally, we have ongoing Total Force marketing improvements focused on underrepresented populations, academic institutions and untapped geographic regions. We are marketing to Minority Serving Institutions and affinity-based professional organizations. We are using data provided by the DoD Joint Advertising Market Research & Studies (JAMRS) to implement a market segmentation approach at zip code level to recruit from growth and untapped potential areas to support greater diversity. Finally, we are working on screening methods to enhance our ability to prevent entry of those accessions who associate with supremacist, extremist, and criminal gang groups.

Finally, the DAF is leveraging predictive tests to ensure that applicants are compatible with serving. This compatibility includes assessing the risk of disciplinary and counterproductive workplace behaviors in potential recruits that might negatively impact well-being, morale and mission effectiveness. To do this, we administer the Tailored Adaptive Personality Assessment System to all recruits. This test identifies and measures an applicant's suitability and adjustment potential for life in the military with ongoing research and development to improve its utility.

RETENTION

While recruiting remains an imperative for the DAF, retention of our agile and ready force is equally essential. Even as the DAF is experiencing unprecedented high retention in some areas, there are areas which continue to experience retention challenges. In an effort to help alleviate these challenges, the DAF

continues to offer targeted monetary incentives. For active component enlisted skills, the DAF has programed \$197M for the FY22 Selective Retention Bonus program, which, when approved, targets critical capabilities in enlisted Air Force and Space 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.

The Aviation Bonus (AvB) is strategic talent-management tool tailored annually through our Business Case Model and specifically designed to retain the proper number of experienced aviators in order to improve readiness and maintain lethality of the force. The AvB program is very cost effective means of talent management when compared to the costs and time needed to replace very experienced aviators.

The FY22 AvB Business Case Model factored manning levels (current and forecast), retention trends (current and trend), cost and time to replace experienced aviators as well as career field health stressors such as very aggressive airline hiring trends, economic recovery, projected Field Grade Officer (FGO) shortages in FY25, aircraft onboarding and divestitures, major aircraft upgrades, Company Grade Officer and FGO manning imbalances, and absorption challenges brought on by increased pilot product to determine program construct. The analysis identified all manned piloted platforms as our top priorities for retention incentives followed closely by Remotely Piloted Aircraft pilots, Air Battle Managers and Combat System Officers. With a budget of \$205.7M, the active component FY22 AvB offers both short-term (defined as 3 years minimum) and long-term (defined as 5 years or more) contracts options and incentivizes long-term contracts with increased annual amounts and larger lump sum payments in the longer term contract categories.

We will continue to modify these annual programs to decisively and deliberately shape the rated force while practicing fiscal responsibility.

FORCE MANAGEMENT

Although DAF retention remains higher than years past, likely due to the lingering effects of the pandemic and economy, we are starting to see balance and stabilization. In FY21 the DAF experienced the highest retention rate amongst officers in 20 years and the enlisted force experienced the second highest in 20 years, after FY20. Although high retention has helped the DAF maintain immediate readiness levels, we ended FY21 approximately 1,159 over our authorized end strength and started FY22 at 334,634. We continue to focus our attention on balancing high retention while sustaining the force overtime leaving enough headspace to access the talent we need year after year. Additionally, we have continued to draw down 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 FY23 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 retain new talent.

MANAGING TALENT

The Air Force's Talent Management systems continue to transform in order to fully support the National Defense Strategy and DOD guidance, develop inclusive leaders of competence and character, and produce the talent we need for the future high-end fight. Most DAF 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.

INNOVATION WORKFORCE

The USAF is continuously finding new ways to improve our capacity to find, support, and nurture the innovation and Cyber workforce that ultimately supports the warfighter and encourages innovative best practices. We are currently working on how to best align and create developmental pathways for Airmen with innovative skills, both military and civilian, within their current communities but also across functional communities. Innovators partnering with experts in leading technology will be critical to building multi-capable Airmen. The DAF is exploring efficient ways to identify people with critical operational talent, including cyber, technology and STEM arenas. Leadership must be ready to support and enhance innovators willing to step into these roles.

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 a force which can adapt, innovate, and demonstrate agility in dealing with today's complex security environment

We have continued our focus on improving the flexibilities of our workforce and appreciate the additional authorities allowed in the FY22 National Defense Authorization Act. We are exploring implementation of many of those authorities as well as expanding on authorities from recent year NDAA's. I am excited to announce the Air Force's recent expansion of the Career Intermission Program for our military members to step away from their active duty commitment without any impact to their career advancement opportunities or competitiveness. Using the authority from the FY22 NDAA, we recently announced that effective December 27th, 2021, Airmen will now experience a 1-to-1 payback option for months served in Career Intermission instead of the legacy 2-to-1 payback by month. There may be specific situations in which one-year participation will still require a two-year commitment upon a member's return, such as a PCS-based Active Duty Service Commitment or ADSCs totaling less than 12 months. At the end of 2021, 12 Officers and 33 enlisted service members are participating in the program.

We have also continued our focus on improving the flexibilities of our workforce and appreciate the additional authorities allowed in the FY22 National Defense Authorization Act. We are exploring implementation of many of those authorities as well as expanding on authorities from recent year NDAA's. I am pleased to report 2021 was the first full-year the Air Force used merit-based reordering of officers selected for promotion. This new talent management authority allows for promotion acceleration based on performance-based potential while still enabling increased experience and development in order to foster a more lethal and ready force. Additionally, the Air Force implemented the new policy allowing officers to opt-out of selection board consideration in late 2021. This option affords our workforce more personal control of their own career management, satisfying individual balance of mission fulfillment and flexibility for personal desires, without risking non-selection in-the-promotion zone or involuntary separation. To date, the Air Force has approved all nine promotion opt-out packages presented to the Secretary of the Air Force.

Additionally, we have shifted our entire military performance evaluation system to a modern 21st century IT application. This sets the conditions for the Air Force to accelerate enhancing our broader feedback and performance report systems. These are the systems our Airmen rely on as the framework to document

performance and develop leader behaviors within our ranks. With the transition, we augment our focus on describing the results Airmen delivered with assessments of Airman Leadership Qualities. That is, we augmented what we value in Airmen performance to include assessments of how Airmen behave and demonstrate competency in doing so. Last month we transitioned all Airmen to use the Airman Leadership Qualities in performance feedback and in the coming months of 2022, we will transition our performance assessment, or the military evaluation, to also be based on these same Airman Leadership Qualities. As part of this transition, we are updating performance reports to ensure leaders are accountable for their unit climates. In the future, our new performance evaluation system will support more agile transitions in data-based talent management approaches.

This new competency-based, data-first approach to talent management ensures we align our values with the behaviors and performance assessments in our evaluation programs. This is crucial as these evaluations are central to selecting our best Airmen for promotion, career advancement development, critical command and senior enlisted leader duties, joint and interagency duties, and so the many other developmental assignments vital to maintaining our competitive edge as an Air Force.

Finally, the Air Force is exploring how to implement military commander and key leader assessments that augment the current command screening boards, prior to command selection. We have a short-term beta test under development that will inform a future permanent and sustainable approach to robust the information considered during selection for command. Our beta test has integrated three new components alongside the traditional record of performance review. These new components include use of a 360-degree feedback survey and assessment of derailing behaviors. In the future, we will pilot in-person cognitive and non-cognitive assessments, an interview by an operational psychologist, as well as peer and subordinate feedback. These new approaches will ensure we consider the whole-person view of strength areas or growth areas of officers selected for command. Additionally, as part of our commitment to development, we will observe and coach officers who participate in these additional assessments to identify gaps or concerns in their ability to understand, grow, and learn the strengths and weaknesses in their ability to lead.

The Air Force is actively re-examining how we develop Airmen over the continuum of their careers and aligning that development to the behaviors we value in our Airman Leadership Qualities, for formal and informal leaders. This emphasis on development and alignment with our values will result in new officer selection processes for the Air Force, ensuring our leaders have the highest levels of character and competence, as well as identifying behaviors requiring adjustment before taking on command and leadership roles.

CIVILIAN TALENT MANAGEMENT

The DAF 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. The DAF Civilian Strategic Human Capital Plan provides the strategic direction for managing the workforce around three over-arching human capital objectives: 1) deliver talent; 2) Maximize Employee Performance; 3) Enhance and Transform Civilian Human Resources. These objectives are supported by a number of human capital strategies and initiatives designed to increase effectiveness and foster a high performing and engaged culture that leverages the diversity and talent within the civilian workforce.

An important component of our civilian talent management efforts is focused on the cyber workforce. The

DOD cyber workforce comprises military, civilian, and contractor personnel who build, secure, operate, defend, and protect DOD and U.S. cyberspace resources; conduct related intelligence activities; enable future operations; and project power in or through cyberspace. The Office of the DoD Chief Information Officer initiated the Cyber Excepted Service (CES) personnel system to support the employment of a highly skilled cyber workforce and the 2018 Cyber Strategy goal to mature the implementation of the CES personnel system across the DOD. CES is designed for civilian employees engaged in, or in support of, certain cyber-related missions and activities (i.e. IT management, artificial intelligence, computer science, computer operations and software engineering). Additionally, CES uses both competitive (Title 5) and excepted (Title 10) service authorities to enhance workforce talent management. Most civilian employees are hired through the competitive service; however, the Office of Personnel Management provides excepted service hiring authorities to fill special positions or to fill positions in unusual or special circumstances. DAF's participation in the two-phased implementation resulted in USCYBERCOM and other DAF cyber supporting units being included in the CES. In March 2019, the USCYBERCOM Commander testified before the House Armed Services Committee that the average time to hire cyber workforce professionals before the CES was 111 days; however, with the implementation of the CES, the average time to hire was reduced to approximately 44 days. Currently, DAF has over 550 positions under CES with ~200 being civilian cyber professionals.

CIVILIAN SHORT-TERM EXPERIENTIAL PROGRAM

The DAF has numerous civilian education and development opportunities. Many of these require geographic mobility; however, our Racial Disparity Review indicated that the expectation for geographic mobility could be a barrier to women and some minorities. In response, the DAF is piloting a new short-term civilian development opportunity called the Civilian Short-Term Experiential Program (CSTEP). The purpose of CSTEP is to allow selectees to 1) Develop cross-functional leadership competencies through a short-term experiential assignment that does not require long term mobility; 2) Enhance development of self, others, and organizations; 3) Gain breadth of experience in a different role; and 4) Gain access senior leader mentorship. CSTEP's pilot period is expected to start in Academic Year 2023. The new program selection board will identify the first slate of candidates in Spring 2022, alongside the rest of the existing opportunities associated with the DAF Civilian Development Education Portfolio such as in-residence intermediate and senior developmental education, full-time bachelor and/or master degree programs, et cetera.

We are also excited at the progress we've made in managing our civilian talent, most notably in our hiring timeliness by leveraging special hiring and compensation authorities. The DAF has dropped average days of hiring from 114 days in 2019 to 82.5 days in 2021. This is much needed progress, but still not where we would like to be, and we continue to work on hiring timeliness. Additionally, the DAF is investing in human resource capacity by continuously evaluating our current processes and systems, seeking opportunities to streamline. For example, the Air Force Materiel Command refined its existing centralized selection and hiring process, moving recruitment responsibility for entry-level, developmental positions to Centralized Hiring Cells in an effort to increase diversity across the field while improving employment timelines. Approximately 2,000 developmental positions will be filled annually through Centralized Selection Cells at each AFMC center. In addition, AFMC has also made concerted efforts to improve new employee onboarding and acculturation, leveraging the USAF Connect mobile application (Apple Store) (Google Play), a digital new employee handbook and diverse technologies to ensure new employees are able to get in the office, on the network, trained and be mission-effective on day one.

The DAF instituted the Premier College Intern Program (PCIP) in 2018 with several goals. First, recruit 500 post-secondary students for internships annually under Direct Hire Authority, Section 1102 of 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 (PAQ) entry level position. Today, between 450-500 PCIP students graduate into our formal intern training programs; since 2018, 1,885 PCIPs have been hired and the DAF currently has 496 PCIPs on board. As of Sep 2021, the retention rate of PCIP interns is 81%. In addition, DAF has 1600 PAQ interns in 2022.

The Science, Mathematics, and Research for Transformation (SMART) Scholarship-for-Service Program, part of the DOD science, technology, engineering and mathematics portfolio, provides STEM students with the tools needed to pursue higher education and begin or continue rewarding careers with the DAF. Since its inception in 2006, the DAF has sponsored 1,186 SMART scholars with 855 DAF-sponsored scholars completing bachelors, masters, or doctoral STEM degrees and being outplaced from the SMART program as DAF STEM civilian professionals. During this time, the DAF has been able to fulfill critical STEM gaps across the DAF in organizations such as the Air Force Sustainment Center, Air Force Research Laboratory, Air Force Life Cycle Management Center, Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center, Air Force Test Center, National Air & Space Intelligence Center, and the Air Force Studies Analysis & Assessments Office. The SMART scholars the DAF has selected the past two years were selected to ensure the DAF has a STEM workforce trained and developed in those critical National Defense Emerging Technology areas for the DAF to include, but not limited to, artificial intelligence, autonomy, hypersonics, 5G, quantum, microelectronics, space technology, biotechnology, advanced computing, and integrated sensing and cyber. In 2021, the DAF sponsored 116 SMART scholars.

We also developed a program to allow individuals that become medically disqualified at BMT a second opportunity to serve. The "DRIVE" Program is a newly established program that provides medically disqualified candidates an opportunity to enter the DAF civilian service. DRIVE is a Total Force talent recruiting initiative which benefits the entire Air Force. Using special appointing authorities such as direct hire, the DAF 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 effective 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 standards which specify significant cockpit flying hours do not adequately address changes in technology that allow for civilian flight instruction to be accomplished in a simulator. DAF continues to work with DOD, the Services and with the Office of Personnel Management to ensure updated qualification and classification standards for both our 2181 pilots and simulator operators, as well as our 2152 Air Traffic Controllers.

We are continuing to demonstrate the Air Force's commitment to fielding innovative talent management programs that deliver on our goal of developing the Airmen and Civilians of tomorrow. Our efforts are ensuring we prioritize talent management innovations that deliver experiences and programs that reinforce the USAF as an attractive career choice for our Airmen and their families. This is directly connected to ensuring we retain the absolute best Airmen we need for our Air Force to continue to deliver our mission

delivering our Nation's defense.

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Diversity and Inclusion are force multipliers and warfighting imperatives. The DAF must be able to draw from the best and brightest talent across our nation to recruit, develop and retain a force comprised of the diverse backgrounds, experience, and skillsets

The DAF's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) Strategy focuses on four key areas to further diversity and inclusion efforts. First, the DAF is working to align diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility to the Department's operational missions. Second, we are focused on leadership engagement and accountability with quantifiable results. Third, we are championing a culture of inclusion by establishing education and training throughout personnel lifecycles. Finally, the DAF is institutionalizing DEIA principles through best practices, analysis and feedback into policy.

Further, we continue to operationalize diversity and inclusion to better recruit and retain top talent. On March 8, 2022, the DAF announced the Caregiver provision for separation. This provision allows either member of a DAF military-to-military active duty couple to apply for voluntary separation after the birth or adoption of a child. This important provision provides further flexibility for Airmen to potentially remain on active duty and also gives both parents more time to understand what is required to balance a family and career before making a decision to separate. To provide further support during the process, the DAF offers the option for members to use MyVector, a creative and innovative online mentoring system available for new parents, to find mentors that can provide support and guidance as they navigate service and family. In addition, as you are aware, the FY22 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) authorized 14 days of bereavement leave for Service members upon the death of certain family members. We are working in close partnership with OSD to update policy, ensuring our members can use this critical new entitlement.

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.