

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
PRESENTATION TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

SUBJECT: SAF/MR and HAF/A1 SASC PERSONNEL OVERSIGHT

STATEMENT OF:

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand, Distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you for your continued support and for the opportunity to appear before this committee to talk about our Air and Space professionals; Active, Guard, Reserve and Civilian. America's Air and Space professionals remain "Always There" providing Global Vigilance, Reach, and Power to protect and defend our Nation.

### **BUILDING A LETHAL AND READY DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE**

Great power competition continues to provide the central challenge to U.S. prosperity and security. To face this challenge, the Department of the Air Force (DAF) must compete, deter, and win in an increasingly complex global security environment. To accomplish this, we must continue to sharpen our competitive edge by developing and building a lethal and ready force. At its core, building the force we need is about people. Our Air and Space professionals (military and civilian) and their families are our most important asset.

#### **End Strength**

The Department of the Air Force appreciates the support for end strength growth in FY20 to 700,000 (military and civilian) as well as for the development of the new Space Force in the FY20 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The DAF's FY21 budget request is for 699,000, which includes a commitment to reducing 2,500 civilian positions by converting Guard and Reserve civilian members to full time military members and adjusting the Working Capital Fund workforce. Our FY21 budget also focuses on growing 900 Active Duty positions for two new F-35 squadrons, resiliency programs for our Air and Space professionals, the B-21, and Joint All Domain Command and Control initiatives. Additionally, it supports growing 400 Air National Guard positions for five Cyber Defense Mission Teams, Fuels, Security Forces, and Traffic Management Office to improve unit readiness and augment the 9th Air Force Joint Task Force. We would also grow 200 Air Force Reserve positions to support C-5, C-17, C-130 global mobility operations and transition from the KC-135 to the KC-46. Our specific resiliency program is the expansion of our True North Program adding 64 officer, 71 enlisted, and 272 civilian personnel to address mental and spiritual health in FY21.

#### **Space Force**

In April 2018, the Commander of Air Force Space Command chartered the Space Cadre Task Force to evaluate the development and management of personnel and career fields dedicated to space and found that the existing space forces in the Air Force were inadequately resourced, trained, and equipped for the operational requirements of an uncontested, much less a contested

space domain. The United States is at risk of losing its competitive advantage in space and we must position ourselves to assure freedom of operations in, from, and through space. The DAF is making bold moves to develop a force to win against any adversary in this domain. Establishing the Space Force will elevate the role of space in national defense and transform how DoD organizes, trains, and equips space forces in order to prepare for these new security challenges in an era of great power competition. The FY20 NDAA re-designates Air Force Space Command (AFSPC) as the United States Space Force (USSF), retaining all of their then-assigned units, other organizations, and personnel (~16K people). The FY21 President's Budget transfers personnel into the USSF (~10K total); 6,434 active military and 3,545 civilian end strength from USAF to USSF. Included in the previously mentioned growth of 900 Active Duty end strength is 140 military members specifically for Space Operations. Personnel will be transferred to the Space Force deliberately and sequentially; first, personnel in organic space specialties (those specialties which will only be in the Space force, e.g., September 1, 2020), then, personnel in common specialties (those specialties which will exist in both the Air Force and the Space Force, e.g., February 1, 2021), then, personnel in organic air specialties (those specialties which will exist solely in the Air Force but may be assigned to the Space Force, e.g. FY21 Q3). The first United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) graduates in organic space specialties will be appointed into the Space Force on May 28, 2020 and the first recruits will enlist into the Space Force during the summer of 2020.

## **DEVELOPING OUR NATION'S AIR AND SPACE PROFESSIONALS**

In this era of near-peer competition, rapidly evolving technology, and the joint all-domain environment in which the Department of the Air Force operates, we realize our talent management system must also evolve to be more agile, responsive, transparent, and effective at empowering and driving performance. These attributes are the bedrock for increasing lethality and developing exceptional leaders. They are also the filters we use to evaluate the effectiveness of new reforms or initiatives. The DAF has taken significant steps to transform our Talent Management system to ensure we can attract, recruit, develop, and evaluate Air and Space professionals to support our future force requirements. DAF transformation activities recognize we are competing for talent in a more competitive market. New Congressional authorities have augmented existing tools providing increased flexibility and efficiency in managing both our military and civilian workforce.

### **Performance Management**

Recruiting, retaining, developing, and best employing our military and civilian total force team is crucial to our National Defense Strategy. Ensuring we maintain our fierce focus on using policies, programs, and procedures to sustain responsive, agile, empowering, and transparent personnel management systems is a warfighting necessity.

### *Enlisted*

Over the last few years, we have evolved our enlisted performance system, incorporating feedback from the field and garnering trends from industry. Our evolution has focused on making the system more agile, transparent, and simple to focus on and drive performance as we strengthen the readiness and professionalism of our vital enlisted force. One example is our initiative to go to a “board only” process, removing the Weighted Airmen Promotion System (WAPS) test for promotion to the grades of Master Sergeant, Senior Master Sergeant, and Chief Master Sergeant. This past year was the first year we implemented these boards, ensuring duty performance is the most important factor in evaluating promotion to the next higher grade.

### *Officer*

The Department of the Air Force is committed to transforming the way we develop, promote, and retain our Officer Corps in order to successfully carry out the National Defense Strategy. To meet that task, we must have an Officer Corps which can adapt, innovate, and demonstrate agility in dealing with today’s complex security environment. We appreciate the additional Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) authorities given to us in the FY19 National Defense Authorization Act and have instituted several programs.

The first program is an Assignment Matching system which puts all active component officers on a new web-based system that balances member input, job owner input, and development needs to create assignment matches. Our Air and Space professionals now have new digital input for assignment opportunities and engagement through a more transparent assignment system. The DAF has also changed its Promotion Development/Competitive Categories, which had remained unchanged since 1947. Active component line officers are now managed in six developmental categories for promotion instead of a single category, which acknowledges different specialties need different developmental experiences and progression. Officers are now screened and selected for formal instructor and recruiting positions as a valued part of career progression, ensuring our best officers serve as role models to shape the future force. This restructure give us the ability to create more agile development paths and better match the officer inventory to actual requirements which is vital to increasing readiness and lethality. Finally, using the increased flexibilities provided by Congress we are transitioning out of our current below-the-promotion zone offering to a merit-based approach with first implementation during the upcoming May Lt Col board. Under this new system, those whose record of performance score highest on the board, pin-on first, reinforcing the importance of performance. This change also increases feedback and transparency, as selects will know where they stand in relation to their peers.

## ***Civilian***

Another key component of our force is the more than 185,000 Department of the Air Force civilian employees stationed around the globe. Our civilian workforce teams with the military as part of the Air and Space Force Total Force in the defense of our Nation. Working in over 600 occupations and professions, the civilian workforce underpins the Department. Civilian engineers work in research labs and social workers help children acclimate to new environments. Civilians are physicians treating Air and Space professionals and their families. They are police officers, aircraft mechanics, nuclear physicists, mathematicians, human resources professionals, electricians, rocket scientists, cyber security experts on the front line guarding against hackers, among many other occupations. At home and abroad, to include deploying to combat zones, our civilian members work shoulder to shoulder with their military counterparts. Having a high quality force and being able to recruit and compete for top civilian talent is an essential aspect of our total force and critical to our readiness. As such, we are thankful for all the previously granted Congressional authorities for civilian hiring. Direct and expedited hiring authorities provided by Congress have allowed us to hire civilians faster. As of January 2020, the DAF used Direct Hiring Authority and Expedited Hiring Authority for 3,965 of our actions that were eligible, or 69% of the time. Correspondingly, the overall time-to-hire timeline is down to 76 days from 118 days. To make further advances in this arena, expansion of hiring authorities is desired. We are partnering with our Sister Services and the Department of Defense (DOD) to identify legislative proposals which will enhance the civilian personnel system.

## **Recruiting**

The Department of the Air Force achieved its FY19 Recruiting Goals of 32,421 regular DAF Enlisted (100% of goal) and regular DAF Officers of 5,598 (100% of goal). We also met our ANG combined Officer and Enlisted goal by recruiting 9,422 Guard members (118% of goal), and our Reserve combined Officer and Enlisted goal of 8,641 (100% of goal). Additionally, the DAF is on target to reach our FY20 recruiting goals of 29,193 regular DAF Enlisted, 4,553 regular DAF Officers, ANG combined Officer and Enlisted of 11,664, and Reserve combined Officer and Enlisted of 8,650.

Readiness is foremost about having the right number of capable Air and Space professionals within our force. 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. While we have been able to meet our recruiting goals, we are keenly aware of a growing competition for talent and expect the recruiting environment to become even more challenging. The DAF is committed to improving how we recruit tomorrow's Air and Space professionals. Steps we have taken to improve our recruiting efforts over the past year include moving to a Total Force Recruiting approach where our Commander of the Air Force Recruiting Service is now responsible for recruiting for our active, guard, and reserve. To move in this direction we have

added a 1-star reserve deputy commander, adjusted recruiter training to be total force, and have begun the consolidation of marketing and operations budgets. We have also added 159 recruiters; established a Recruiting Squadron specifically focused on areas where we continue to experience shortfalls such as Special Warfare Airmen, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, and Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape; and we are working with OSD on potentially implementing the DAF Compatibility Assessment, an integrity test to screen out accessions at high risk for unethical behaviors, including sexual assault.

We also recognize that recruiting is not just about meeting numbers, but about attracting eligible talent from across the country. The current population of Americans eligible to serve includes 57.5% women, 7% African Americans, and 9.5% of Hispanic ethnicity. The DAF has made strides toward improving our diversity with a current force comprised of 22% females, 15% African American, and 13% with Hispanic ethnicity, representing an increase of female Airmen by 4% over the last 10 years and a 5% increase for racially and ethnically diverse Airmen (African American, Hispanic, and others) over the same time. While heading in the right direction, these modest gains are not keeping pace with the changing demographics of the military eligible population and are at a slower pace than we desire.

To enhance our diversity we have focused on increasing our female applicant pool within the officer accession sources, setting an initial target to achieve growth in applicants to 30% female. We attained that goal at the Air Force Academy for the class of 2023, and we admitted 28.1% of those female applicants. Last year's graduating class was more than 25% female, a 4% increase from 2012. Within our ROTC program, we raised our applicant pool to 28% female with an actual cadet class of 25.5%, marching toward the initial 30% applicant pool goal. The 2019 ROTC class consisted of 25% female, a 1.5% increase since 2012. Finally, our 2019 OTS classes were 18.7% female, which is a 2.5% increase since 2012.

Recruiting talent is also dependent on our Department being an inclusive organization. Since June 2018, we have accessed and made accommodations for more than 29 practicing Sikh, Muslim, Heathen, Jewish, Norse, Easter, and Russian Orthodox individuals to allow these talented members to serve while still respecting their religious dress and appearance requirements. These professionals serve as role models for other talented Americans who can potentially see themselves serving in our force as well.

## **Retention**

As important as recruiting is, retention within our high-tech force is even more important. While the DAF is experiencing generally high retention rates in both the Enlisted and Officer Corps, the aggregate success sometimes masks pockets of retention challenges. To help ameliorate these retention challenges, the DAF continues to offer targeted monetary incentives.

For Enlisted skills, the FY21 Selective Retention Bonus program's \$157M targets critical capabilities in enlisted Air Force Specialty Codes with low manning percentages, low retention, and/or high training costs, such as special warfare, aircraft maintenance, cyber, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. For the Officer Corps, the FY21 budget is \$31.8M for Officer Retention Bonuses in areas such as contracting, special tactics, operations research, combat rescue, and air liaisons. Focusing on pilots specifically, the DAF has a FY20 budget of \$175.9M for the Aviation Bonus (AvB). The take-rate for pilots has steadily declined from 68% in 2013 mainly due to an unprecedented major airline hiring boom that is anticipated to continue for at least the next decade. However, while the overall rate is still below our 65% annual target, the take-rate has stabilized around 45% (44% in 2019) since the AvB cap was raised from \$25K to \$35K in FY17.

Monetary incentives are only one small piece of our overall retention portfolio. The majority of the retention efforts are non-monetary and focused on improving quality of life, quality of service, and mitigating operational tempo. Those efforts include adjusting enlisted high year of tenure limits (Senior Airmen from 8 to 10 years, Staff Sergeants from 15 to 20 years, and Technical Sergeants from 20 to 22 years); implementation of an information technology solution known as "Talent Marketplace" to improve the officer and enlisted assignment processes; increasing our Child and Youth focus to expand child care during non-duty hours; and expanding the Recharge for Resiliency program to provide unit leaders deliberately designed activities to improve unit cohesion.

Just as diversity plays an important role in our accessions, so too does it underscore our retention efforts. While our overall population diversity and recruiting numbers have improved, we have not been as successful in retaining women and diverse Airmen for longer careers. To improve diversity, the DAF created several barrier analysis working groups to identify barriers to retention of women and diverse Air and Space professionals, and we made several policy adjustments based on their findings. One policy, 'Child Career Balancing Time,' allows new mothers to defer their decision to separate up to 12 months after delivery. This provides an opportunity to experience the programs and resources available to assist with balancing career and family priorities. The DAF also implemented the FY17 Military Parental [Non-Chargeable] Leave Program, which allows a mother to take six weeks, the family primary caregiver to receive six weeks, and the secondary caregiver to receive 21 days within the first year of birth or adoption. Further, female Airmen are exempt from deployment, PCS, or TDY for 12 months after giving birth unless they volunteer.

The DAF also continues to utilize the Career Intermission Program (CIP). The program provides flexibility for Airmen looking to pursue goals such as advanced education, raising or starting a family, or aligning career timing for dual military couples. The program appears to be working. In CY18 and CY19, 54% of CIP participants were female and 100% of the

Airmen (6 in CY18 and 11 in CY19) who completed the program and their follow-on commitment elected to stay in the service. We are assessing ways to improve this program and look forward to working with the Congress to do so in a way that further incentivizes use.

Knowing opportunity and advancement have a lot to do with retention, we have increased focus on ensuring exposure for younger officers to key developmental positions such as selection for Aide-de-Camp and Executive Officers for senior leaders. By way of policy, we ensure all selection slates for these key positions have a minimum of one qualified female or qualified diverse candidate for consideration. In a short period under this policy, we have seen a 17% increase in female selections and a 21% increase in African American female selections.

## **FAMILY READINESS**

Our families are critical to ensuring we remain the world's greatest Air and Space Force. We are focused on family readiness and resilience to ensure the professionals of the Department of the Air Force can focus on the mission, knowing their family members are supported with a robust network of people and capabilities dedicated to their well-being. In FY19, our 76 Airman and Family Readiness Centers responded to almost three million service requests, hosted more than 26,000 workshops with 360,000-plus participants, and sponsored over 40,000 outreach events connecting with almost one and a half million attendees.

This support provided great value to the families of the department, and resulted in valuable feedback on areas that need attention. While we are proud of the support we provide, we remain committed to improving our capabilities, especially in the exceptional family member, child care, and spouse employment arenas.

### **Exceptional Family Member Programs (EFMP)**

Today, there are 51,665 family members enrolled in EFMP and 35,773 active duty Air and Space professionals coded as EFMP sponsors. When a family is identified as EFMP, the supporting installation Airman & Family Readiness Center EFMP-Family Support (EFMP-FS) Coordinator connects them with appropriate information, assistance, and resources. Our 99 EFMP-FS Coordinators are spread across 78 installations and provide the community support function to enhance quality of life of special needs family members. EFMP-FS Coordinators provide non-medical case management that includes assessing family needs, developing family services plans, and providing related workshops and support events in addition to assisting families in navigating community resources. Examples of these resources include federal, state and local programs; Military OneSource; respite services; and other non-profit organizational support such as Easter Seals support services. In concert with our increase of 59 EFMP-FS Coordinators since 2017, the Department of the Air Force implemented a one-week in-person



training course for newly assigned EFMP-FS staff to standardize the level of services provided to families. We also continue to offer quarterly parent focused training on topics such as Applied Behavior Therapy, Medicaid, financial planning, individualized education program, and future life planning. These training opportunities help enhance the connection and knowledge of parents as they navigate resources for their special needs children. Additionally, the Department of the Air Force funded or hosted over 450 outreach events across our installations in FY19, with 100 of those specifically addressing the increased number of special need adults as well as resilience support to caregivers. As we move forward, we are strengthening our EFMP focus across the board and detailing ways to increase awareness and use of legal services for all EFMP families.

Even with these efforts, we continue to have families who are frustrated with the EFMP program and in particular the permanent change of station process. In February of 2020, we initiated a review and rapid improvement event to get after the medical clearance process associated with moving EFMP families. This ongoing work includes creation of a new 20-person section at the Air Force Personnel Center dedicated to EFMP. The section will have representatives from the medical community, child and youth education, and family support all under a single organization to help focus and streamline EFMP support. We hope to have this new section and the findings from our rapid improvement event implemented and operating by summer of 2020.

### **Child and Youth Programs**

Available, affordable, quality child care programs support families and enable Air and Space professionals to focus on the mission. The Department of the Air Force Child Development Program (CDP) provides services to children from birth to twelve years of age within installation child development centers, school age care programs, and family child care homes DAF-wide. Two key CDP elements are the Air Force Expanded Child Care Program and the Community based Child Care Fee Assistance. The DAF Expanded Child Care Program provides non-traditional child care for irregular duty hours through an array of approaches to meet unique needs of our Air and Space professionals and their families. This program is offered in Family Child Care homes to fit virtually any schedule, deployment or need. Community-based child care fee assistance supports our Air and Space professionals not living near a military installation or where the on-base program has an unmet demand waiting list, by subsidizing a portion of child care fees.

The availability of quality, affordable child care varies across locations and age groups and, as a result, families may be placed on a wait list. The priority usage category of customers influences both access to child care and waiting period. As of January 31, 2020, there were 3,578 children across the DAF with unmet child care needs. To reduce wait lists, the DAF convened a cross-functional working group of child and youth professionals, engineers, and

data analysts focused on improving access to child care for military families across lines of effort including staffing challenges and facility shortfalls that can impact availability of on-base child care. Some accomplishments this past year include: implementing Direct Hiring Authority (DHA), decreasing the time required to on-board new appropriated fund staff from an average of 190 days to 73 days; hiring 60 additional Family Child Care (FCC) in-home providers bringing the total number of FCC providers to 348, augmenting CDC capability; deploying a Child and Youth Program Non-appropriated Fund Employee Transfer Assistance Program; implementing DAF Centrally Funded Non-appropriated Fund Recruitment Bonuses and Non-appropriated Fund Retention Allowances; and implementing Family Child Care provider recruitment and retention incentives – pay increase, retention bonus, and 100% offset for credentialing. Additionally, the DAF reversed a downward trend, going from an all-time low of 283 certified providers in September 2018 to 333 providers in December 2019 with an additional 144 in the process of certification.

To ensure smart investment in facilities we developed a child care access scorecard dashboard to better inform decisions on funding facility repairs and expansions, and prioritizing Military Construction (MILCON) projects, priorities, and decisions. We analyzed each base and wait list, identifying if the shortfall is a staffing, configuration, or MILCON limitation, allowing us to prioritize and attack the issue. We are ensuring investment dollars go to the greatest impact on our waitlists. As a result, we are applying the \$20M provisioned to AF in the FY20 NDAA against eight facility projects that will provide spaces for 552 children on our waitlists. We also identified 21 projects and are preparing them for execution should additional funding become available. These efforts reflect our commitment to addressing the child care demand, and we will remain engaged at all levels in providing the best support possible for our families.

### **Spouse Employment**

Spouse employment is a critical element impacting family resilience, financial readiness, quality of life, retention, and mission success. Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves may negatively impact military spouse wages and employment opportunities. The DAF spouse employment program provides a robust system of support to help military spouses find meaningful employment and connect with available resources. The DoD continues to advance spouse employment initiatives with states to improve professional license portability and is currently pursuing interstate compacts. The DAF continuously addresses spouse employment challenges to help meet the needs of our Air and Space professionals and their families. The DAF enacted policy in May 2019 per FY18 NDAA for reimbursement of re-licensing/re-certification costs up to \$500 resulting from a PCS for spouses of military members. As of February 29, 2020, DAF has processed 219 claims for spouses, with average payment of \$311, and overall total of \$68.1K. The FY20 NDAA increased this reimbursement from \$500 to \$1,000 and policy changes are underway to provide this increased support to our spouses. The DAF partners with the DoD State Liaison Office who works directly with state legislators to

improve licensure portability across all states. Military Service Secretaries established a working group in 2019 to identify barriers and make recommendations to improve spouse overseas employment opportunities, and this work is still in progress.

## **FOUNDATIONAL READINESS IMPERATIVES**

The Department of the Air Force's core values--*Integrity First, Service before Self, and Excellence in All We Do*-- are the foundation of all Air and Space professionals' performance. They define our culture, who we are as a force, and are the basis of the Care Solutions we consider foundational readiness imperatives.

### **Personal Violence Prevention and Response**

Interpersonal violence and suicide are counter to our culture and our core values. These actions negatively impact victims, the bereaved, and their units. As a result, unit cohesion, mission effectiveness, and ultimately the Department of the Air Force's readiness are threatened. We are deeply committed to the prevention of interpersonal violence on all fronts including sexual assault, child maltreatment, domestic violence, and workplace violence. We are dedicated to a strategy that leverages the latest science, implementing best practices and feedback from our members, with our ultimate goal of never losing another Air or Space professional to suicide. Should these acts of violence occur despite our prevention efforts, we are committed to providing victims of violence the care they need as well as caring for individuals, families, and units left to grieve.

### **Suicide Prevention**

Suicide prevention remains a difficult challenge with 2019 Department of the Air Force suicide counts elevated compared to previous years.

The DAF remains 100% engaged on preventing suicides and is focused on four strategic areas that align with suicide prevention strategies established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Building Connections, Detecting Risk, Promoting Protective Environments, and Equipping our Air and Space professionals and their Families to mitigate risk and build resilience. The DAF is taking a leadership-driven public-health approach informed by data and analysis in partnership with academia, industry, and sister services to include diverse ideas and perspectives.

This past year the DAF launched the Resilience Tactical Pause (RTP) to enhance and build connections, encourage help seeking, reinforce squadrons as the heartbeat of our Force, and derive feedback from our Air and Space professionals. Since inception of the RTP, we have

received more than 12,000 responses from our force informing subsequent and ongoing resilience efforts. This feedback has highlighted the need to continue RTP efforts allowing our force time to personally connect, clarify existing resources, and reduce the stigma to help seeking. Follow-on RTP efforts will use this feedback as a guide. This feedback validates our decision to expand True North, a comprehensive approach to engaging members and families early, normalizing help-seeking behavior as a strength, and providing helping resources to our Force. Based on the updated DAF suicide prevention strategy, five suicide prevention priorities have been established by the DAF Community Action Team for 2020. These priorities include improving the Total Force suicide prevention training, strengthening implementations of the suicide prevention program, encouraging lethal means safety, empowering and equipping family members in suicide prevention, and enhancing suicide postvention procedures. The prevention priorities we established for 2020 are expected to further initial efforts to produce measurable change in risk and protective factors within our force.

Specific examples enacted this past year include developing and distributing time-based prevention products such as 150K gun locks at no cost to our members, educational materials, and training on safe storage options. These new time-based prevention efforts put time and space between our members in distress and access to lethal means, particularly firearms which are involved in more than 70% of DAF suicide deaths. Additionally, the first MAJCOM Suicide Analysis Boards (SABs) were completed on January 1, 2020. The process, modeled after Safety Investigation Boards, identifies gaps and better equips leaders, Air and Space professionals, and families for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention.

Our revised strategy and initiatives to build partnerships with academia, industry, and sister services will also help ensure our suicide prevention efforts continue to leverage the best ideas and research to end the tragedy of suicide. The DAF is therefore planning a National Suicide Prevention Summit for late 2020 following a model similar to the National Discussion on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at America's Colleges, Universities and Service Academies. The audience of the National Suicide Prevention Summit will be experts and stakeholders from across industry, healthcare, and academia in order to facilitate the sharing of ideas on preventing suicide.

Leaders at all levels are needed to help reinforce the notion that seeking help is a sign of strength and our Air and Space professionals do not need to go it alone. While suicide is a difficult and complex issue requiring complex solutions, it is preventable and the DAF remains committed to leveraging the best ideas and research to end the tragedy of suicide.

## **Task Force True North**

True North has moved from a beta test to an execution program for embedding mental health providers and Religious Support Teams in units to increase access and build trust and confidence in the care givers. Initial results are promising and we are investing further in True North. While the budget for True North in FY19 and FY20 had been \$9.9M each year, we are increasing funding for True North to \$53.3M in FY21. This growth will expand the program to fully serve all four beta test locations plus 12 additional installations (for a total of 16 installations), while also covering Air Support Operations Squadrons and Rescue Squadrons DAF-wide. Priority for installation expansion is based on a 5-year history of suicides, sexual assaults, domestic violence, child maltreatment and other violence (including workplace violence).

## **Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR)**

Sexual assault remains a serious national problem. It is a crime that negatively affects our Air and Space professionals and their families, erodes unit trust and cohesion, and ultimately undermines force lethality, readiness, and mission success. It is counter to our core values and goes against our culture of dignity and respect. The DAF remains committed to eradicating sexual assaults using effective, research-based prevention. Commanders set the standards and require our Air and Space professionals to meet them, establishing the foundation of military discipline, while ensuring victims receive care, and holding perpetrators accountable. Commanders, advised by judge advocates, are best positioned to handle the disposition of all crimes under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). Taking away a commander's ability to discipline and care for their Air and Space Professionals removes their authority and diminishes their responsibility and accountability.

The Secretary of the Air Force (SecAF) attended the first National Discussion on sexual assault and sexual harassment at America's Colleges, Universities, and Service Academies, at the Naval Academy in April 2019, to combat and eradicate sexual assault and harassment from our campuses. This event brought together 126 universities, 21 congressman/professional staffers and 17 educational/federal agencies to create a forum for leaders and experts in the public and private sectors to advance evidence based prevention efforts and share lessons learned and best practices. In April 2020, the National Discussion will be held at West Point and will be attended by the SecAF, Vice Chief of Staff, congressional staffers, and over 100 universities and educational organizations. In April 2021, the DAF will host the National Discussion at the Air Force Academy.

General Officers from the DAF participated in the Sexual Assault Accountability and Investigation Task Force (SAAITF) which examined investigative and accountability processes across the Services. The task force found a command-centered military justice system is

integral to military discipline and lethality, and is best positioned to protect both the rights of victims and defendants. The DAF's SAAITF implementation plan, which was signed by A/SecAF Donovan on July 8, 2019, will ensure that the Commander has all available tools to hold offenders appropriately accountable and support the victim, while protecting the rights of the victim and the accused throughout the process. The SAAITF implementation plan improves the ability of the Commander to set appropriate command climate by making sexual harassment a "stand alone" military crime which highlights the severity of this behavior. The SAAITF implementation plan improves support to the victim by providing additional information and assistance throughout the process, including more consistent and regular updates from command. DAF prevention efforts address key sexual assault risk factors with long-term goals including assessment tools for identifying and screening out those at high risk for unethical behaviors. In addition, DAF is implementing the Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention Plan of Action.

The Military Justice Act of 2016 took effect on January 1, 2019, and is the largest military justice overhaul since 1983, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the military justice system. These changes, in conjunction with the changes implemented by the Air Force's SAAITF plan, are continuing to shift the landscape of sexual assault prevention and response towards more support for victims while balancing the rights of the accused. It has only been a year since the effective date of the Military Justice Act of 2019, and continued implementation of the numerous provisions of the DAF SAAITF plan is ongoing. We appreciate the changes Congress has made in the laws allowing us support victims and hold offenders accountable. Taking the time to objectively evaluate these changes will allow the DAF to institute effective and research-based sexual assault prevention, victim support and offender accountability.

Sexual assault reporting across the DAF steadily increased over the last three years (FY18 1,544 reports v. FY17 1,480 reports v. FY16 1,355 reports), viewed as both a positive trend (trust) and negative (volume). USAF Academy reporting was consistent from academic year 16/17 to 17/18 with 23 reports each year. In academic year 18/19 there was a rise with 40 reports. Based on the latest sexual assault prevalence study in 2018, approximately 33% of sexual assaults were reported across the DAF versus 30% for the DoD. The DAF is focused on reducing prevalence while increasing victim reporting to seek care and hold alleged offenders appropriately accountable. The DoD Inspector General concluded that USAFA personnel properly provided services to cadet victims and USAFA leadership did not retaliate against them.

Since 2013, legislation has been proposed that would strip commanders of court-martial convening authority – DAF opposes this legislation as it undermines readiness and lethality. Our military justice system operates within a careful balance between the interests of the government, the rights of the accused, and the respect for the dignity of victims. Commanders

serve a critical role in maintaining this balance by bringing all resources and support programs to every case, to include access to counsel, sexual assault response coordinators, medical services, mental health providers, and investigators. Installation commanders also conduct monthly Case Management Group meetings to ensure that victims are receiving the services they need to recover and are being screened for retaliation. Over the past several years, external and Congressional panels have examined and continue to review the military justice response to sexual assault offenses including reviewing the commander's role – not one has recommended removing the commander. “Unlike a lawyer-focused civilian system, the military needs a Commander-driven, lawyer-supported, victim-supportive system to drive cultural change and enforce discipline required on the battlefield” (Department of Defense, Sexual Assault Accountability and Investigation Task Force Report, April 30, 2019). Sufficient protections exist within our current military justice system to ensure that disposition authority for sexual assault cases is reserved to levels of command far removed from the subject and victim, and provides at least one superior review of dispositions in every penetrative sexual assault case while reinforcing the partnership between commanders and judge advocates in making disposition decisions. Additionally, Special Victims Counsel and Defense Counsel, who are each independent of the chain of command, provide zealous representation in sexual assault cases to ensure that the rights of both victims and accused are defended.

## **CONCLUSION**

Resilient and ready Air and Space professionals, both military and civilian, are the bedrock of the Department of the Air Force's readiness and lethality. Your Air and Space Forces 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, and 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.