

United States Air Force



Presentation

Before the Subcommittee on Personnel to the
Senate Armed Services Committee

Military Personnel Policies and Military Family Readiness

Witness Statement of
CMSAF Kaleth O. Wright
Chief Master Sergeant of the U.S. Air
Force

February 27, 2019

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand and the members of this Subcommittee, it is an honor to address you, express our Airmen's needs, and offer their appreciation for your support. Our Airmen and their families are the key to our success and understand the freedoms we guard are not just our own. They've made a choice to do something purposeful and it is our duty to take care of them as they take care of the mission.

Our Airmen are our most important asset. Increasing our end strength allows the Air Force to better meet the warfighting demands of today and tomorrow.

Readiness and Airmen are inextricably linked. Recruiting the best Airmen for the Air Force we need, training and retaining the Airmen of today, and ensuring our Airmen and their families are taken care of directly impacts readiness. Providing Airmen with developmental opportunities allows us to enhance readiness, cohesion and combat effectiveness. Remaining fully committed to sexual assault prevention and providing better care, recovery and judicial advocacy for victims who report sexual violence, mixed with a dedicated strategy to reduce suicide rates, ensures we place dignity, respect, and the health and wellness of all Airmen as our priority. We rely on and are grateful for your efforts and legislation to protect and support our service members. We welcome your visits to see first-hand the talent and dedication of our Airmen and families.

TOTAL FORCE END-STRENGTH

In order to meet mission requirements established in the NDS, the Air Force must increase our total force end strength. This growth directly improves readiness and lethality by increasing personnel to our squadrons. It also provides the manning necessary to continue readiness improvements, increasing Airmen in operations and maintenance; intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; special operations forces; space and cyber. This is imperative to supporting modernization efforts, providing needed manning to build and sustain KC-46 and F-35 programs

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and B-21 research and development workforce. Discontinuing end strength growth now will force us to accept risk to mission priorities and perpetuating an environment of hollowed out units.

RECRUITING AND RETENTION

The Air Force is on track to meet its active duty enlisted accession goals of 32,050 non-prior service enlisted Airmen for FY19. With an improving economy, the Air Force faces tough competition for recruits, especially those with highly technical or unique skills and capabilities. We must continue to attract the highest caliber applicants to meet myriad mission needs, especially for evolving cyber and space and critical High-Demand/Low-Density special warfare career fields.

We have taken a multi-pronged approach to bolster recruiting efforts. First, we increased total force Tier 1 enlisted accession recruiters by 150 over four years, bringing our total to 1,300. Next, we increased our recruiting budget to \$95M with \$40M earmarked for advertising and marketing. Finally, we established a recruiting squadron focused specifically on special warfare, EOD and survival, evasion, resistance and escape Airmen, enhancing pre-accession development training for career fields with historically high training attrition rates.

Once we have recruited and trained the Airmen we need, we have to ensure we work to retain them. A high demand for technical skills and continuously high operational tempo, mixed with a strong economy, burdens Air Force retention.

One of the most successful ways we retain Airmen is through monetary incentives. To ensure the continuous health of career fields stressed due to low manning or with skillsets critical to the mission, we offer selective retention bonuses (SRBs) to maintain capability and capacity. SRBs are based on specialty manning, retention trends and training costs, and are reviewed bi-annually to meet changing requirements. The goal remains to be most economical while still achieving desired retention results. The most recent SRB list targets 115 of our 196 enlisted specialties.

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We are keenly aware that monetary incentives are just one part of our retention portfolio. Quality of life, education benefits and potential for future growth and development also strongly influence retention.

DEVELOPING EXCEPTIONAL LEADERS AND TALENT MANAGEMENT

One way the Air Force must continue to capitalize on the talent of our Airmen is through the continued improvement of its Force Development processes. Through that lens, we've worked with our joint partners on several development programs. Focused on improving leadership and management these programs are designed to produce Airmen with tactical expertise, operational competence, and strategic vision to lead and execute Air Force and joint missions.

The first program we are executing is a senior leader development portfolio emphasizing the continued development of enterprise-level senior leaders. This is managed by specific enlisted, officer and civilian management teams with a development portfolio comprised of approximately 35 tailored courses and development opportunities annually. We continue to examine Professional Military Education to improve how we develop leaders capable of critical and strategic thought and clear communication who are adept in the art and science of warfighting.

Next, we are adding flexibility into the assignments process by leveraging technology to improve our assignment matching system. After researching industry-best practices, we implemented an information technology solution known as "Talent Marketplace" (TM). TM uses algorithms to match Airmen to assignments, taking into account member assignment preferences and hiring manager desired criteria to produce a match. TM provides a "scientific" starting point, allowing assignment teams to apply the "art" to finalize the process. This two-pronged approach of "science" and "art" adds transparency to the process, allowing for better talent management. As funding allows, we will continue to bring all officer and enlisted skill sets into the TM program.

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HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY REFORM

The Air Force is modernizing the information technology (IT) infrastructure across its human resources systems. To improve these systems, our efforts are focused on providing Airmen a modern cloud-based, mobile-enabled, self-service digital platform. The way forward requires analyzing the Human Resource Management Information Technology portfolio of 115 talent management platforms and 400+ applications. The foundation of this effort is the transition to cloud-based services, enhancing Privacy Information security.

One example of evolving human resources IT capabilities supporting Airmen is via MyVector, a web-based development platform. MyVector underpins force development, allowing Airmen to be actively involved in their career development process. We are posturing the platform to accomplish officer developmental education boards, enlisted deliberate development, and foreign language proficiency tracking capabilities, modernizing TM options. More than 238,600 Airmen are registered on MyVector and more than 48,700 Airmen have matched mentoring connections.

Another example of modernizing IT platforms is through the Air Force Integrated Personnel and Pay System (AFIPPS). This program will enhance our personnel system for the Active, Reserve and Guard by integrating payroll. Our strategy has greatly reduced the life cycle cost estimate of the program from \$1.8B to \$0.7B. It has dramatically reduced risk by using our existing Oracle platforms, established system infrastructure and trained workforce. Once complete in January 2021, we will have a fully integrated personnel and pay system that meets all federal audit compliances and resolves pay issues Airmen currently experience.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Cultivating workforce talent is a priority through the deliberate and continuous processed we use to strengthen the capabilities, readiness, and professionalism of our force. We recently completed the first Enlisted Evaluation System (EES) triennial review since transitioning to a new

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system in 2015. The review centered around answering two strategic questions: 1) “How do we get the best from our Airmen so they can give their best to mission accomplishment?” and 2) “Are there any alternative performance management models available other than Forced Distribution for promotion recommendations?” Initiatives include re-examining what we value in documenting feedback, transforming evaluations to better document performance, developing an evaluation and encouraging more candid feedback. Senior leaders use these recommendations as a baseline to ensure our EES reinforces development and feedback for Airmen.

COMPENSATION

To retain the career Airmen we need, we must retain families as well. The continued service of career Airmen is a family decision. To take care of Airmen, we rely on protections for current compensation with stable, predictable funding moving forward.

One of the means by which we do this is through enhanced quality of life, which starts with relevant, predictable Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH). The services supported the proposal to gradually slow annual BAH increases by 5% over five years until 2019, with rates covering 95% of rental and utilities costs. The actual impact of the changes to BAH computations varies depending on a member’s housing choices. Members who rent a median-priced property will pay a small amount above their BAH rate while those who choose to economize their housing choices may have all housing expenses covered by BAH. Airmen remain free to choose the situations best suited to them but rely on predictable, reliable allowances when making the best decisions for their families.

One of the most wide-reaching, significant changes to military compensation over the past 70 years was the implementation of the Blended Retirement System (BRS). As part of the overall military compensation package, BRS extends retirement savings options to the 81% of service members who historically have received no DoD retirement benefits. Approximately 75,000 total

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force Airmen opted into the BRS last year -- 29.8% of the ReAF, 11.5% of the Reserve, and 11.5% of the Guard who were in the eligible enrollment window. An additional 23,000 Airmen were automatically enrolled upon entering service, for a total of approximately 98,000 Airmen enrolled in BRS as of the end of 2018.

PRIVATIZED HOUSING

A significant component to the quality of life of Airmen is access to quality housing. The health and safety of our Airmen and their families is our priority and we share their concerns when we detect instances where housing objectives are not being met. When there are challenges, Air Force leaders own it. We intervene with the project owners, advocate for our residents, and support installation commanders in our mission to take care of Airmen and their families.

Currently, the Air Force provides 53,237 family housing units at 63 installations. We're focused on overseeing long-term project health and sustainment of these projects, focused on providing quality housing for our Airmen, but know privatized housing is not without issues.

The number one concern plaguing Air Force privatized housing is mold, particularly in perennial high-humidity climates. Environmental mold spores grow readily when the right moisture conditions are present and even the best facility designs cannot eliminate the risk. However, we have identified three installations where facility design, construction, or materials are key contributors to mold growth in 1,667 homes (3.1% of privatized homes): Tinker Air Force Base, OK, Keesler AFB, MS, and MacDill AFB, FL. Roughly 76% of these homes were conveyed to housing privatization projects from the government's inventory.

At Tinker AFB, 398 homes constructed from 2009 to 2012 by the project owner, Balfour Beatty Communities (BBC), experienced mold issues. In June 2018, BBC also discovered roughly 200 newly constructed homes were experiencing moisture problems in mechanical rooms resulting

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in mold growth. With direction from the Air Force, BBC remediated the mold. Furthermore, BBC hired a third-party engineering firm to assess mechanical room heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems to determine the causes of moisture issues and recommend further corrective actions. The estimated completion date is May 2019.

At Keesler AFB, the Air Force conveyed 1,028 homes built by Hunt Companies in 2010 to Forest City Military Communities (FCMC) in 2011. Poor workmanship in the air conditioning systems and building envelopes resulted in condensation. FCMC treated mold as it occurred while seeking remedies from Hunt Construction. In 2015, Hunt Military Communities purchased the project from FCMC and the Air Force insisted on a Mold Remediation Settlement as a condition of sale. The settlement required Hunt to correct construction defects within the scope of the original construction contract, representing a \$6.4 million exposure to Hunt Companies. The Air Force worked with Hunt on a multi-phased Moisture Remediation Plan with an estimated completion date of June 2020. Hunt Communities has completed the Test Pilot and Immediate Response phases, and the first of three stages of the Sustainment Phase. All 1,028 units have received some work. Stage Two of the Sustainment Phase is 33% complete and involves 255 units.

At MacDill AFB, 241 units previously built for the Air Force were conveyed to Clark/Harbor Bay. Due to breaches in or lack of a vapor barrier, systemic moisture issues were present in these units. The project owner treated the mold while designing projects and plans to correct the underlying cause. In 2017, 94 units were reclad at a cost of \$3.7M. In 2018, interstitial spaces and stucco repairs were executed, dehumidifiers were added to homes where the air conditioning units were not controlling moisture adequately on their own, and 19 homes were treated for mold growth. This year, an additional 68 units will be reclad.

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At all three installations, the project owners have taken steps to correct underlying causes. But, corrections have not been as quick as we would like, and there have been instances where the project owner's response has lacked the urgency we would expect. Air Force leaders have engaged with project owners, withheld Performance Incentive Fees, and implemented corrective action plans to address underperformance and inadequate oversight.

While we remain concerned with issues in small pockets of our housing inventory, we believe military housing privatization has been generally successful in providing quality communities for Airmen. This is evidenced by a 2017 customer satisfaction survey, conducted by a third-party agency, which returned ratings of "Very Good" (81.8%) with military occupancy rates of 90% across the Air Force. As with any housing portfolio of this size and scope, we have challenges but actively working with project owners, residents, and installation commanders to find resolutions.

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

The Air Force remains fully committed to Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) and advanced assault prevention and response capabilities. We continue to build upon our SAPR efforts. Recently, the Air Force approved 12 strategies that fall into three categories (immediate, mid-range, and long-term) to improve response, provide better care, recovery, and judicial advocacy for victims.

IMMEDIATE

1. Build a continuous Quality Assurance system for persistent external assessment of SAPR response capabilities;
2. Special Interest Item conducted by The Inspector General on SAPR response procedures;
3. Provide commanders with common operating picture to plan and execute local strategy;
4. Continuously report military justice outcomes and adjudication AF-wide, including Nonjudicial Punishments (publicly);

MID-RANGE

5. Re-evaluate Family Advocacy & Sexual Assault Response Coordinator roles and responsibilities for victim response procedures;
6. Ensure privacy controls for access & utilization of victims' mental health records (via legislative process);

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7. Increase commander decision time for Expedited Transfers to pursue best assignment option for victims;
8. Increase commanders and supervisors knowledge, skills, abilities in managing the neurobiology of trauma
9. Develop multifunctional victim support technology platform

LONG RANGE

10. Improve investigative and legal process timelines
11. Allow adult victims to testify via video to increase likelihood of reporting
12. Provide victims more control and alternatives in reporting options

Additionally, we are leveraging approaches to prevent and reduce power-based personal violence such as partner violence, rape or sexual assault, stalking or uses of force, threat, intimidation or harassment. We enhanced our response system through accountability, transparency and senior leader oversight to continue shrinking the gap between prevalence and reporting. Prevalence data is culled from anonymous surveys conducted bi-annually. While we are still compiling data from the 2018 report, 2016 data shows that while 1,455 active duty Airmen provided either a restricted or unrestricted report of sexual assault. Additionally, 2,450 respondents reported having been victim to some form of sexual assault or abusive contact.

Workplace Gender Relations Survey data from 2016 reflects prevalence is decreasing while sexual assault reporting is steadily increasing. This is a positive step, as assaults are decreasing while victim confidence in reporting is increasing. But our standard remains “zero tolerance” for sexual assaults. We do not tolerate an increase in the prevalence of sexual assault and continue work to promote a safe environment, holding accountable those who commit sexual assault.

We recognize that without dedicated prevention efforts, sexual assault will remain an issue no matter how robust our response system. We also recognize that if an assault does occur, the long-term well-being of the victim must be forefront in our efforts.

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SUICIDE PREVENTION

Suicide prevention remains a priority at all levels. We are pursuing 11 suicide prevention goals and initiatives aimed at decreasing suicide rates by 50% over five years with an end goal to drive rates to as close to zero as possible.

- 1. Leadership involvement:** Air Force leaders actively support the entire spectrum of suicide prevention initiatives in the Air Force community. Regular messages senior leaders and commanders motivate the community to fully engage in suicide prevention efforts.
- 2. Addressing suicide prevention through professional military education:** Suicide prevention education is included in all formal military training.
- 3. Guidelines for commanders on use of mental health services:** Commanders receive training on how and when to use mental health services and in encouraging early help-seeking behavior.
- 4. Community preventive services:** Community prevention efforts carry more impact than treating individual patients singly. The Medical Expense and Performance Reporting System was updated to effectively track and encourage prevention activities.
- 5. Community education and training:** Annual suicide prevention training is provided for all military and civilian employees in the Air Force.
- 6. Investigative interview policy:** The period following an arrest or investigative interview is a high-risk time for suicide. Following any investigative interview, the investigator is required to “hand off” the individual directly to the commander, first sergeant, or supervisor. The unit representative is then responsible for assessing the individual's emotional state and contacting a mental health provider if any question about the possibility of suicide exists.
- 7. Trauma stress response:** Trauma stress response teams were established worldwide to respond to traumatic incidents such as terrorist attacks, serious accidents, or suicide. These teams help personnel and their families deal with the emotions they experience in reaction to traumatic incidents.
- 8. Integrated Delivery System (IDS) and Community Action Information Board (CAIB):** At the Air Force, major command, and base levels, CAIB and IDS provide a forum for cross-organizational review and resolution of individual, family, and community issues impacting the force readiness the quality of life. The IDS and CAIB help coordinate the activities of the various base helping agencies to achieve a synergistic impact on community problems and reduce suicide risk.
- 9. Limited Privilege Suicide Prevention Program:** Patients at risk for suicide are afforded increased confidentiality when seen by mental health providers (Limited Privilege Suicide Prevention Program). Additionally, Limited Patient-Psychotherapist Privilege was established in 1999, limiting the release of patient information to legal authorities during UCMJ proceedings.
- 10. IDS Consultation Assessment Tool:** The IDS Consultation Assessment Tool allows commanders to assess strengths and identify vulnerable areas. Commanders can collaborate with IDS consultants to design interventions to support the health and welfare of their personnel.
- 11. Suicide Event Surveillance System:** Information on all Air Force suicides and suicide attempts are in a central database that tracks suicide events, facilitating potential suicidal risk factor analysis.

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For calendar year 2017, Air Force suicide rates per 100,000 were at 19.5, slightly below the DoD average of 21.9 and demographically matched to U.S. rates. Our suicide rates increased between 2009 and 2015, from 12.5 per 100,000 to 20.0 per 100,000, and then plateaued between 2014 and 2018, remaining at about 19.0 per 100,000 for all three years.

One program we're currently testing to bring resources closer to Airmen and drive a culture that affects, embraces, and drives help-seeking behavior is Task Force True North (TFTN), currently available at four bases: Minot AFB, ND; Beale AFB, CA; Whiteman AFB, MO; and Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, AK. TFTN is comprised of three primary elements: engaging Airmen and families early; normalizing help-seeking behavior as a strength; and a decentralized push for help, meeting Airmen where they are, at the unit level.

Under TFTN, units have mandatory sponsorship programs and dedicated on-boarding programs to engage Airmen upon arrival, ensuring their assignment begins with positive leadership interaction. Additionally, leaders are now using a squadron commander risk and protective factor analysis tool, developed in partnership with New York University. This tool, called NORTH STAR, uses anonymous surveys feedback to identify issues like suicidality, alcohol misuse and domestic partner abuse. Leadership teams use results to work directly with psychologists from NYU to the issues and build an intervention plan that provides the Airmen with self-help tools like articles, resources or smart phone apps they can use to seek help or enhance coping skills. Feedback is anonymous so commanders provide tools to the entire unit, not targeting any one person.

We have also embedded mental health providers with duties at the squadron-level. We developed group-level dedicated religious support teams to provide support directly to Airmen. Both were enacted to directly target a range of conditions affecting Airmen's mental, social and spiritual comprehensive fitness. Early results show TFTN improves mission readiness by

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enhancing Airman and family well-being, decreasing negative outcomes such as suicide, sexual and domestic or workplace violence, and optimizing human performance. Data gathered during the beta test phase will inform decisions regarding a possible total force scale up.

CONCLUSION

Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand and members of this Subcommittee, thank you again for this opportunity to represent our incredible Airmen and their families. Your Airmen, supported by some of the strongest families our nation will ever know, stand ready. They fully understand the joint force depends on their ability to employ and enable airpower around the world.

We must ensure our Airmen have the resources, training and tools to compete, deter, and win in an ever increasingly complex security environment. Resilient and ready Airmen, military and civilian, are the foundation of the Air Force's readiness and lethality. Your Air Force remains "Always There" providing Global Vigilance, Reach and Power to protect and defend our Nation. We are committed to prioritizing and resourcing what is most important and look forward to partnering with Congress in our endeavors to protect and defend our Nation. We thank you for your continuing support of your Air Force.