

**Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernández (NM-03)**  
**Statement for the Record**  
**FY2027 House Armed Services Committee Member Day**

Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Smith, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. As you consider the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY2027, I would like to share a few of my priorities and urge their inclusion in the bill.

Reforming Rural BAH Methodology

It is my sincere honor to represent Cannon Air Force Base. As you know, Cannon is home to the 27th Special Operations Wing and is located in Clovis, New Mexico. The servicemembers at Cannon are essential to our national security and air power capabilities. Given the rural and geographically-isolated nature of Clovis, though, they face unique housing challenges that the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) fails to address. Because the BAH does not reflect the reality of the constrained housing supply, many servicemembers pool their housing allowances out of economic necessity rather than preference, which distorts rental market demand signals. This ultimately inflates demand for larger family homes and further reduces availability, particularly for junior servicemembers. As costs, including for utilities, continue to rise, the need for a more accurate BAH is more necessary than ever.

I was pleased that the FY26 NDAA included a study and report on a more transparent and modernized option to fairly calculate the Basic Allowance for Housing for servicemembers, and I look forward to the results. However, I believe we need BAH reform that more specifically and accurately addresses rural housing and the housing profiles available in rural and geographically isolated areas. This includes addressing deficiencies such as limited data sources, insufficient assessment of availability, and inconsistent coordination with local communities, as recommended by the GAO since 2024. To address these deficiencies, I urge that the FY27 NDAA include further efforts to modernize BAH data collection methods, account for housing profiles needed and available, account for safety-constrained availability, improve utility cost weighting, and reduce lag between market changes and BAH adjustments.

Temporary Cost-Of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for Service Members Living Off-Base In Rural Areas

As previously noted, the current BAH methodology is not reflective of the reality in rural and geographically isolated areas. These areas often face housing-constrained housing markets, which create negative housing experiences for servicemembers. Until we adequately reform the BAH methodology to more accurately reflect the housing reality for our servicemembers in rural and housing-constrained markets, it's important that we provide short-term relief to servicemembers in these areas in the meantime. To provide more immediate relief upon enactment while avoiding inflationary pressure upon on-base or privatized housing, I request the inclusion of a temporary cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for servicemembers living off base at rural or housing-constrained installations. This COLA should be implemented similarly to other military compensation structures, which are determined by years of service and pay grade. This would help ensure that more junior servicemembers have the option to live on-base and that more senior servicemembers live off-base, which could ultimately help alleviate housing constraints.

## Temporary Lodging Expense (TLE) Days Increase

Additionally, I request the following report language to increase the total number of TLE days allotted to servicemembers in rural and housing-constrained areas:

### ***Report Language: Temporary Lodging Expense (TLE) Days Increase for Rural Areas***

“The Temporary Lodging Expense (TLE) provides servicemembers with necessary funding to find housing during their permanent change of station (PCS) transitions. However, finding housing that best suits servicemembers and their families within the standard TLE allotment time is often difficult for servicemembers in rural and housing-constrained areas and leads to rushed housing decisions, which may not adequately fit the needs of servicemembers. The Committee recognizes the particular need for an increase in the TLE in rural areas so that servicemembers may have more time to make better-informed housing decisions for themselves and their families. Therefore, the Committee recognizes the importance of reducing stressors on service members during a PCS and recommends that the Department of Defense increase the total number of days a servicemember may receive TLE to at least 45 days and up to 60 days for servicemembers who are stationed in rural or housing-constrained areas.”

## Innovative PFAS Destruction

As you know, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are synthetic “forever chemicals” linked to serious health harms, including increased cancer risks, adverse reproductive effects, and developmental effects or delays in children. For years, our defense communities have suffered from the consequences of this contamination due to DOD operations. The DOD has a serious responsibility to these communities, including servicemembers and their families, whom DOD-caused PFAS contamination harmed. Cleanup at bases across the country continues to get delayed, and DOD continues to invest millions of dollars in lengthy and costly contracts that do not provide the highest quality destruction of PFAS or prevention of further environmental recontamination from PFAS molecules. To address this issue and to direct the use of more innovative PFAS destruction technology, I request the following report language requests:

### ***Report language: Air Force PFAS Destruction Pilot***

“Given the limited options currently available through Department of Defense contracts to destroy PFAS on contaminated military installations, the Committee recommendation includes \$20,000,000 for the Department of Defense to execute a PFAS destruction pilot in support of the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Energy, Installations and Environment. The pilot shall utilize technology that uses proven operations analysis completed to facilitate more timely destruction and decontamination methods that result in the destruction of long, medium, and short chain PFAS molecules and convert the remaining molecular structures into inorganic fluoride at a level above 90% as compared to the starting mass balance. This technology shall include advanced catalyst and demonstrated low-risk hazardous analysis. The PFAS contamination levels and destruction shall be demonstrated and proven to be below approved Method Detection Limits (MDLs), and current Safe Drinking Water Standards (SDWA) regulations while documenting the most complete destruction possible as the industry standard. Demonstration shall be verified against all currently regulated compounds and previously proposed compounds in regulated States and the Federal Register through using EPA-certified third party testing facilities using certified testing methods. Further, the Committee directs the pilot to be carried out on at least two Air Force installations in areas with contaminated aquifers

that serve as a primary or secondary source of drinking water, contaminated agricultural lands, and high rates of residents who have had blood test results finding one or more PFAS chemicals in their blood.”

***Report language: Innovative PFAS Destruction Technology***

“The Committee recognizes the harmful impact of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), which includes perfluoro octane sulfonic acid and perfluorooctanoic acid, on drinking water systems on or around military installations, as well as civil municipalities and agricultural lands. The Committee further recognizes the military services have invested millions of dollars in lengthy and costly contracts on projects and programs for remediation systems which do not eliminate PFAS molecules in highly contaminated locations, resulting in further environmental recontamination. Therefore, the Committee directs the Secretary of Defense and the Service Secretaries to use technology that uses proven operations analysis completed to facilitate more timely destruction and decontamination methods that result in the destruction of long, medium, and short chain PFAS molecules and convert the remaining molecular structures into inorganic fluoride at a level above 90% as compared to the starting mass balance. This technology shall include advanced catalyst and demonstrated low-risk hazardous analysis. The PFAS contamination levels and destruction shall be demonstrated and proven to be below approved Method Detection Limits (MDLs), and current Safe Drinking Water Standards (SDWA) regulations while documenting the most complete destruction possible as the industry standard. Demonstration shall be verified against all currently regulated compounds and previously proposed compounds in regulated States and the Federal Register through using EPA-certified third party testing facilities using certified testing methods.”

**Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program**

To best support the missions of our military installations, we must avoid land use conflicts near military installations and increase military installation resilience. The Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program (REPI) helps prevent and address the threats that result from drought, flooding, and wildfires that threaten military readiness and operations, military personnel, warfighting equipment, and infrastructure. REPI funding, combined with funding from state and local government and NGO partners, helps prevent this encroachment and reduces the threats to military installation resilience through the acquisition of interests in real property from willing landowners and through management activities on those lands, thereby ensuring the continued viability of key installations while also conserving both important natural areas and working farms and forests. REPI is a highly effective component of DoD's efforts to address encroachment pressures that threaten both military readiness and military installation resilience.

For Cannon Air Force Base, REPI has been instrumental in solving water scarcity challenges posed to the base's operations and mission by the Ogallala Aquifer. With local partners surrounding Cannon Air Force Base, REPI has helped save billions of gallons of water. This is just one example of REPI's success across the nation. To further support REPI's invaluable work, I urge the Committee to include the following report language request:

***Report language: Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program***

The committee notes that Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) funding, combined with funding from state and local government and other non-government

organization partners, helps the Department of Defense (DOD) prevent encroachment and reduces threats to military installation resilience. The Committee anticipates that the military services will identify validated requirements for fiscal year that may exceed the budget request. Additionally, the Committee encourages the military services to establish and resource additional staff to increase capacity to more effectively implement available REPI funds and to take full advantage of the benefits of the REPI program to improve military readiness and military installation resilience. Accordingly, the committee recommends at least \$200,000,000 in OMDW SAG 4GTN for the REPI program”

### Circuit Riders

Although there are health care shortages across the country, rural U.S. military installations face added challenges when it comes to lack of specialty medical care. This leads to costly travel for service members and their families and high Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) Dependent Travel Not Approved (DTNA) rates. Elevated EFMP rates lead to shortages of fully qualified service members for deployment and create manning shortages.

To improve access to care, Cannon Air Force Base’s 27th Special Operations Medical Group paired with Military Treatment Facilities across the Defense Health Network Continental and the Developmental Behavioral Family Readiness Center to provide quarterly circuit riders for specialty care. As a result, patient travel expenditures, EFMP DTNA rates, and duty hours lost to medical travel all decreased. There was also increased optimization of specialty providers. However, access to specialty care is still lacking. To help improve access to necessary health care at remote U.S. military installations, such as Cannon Air Force Base, I request the following report language:

#### ***Report Language: Supporting Circuit Rider Health Care Programs***

The committee recognizes the importance of bolstering access to specialty care at rural military installations. The committee encourages the Defense Health Agency to increase support for circuit rider health programs at U.S. military bases to address the needs of service members and their families and to improve mission readiness.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of the inclusion of these important provisions in the Fiscal Year 2027 NDAA. I look forward to working with the Committee on these issues.

Sincerely,



Teresa Leger Fernández

Member of Congress