

PAIRS CASE 2024-C-0395

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE PRESENTATION
TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBJECT: MILITARY DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL POSTURE HEARING

STATEMENT OF:

LIEUTENANT GENERAL CAROLINE M. MILLER
DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR MANPOWER,
PERSONNEL AND SERVICES

April 17, 2024

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, and distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and for your continued support. I am honored to share the United States Air Force's continuing efforts to build and maintain critical Airmen readiness across the human resources portfolio.

As the Department of the Air Force (DAF) looks to the future, readiness stands as the cornerstone of our mission. In today's dynamic landscape, readiness goes beyond our platforms, lethality of our pilots and the number of weapons in our inventory; arguably, the most important critical factor to readiness is our human weapon system: our Airmen.

Cultivating the next generation of Airmen through enhanced talent management initiatives is our top priority. Through innovative programs such as the Pathfinder Program, technical tracks and the civilian program STELLAR FORCE 2030, the USAF will foster specialized expertise and promote a culture of continuous learning. We must maintain optimal end strength, aligning manpower to future force structures and modernization efforts. Additionally, we continue to analyze and refine recruitment & retention strategies and accession standards, adapting to evolving demographic and societal trends while maintaining our commitment to excellence across all facets of our force structure.

The DAF also continues to strengthen a resilient and adaptable force. Our comprehensive approach reflects our unwavering dedication to care and support for Airmen, Guardians and their families, ensuring they are equipped to thrive in an ever-changing landscape while upholding mission readiness and success.

OUR FORCE NOW AND FOR THE FUTURE: To ensure readiness, we must have a robust, dynamic, well-developed, and technically proficient total force encompassing Active Duty, Reservists, Air National Guardsmen, and civilians prepared for any peer adversary.

GROW THE FUTURE AIRMAN

It is imperative that we continue to grow the future force we need to prevail against our peer competitors, China and Russia. We are dedicated to developing Airmen with specialized skills for strategic solutions and create alternate career paths focused on technical expertise.

The Pathfinder Program, initiated by the Secretary of the Air Force and propelled by General Allvin during his tenure as the Air Force Vice Chief of Staff, cultivates Airmen with distinctive expertise, able to devise transformative solutions to enhance the Air Force's competitive edge. This initiative is designed to find and cultivate talent among our officer, enlisted and civilian corps, unbound by traditional career paths. These uniquely skilled and innovative Airmen will focus on strategic Air Force priorities while maintaining current functional expertise. We selected the first cohort in 2023 to work on complex problems throughout the enterprise.

We implemented the officer technical track this year: a small cohort of Cyberspace Operations officers focused on strengthening specialized expertise in emerging technology. The first cohort all have assignments for summer of 2024 at which time they will hone their technical expertise, focused on mission accomplishment and leading operational-level technical missions. In addition to this small

cohort, we are expanding officer technical tracks in other critical areas to support the re-optimization for great power competition efforts and are analyzing data to determine feasibility of enlisted technical tracks.

The DAF is also applying principles of learning engineering to optimize force development. Our Air Force continues to capitalize on technological advances to make training more effective and efficient. The Air Education and Training Command is using the Maintenance Operations Training Augmented Reality (MOTAR) program to bring virtual reality “game like” training solutions to Ready Airmen Training. Virtual Reality environments complement, and supplement limited hands-on equipment, such as aircraft engines, allowing Airmen to gain increased touch time when the physical engine is occupied by other students.

Furthermore, our leader development courses are using Leading Inclusively Virtual Experience (LIVE) to provide a virtual simulated experience, including scenarios for leaders to train and practice human interactions. We continue to explore Artificial Intelligence tools in the Human Capital domain to augment data-driven decisions and enhance—not replace—military judgement to develop our Airmen.

DELIBERATELY MANAGE AIR FORCE TALENT

Talent management is the cornerstone to develop the force we need. We’ve successfully implemented a complete overhaul of our Officer and Enlisted Performance Evaluation Systems. We have aligned our evaluations with Airman Leadership Qualities, representing performance characteristics critically important to define, develop, incentivize and measure our Airmen. Our goal is to develop mission-focused Airmen and reinforce the behaviors valued by the Air Force across all enlisted and officer ranks. We have already realized positive results of these changes across the force.

In the fall, we conducted a beta test to standardize qualitative feedback for Airmen meeting their Squadron Command board. This initiative, recommended by the Independent Review Commission, was directed to better assess Airmen into Command positions. The hiring authorities were required to review qualitative data and conduct interviews prior to selection for key leadership positions. The success of the test also provided information to identify developmental opportunities. The new process was approved for implementation starting in September 2024.

We continue to focus on Coaching and Mentoring, recognizing the importance to create an enterprise in which a coaching culture is the norm. To increase internal DAF coaches, we have extended our contracts with reputable private-sector coaching entities and through International Coaching Federation-accredited coach training. Our desired end state is to have Airmen who understand, value and use formal and/or informal coaching to enhance the development of DAF professionals in support of our mission.

CIVILIAN TALENT MANAGEMENT

To maintain our competitive advantage, we must acquire and retain civilian talent. This year, the DAF established Human Capital Management Guiding Principles to focus on our priorities in talent acquisitions and foster agility and innovation. The principles are: Recognize the Civilian Force as Integral to the Total Force, Prioritize Capability, Relentless Pursuit of Competitive Advantage, Enable DAF Leadership Vision, Embrace IT Modernization, Collaborate Across Services, Uphold Professional

Standards, Prioritize Airmen and Families' Well-Being and Promote Diversity. These guiding principles will bolster the strength of our civilian workforce to enhance DAF readiness and competitiveness.

The guiding principles are the foundation for the DAF STELLAR FORCE 2030 initiative. This initiative aims to revolutionize civilian talent management practices by harnessing collective knowledge and expertise to drive meaningful improvements in talent acquisition, development, and retention. STELLAR FORCE 2030 is a call to innovate across the DAF, encouraging the human resource community and functional communities to submit proposals and ideas to enhance civilian talent management. We are collaborating with the Department of Defense and Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to develop new policies to enable more effective civilian talent management.

We continue to focus our attention in the air operations community to pursue enhanced mission responsiveness. Our efforts include working with OPM to revise classification and qualification standards for pilot and simulator instructor trainees, seeking to improve the recruitment of new pilots. This will enhance competitiveness and remove outdated criteria that hinder our ability to attract and retain personnel.

END STRENGTH

The Air Force end-strength strategy must address crucial gaps in our warfighting capabilities, enhancing our ability to meet the strategic challenges in a time of Great Power Competition (GPC). We actively seek opportunities to divest capabilities not aligned with this challenge, focusing instead on bolstering capabilities crucial for executing the National Defense Strategy and GPC optimization. Moreover, our end-strength strategy emphasizes ensuring we have the optimal mix of skilled personnel in the appropriate roles and at the right time, thereby enhancing our readiness and agility in this dynamic strategic landscape.

Our FY25 total force end strength facilitates the human capital strategy to support future force structure including modernization in programs such as the B-21 Raider, KC-46A, F-35 and Electronic Warfare Integrated program. We continue to strategically divest our legacy platforms to redirect manpower to critical modern aircraft and platforms required to win in the new competitive environment. Taking near-term measured risks allows us to ensure critical operations capabilities and future functions to support GPC.

The 494,700 Total Force end strength represents the Airmen we need right now to continue to execute current missions, while we also plan for and begin to transition to the force of the future.

RECRUITING

FY23 was a challenging recruiting year; for the first time in 24 years, we did not meet recruiting goals in the Active Duty, Guard and Reserve. We examined our internal accession requirement policies: tattoos, body composition, drug testing, etc., to determine opportunities to reach the current population. Propensity to serve remains historically low hovering between 9 and 12 percent. Additionally, those who have a parent who served are more likely to join and this number has declined from 40 percent in 1995 to just 12 percent in 2022. To ensure policies keep pace with the changing generation, DAF initiated a Barriers to Service working group to holistically review our policies. The group identified 19

accession policies we've updated, providing approximately 6,800 people the opportunity to serve their country as Airmen. The quality of recruits has remained unchanged with 80% of recruits in the 1-3A category (scoring 50 or above on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)) and our Active component has accepted no recruits in Category 4 (scoring 30 or lower on the ASVAB).

We are cautiously optimistic we will meet FY24 recruiting goals due to modification of our policies. We established the FY24 Active Duty enlisted recruiting goal at 26,000; the ANG goal at 8,494; and the AFR goal at 5,700. For Active Duty, in response to observed declines in current year retention averages and to help offset potential future retention trend declines, we recently increased the recruiting goal by 1,200 (from 26,000 to 27,200). The change is part of a larger force management strategy that involves additional retention programs designed to deliver the right number of Airmen to match future force structure within authorized end strength throughout the FYDP.

Additionally, our goal is to add a total of 3,534 new officers from all accession sources across the total force. Five months into the fiscal year, we are experiencing positive trends. The Active Duty Air Force continues to meet its monthly enlisted and officer accession goals and is over 12% higher than the same time last year. The Reserve component is also meeting its enlisted accession goal, a full 36% higher than last year. Reserve officer accession is currently below its year-to-date goal; however, it is 6.3% higher than last year. Finally, while the ANG is not currently meeting its year-to-date enlisted and officer recruitment goals, they are seeing approximately 15% gains over last year.

Overall, the US Air Force recruiting program is healthy, determined by how far in the future we are filling and the size of our Delayed Entry Program (DEP). We are currently filling slots 2 to 2.5 months in the future and continue rebuilding our DEP from 4,600 in the beginning of FY23 to current rate of 8,900. Overall, we see no reason why the positive recruiting trends will not continue throughout the rest of the year.

RETENTION

As the US Air Force shifts towards a more modernized model of warfighting, retaining our talented Airmen is a priority. Officer and enlisted personnel retention rates continue to decline—less than a percentage point per year—however, this is not unexpected, as they normalize to pre-COVID historical average rates. We are actively implementing programs to manage the force to our desired retention levels and remain committed to an optimal balance of officers and enlisted personnel across a range of functions in response to the demands of a rapidly evolving technological landscape.

The Air Force continues to offer targeted monetary incentives to address retention challenges. This year, we are expanding our Selective Retention Bonus (SRB) program for an additional 19 jobs in FY24. SRB targets capabilities in the enlisted Air Force Specialty Codes with low manning percentages and high training costs such as special warfare, aircraft maintenance, cyber and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. For FY24, we programed \$172M to incentivize retention and are planning on maintaining the \$172M amount for FY25.

Additionally, we are continuing our two Active-Duty Aviation Bonus (AVB) programs: the FY24 Experienced Aviator Retention Incentive (EARI) and the FY24 Demonstration Bonus (Demo). The two

AVB programs have been highly effective; in FY23 we retained an additional 380 pilots compared to previous years when only the legacy bonus program was offered. The financial analysis of the FY23 Demo program indicates a positive return on investment. The Air Force spends \$40M per pilot in training and retention costs to develop 10-year experienced pilots while the cost of the FY23 Demo program was an additional \$52.3M to retain the additional pilots.

FORCE RESILIENCE

The DAF places a high priority on the well-being of its Airmen, Guardians, and families as they are our most significant competitive advantage. We continually assess our family programs to modernize existing services, introduce new solutions and innovate to address evolving priorities. The DAF ensures individuals seeking assistance for financial, transitional or health issues are viewed as a positive sign of resilience. The Air Force is dedicated to supporting families by providing tailored support and resources, including economic security, childcare and spouse employment. Additionally, we actively work to counter sexual assault and harassment through prevention strategies, together with implementing strategies for suicide prevention, such as promoting safe firearms storage and conducting reviews of suicide cases to identify actionable recommendations. Through these multifaceted efforts, the DAF seeks to cultivate a supportive environment where Airmen, Guardians, and their families can thrive, ensuring mission readiness and success.

ECONOMIC SECURITY

We appreciate your support through the FY24 NDAA Basic Pay, Basic Allowance for Housing and Subsistence increases. The Basic Allowance for Housing increase provides much needed relief in these challenging economic times.

We believe we have a competitively compensated force; however, our increasingly educated and skilled enlisted corps demands we continue to evaluate their compensation structure. We look forward to the 14th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (QRMC) results, due to be completed by January 2025. As we are awaiting results, the DAF finalized several initiatives which helped off-set the additional costs associated with military life. In FY23, we restored Special Duty Assignment Pay, funding it at \$11M in FY23, \$95.2M in FY24 and an estimated \$91.3M for FY25. We increased the temporary lodging expense reimbursement from 10 to 14 days for CONUS PCS and from 5 to 7 days for OCONUS PCS and increased Dislocation Allowance for E-1 through E-6. While this added an additional \$18.3M to our FY25 budget request, it is necessary to ensure the financial security of our service members during PCS moves.

The DAF was the first Service to implement the Basic Needs Allowance (BNA) in January 2023 to address the needs of our most at-risk Airmen. Paid to Airmen with a gross total household income of 150% of the federal poverty guidelines (FPG) or less, the typical BNA recipient is a married E-4 with six or more dependents receiving an average \$1,687 per month. Currently, 37 Airmen are receiving BNA: with 44 Airmen receiving the allowance since its inception. The DAF requested \$40.3M in the FY25 President's Budget, attributed to the anticipated increase in potentially eligible Service members when the FY 2025 legislative proposal proposed by the Administration is enacted to include service members below 200% of FPG. The DAF identified approximately 1,400 service members potentially eligible based on their military compensation alone. We anticipate the final figures will be lower once total

family household income is determined.

The DAF diligently continues to address the financial requirements of our Service members. The Air Force's Military and Family Readiness Centers (M&FRC) are the on-base service member and family touchpoint providing education, counseling and referral services to families with economic and food security concerns. We started enterprise-level tracking in August 2021--M&FRCs received 345 visits for food insecurity, 50% of which occurred in FY23. In addition to our M&FRCs, our command teams and First Sergeants network continue to be incredibly valuable resources for our struggling families. They assist in locating available sources to include the Air Force Aide Society, which provided \$279,346 in food assistance to 1,347 Service members.

CHILD AND YOUTH PROGRAMS

In addition to economic security, childcare is one of the most critical issues for service members and their families. Available, affordable, quality childcare programs are critical to support families, enable our service members to focus on the mission, and have direct readiness and retention impacts. In 2023, the DAF Child and Youth Programs (CYP) provided care or support through to 52,061 children. These programs include DAF-operated Child Development Centers (CDC), DAF-certified Family Childcare (FCC) providers, Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood (MCCYN) community fee assistance and several DAF/DoD pilot programs.

The DAF addresses the availability and delivery of CYPs with targeted efforts to maximize available childcare options, expand childcare capacity, increase DAF childcare program awareness and leverage customer feedback to determine needs as outlined in the DAF 2021 Childcare Strategic Plan.

The unmet child care needs waitlist is trending favorably down, decreasing between 25 and 33%, back to pre-COVID levels. The unmet needs waitlist consists of children who were not placed in care the day after care was needed, with approximately 3,700 children on that list currently awaiting placement at a DAF CDC or FCC program. The average wait across all priorities categories is 137 days, with single/dual military families waiting an average of 62 days for placement.

The DAF experienced post-pandemic childcare staffing shortages as did the entire childcare industry. Direct care staffing rates at DAF CDCs fell to 65% in July 2022, resulting in critical room closures, increased wait times and families struggling to secure care. During FY23, the DAF continued offering monetary and non-monetary incentives to attract and retain direct care staff—the most popular being the 100% child care tuition discount for the first child of direct-care staff. Additional children of direct-care staff and non-direct-care staff receive a 25% tuition discount. Additional staff incentives included retention bonuses, employee referral bonuses and tuition assistance. The DAF has experienced steady growth in CDC staffing rates since July 2022, from 65% in July 2022 to 80% by October 2023. Our staffing levels remain robust, ranging from 79% to 81%, reflecting our collective efforts and commitment to ensure the highest quality of care is provided. Approximately 3% (\$15M) of the Child and Youth Program FY25 budget request is earmarked for staffing initiatives to continue providing the highest quality of care.

We are also focused on our FCC provider program. The FCC caregivers are the primary delivery system

for expanded care needs for members whose childcare needs are outside of the traditional model such as 24/7 duty, shift work, part-time/hourly and specialized care options. We used targeted FCC recruitment and retention incentives, resulting in an increase of our program to 435 homes at 61 installations, up 14% from FY22.

Another program is the MCCYN program. This provides fee assistance to service members who are not located near base-care options or where base space is unavailable. In FY23, \$28.1M supported 6,700 DAF children at nationally accredited child care centers across the country. For FY24, we requested \$30.4M; in FY25, we increased our request to \$31.5M. Continued investment in our providers, facilities and programs is essential to grow the availability of quality and affordable childcare services for our families and ensure the health of the CYP.

Dedicated military construction (MILCON) projects and Facility Sustainment, Restoration, and Modernizations (FSRM) funds are as critical as staffing initiatives and fee assistance. We are grateful for the FY22 and FY23 appropriations for nine MILCON projects at JBSA-Lackland, Sheppard AFB, JBSA-Fort Sam Houston, RAF Lakenheath, Osan AB (Host-Nation funded), JBSA-Randolph, Scott AFB and two projects at Wright-Patterson AFB, as well as additional Planning and Design funding, and additional funding for four Cost to Completes. The FY24 NDAA-authorized amounts included a Cost to Complete request (\$20M) for the CDC at JBSA-Lackland, authorized and appropriated in FY22, and a net-zero facility CDC at Hanscom AFB (\$37.0M). In the June 2023 update to the Child and Youth Facility Master Plan, the DAF identified 35 CDC requirements, including 11 MILCON projects totaling \$367.4M, which are authorized and appropriated. An additional 11 are in the design phase and a final 12 projects are currently in the planning phase.

The DAF is addressing child care facility condition concerns with FSRM funding. In FY24, we set aside \$46M in focused FSRM funding for 11 CDC projects. In FY25 we are targeting to increase to \$50M for focused investment in CDCs. Additionally, installations receive discretionary sustainment funding for routine preventative maintenance and repair for facility projects with costs below the thresholds for centralized funding. Finally, there are additional projects executed under a Non-Appropriated Funds memorandum of agreement totaling \$27.85M, including CDCs at Grand Forks AFB (\$8.1M), Hurlburt Field (\$3.41M), McConnell AFB (\$8.5M) and Altus AFB (\$7.85M).

SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT

Spouse employment is a critical element to family resilience, financial readiness, quality of life, retention and mission success. Military spouse unemployment rate remains at 21%--significantly higher than the 3.9% country-wide unemployment rate published by the Bureau of Labor and Statistics. The unemployment rate for spouses of enlisted Airmen is 4% higher than spouses of officers with the highest unemployment rate among spouses of Airmen in the ranks of E-1 to E-4 (26%). There are multiple factors impacting spouse employment to include local CONUS job markets, transferring state licensures/certifications, overseas employment & telework restrictions for spouses overseas and the cost and availability of childcare.

The DAF relies on a variety of initiatives to counter spouse employment issues and contribute to our families' economic security. The M&FRC serves as a connector to extensive DAF and DoD resources

available to assist with spouse employment and has been instrumental to assist 43 DAF spouse education/career courses. Additionally, in FY22, the Military Licensure Reimbursement program was initiated, followed by the Spouse Small Business Reimbursement Program in 2023, in which relocation costs up to \$1000 are reimbursed. In the FY25 budget request, the DAF has set aside \$2M for both programs to offset the cost of PCS moves on spouses and encourage continued spouse employment.

Additional initiatives include the Military Spouse Employment Partnership and the My Career Advancement Account (MyCAA), which assists active-duty military spouses in obtaining a license, certification or associate degree necessary to gain employment in an occupation or career field. The Military Spouse Career Accelerator Pilot (MSCAP), launched in December 2022, provides active, National Guard and Reserve spouses with a 12-week paid fellowship program with industry, blending professional development, networking and hands-on experience. The pilot lasts for 3 years; to date, 425 spouses have been placed into fellowships with 85% of fellows offered follow-on employment with an average starting salary of \$67K.

COMBATTING SEXUAL ASSAULT & SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The DAF strategy to address sexual assault and harassment is a multidisciplinary approach focusing on prevention, response and accountability. We focus on the entire continuum of harm—addressing reports of sexual assault and associated experiences of retaliation to maintain the ready, diverse and lethal force required to defend our Nation. This approach includes a wide range of policies, programs and training reinforcing the DAF commitment to counter sexual assault, thereby enhancing accountability, prevention, climate and culture and victim care and support. The DAF recognizes we have more work to accomplish to detect changes in climate and educate commanders on the impact of harmful behaviors on victims and how a holistic climate and culture is critical to mission readiness. We must identify individual and environmental factors responsible for creating toxic conditions that degrade our culture of care. We continue to address training efficacy to equip leaders at all levels to promote a positive unit climate and cultivate environments that protect Airmen and Guardians from sexual assault, sexual harassment and retaliation.

The DAF continues to work on the DoD four-tiered implementation plan based on the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military (IRC-SAM). On December 27, 2023, we reached full operational capability of our Office of Special Trial Counsel (OSTC) to oversee the investigation and prosecution of sexual assault and other covered offenses. The DAF published updated Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) policy with changes for best practices regarding: Restricted (confidential) and Unrestricted Reporting options; SAPR victim advocacy services for DAF service members experiencing military sexual harassment; Installation Commander roles and responsibilities related to SAPR program location and office requirements; Convalescent leave options for victims of sexual assault; and Safe-to-Report policy changes. By integrating IRC-SAM recommendations, as approved by the Secretary of Defense, we are reaffirming to all Airmen and Guardians that we are striving to counter sexual assault by fostering an equitable culture of dignity and mutual respect.

The IRC-SAM recommendations, approved by the Secretary of Defense, led to the co-location of support agencies, coined the “connect to care” collaborative approach. Centralizing the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, SAPR Victim Advocate supporting sexual harassment advocacy, Domestic Abuse Victim

Advocate, Victim's Counsel and Religious Support Teams improves the ease of access when coordinating victim support. The pilot program launched by the DAF at six installations between August 2022 and January 2023 reported a 22% increase in collaboration, coordination, consistency, awareness and access since the start of the pilot. The success was codified into policy and is being implemented DAF-wide. Another training effort includes the launch of the Integrated Prevention Course at Air University and the development of annual SAPR training targeted for General Officers and Senior Executive Service civilians which was developed and deployed DAF-wide in FY23.

The DAF is committed to fill the 769 additional billets authorized by the Secretary of Defense. As of February 2024, we have filled 457 positions. The DAF is committed to strengthening the full-time response workforce structure to ensure critical support and experienced advocates are available to provide continuity of care. We continuously seek to learn and understand that prevention and response to sexual assault requires leadership focus and is a vital command responsibility. Through engaged and equipped service members and leaders at all levels, we are committed to preventing and reducing sexual assault while ensuring that victims receive care and perpetrators are held appropriately accountable.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

According to the DoD Annual Report on Suicide in the Military Calendar Year (CY) 2022 released on 30 October 2023, suicide rates in the Air Force declined from a rate of 25.1 per 100K Active Component service members in CY19 to 24.3 in CY20 and 15.3 in CY21. In CY22, this number saw a slight increase to 19.7 per 100K, consistent with the Air Force average rate over the past 5 years. In comparison, the DoD Active Component suicide rate for 2022 was 25.1 per 100K. After controlling for differences in age and sex, the Active Duty, Reserve and Guard suicide rates are comparable to US population suicide rates. Use of a firearm was the most common method of suicide, which is consistent with previous years. The largest demographic of suicides continues to be single, enlisted men, under the age of 30, in the rank of E-1 through E-4, which is consistent with previous years and to the overall demographic profile of the DoD total force.

One of the Air Force's initiatives started in March 2022, the Time-Based Prevention (TBP), focuses on promoting safe storage of personal firearms to put time and space between an Airman or Guardian who is at risk for suicide and has access to lethal means. With the establishment of a centralized contract to facilitate the purchase and distribution of cable-style gun locks, more than 280K have been distributed across the DAF to date. Continued implementation, expansion and leadership support will build a culture in which safe storage is commonplace, which will accelerate efforts to save lives by reducing immediate access to firearms for those in distress and helping to prevent accidental injuries and deaths among DAF members and their families.

The first standardized, unified, scientific and public health-driven methodology for suicide death reviews in the DAF was completed for CY20. In partnership with suicide researchers at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS), the DAF systematically analyzed factors to identify aggregated findings & lessons and deliver generalizable & actionable recommendations to reduce suicide. Researchers drew information from four sources, including personnel records, investigation reports, medical records and DoD Suicide Event Reports (DoDSER), collecting over 1,000 data points for each suicide decedent. USUHS researchers piloted the Suicide Analysis Board (SAB) process this past year on

117 suicide deaths from 2020. The final report was released in March 2024 with 68 recommendations; future studies will look at deaths from calendar years 2018, 2019, 2021 and beyond to provide additional data and recommendations as we strive toward zero deaths by suicide. The DAF is focused on implementing those recommendations, many of which are already underway, to include conducting a lethal means safety campaign, continuing to promote lethal means safety practices and focusing on programs that build connections. The Wingman Guardian Connect Program is one effective program already established that helps Airmen and Guardians build the skills to form connections. An additional training effort includes the launch of the Integrated Prevention Course at Air University and the development of annual suicide prevention training targeted for General Officers and Senior Executive Service civilians which was developed and deployed DAF-wide in FY23.

CONCLUSION

Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, and distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you again for this opportunity to represent our distinguished service members and their families. We remain committed to recruiting, retaining, developing and employing the force needed to complete our mission in service of our country. I am honored for this opportunity to provide insight into the quality of service and quality of life of our service members, which directly impacts the mission readiness of our force. We look forward to our continued partnership and appreciate your advocacy of the US Air Force—those in uniform, our civilian professionals and the families, caregivers and survivors who support them.