

**RECORD VERSION**

**STATEMENT BY**

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ARMY**

**BEFORE THE**

**QUALITY OF LIFE PANEL  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL  
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Chairman Bacon, Ranking Member Houlahan, distinguished members of this panel, thank you for the invitation to speak on behalf of the Soldiers, their families, and the Army Civilians who make up our all-volunteer force.

First, I want to say how proud I am of our Soldiers. America's Army is lethal and effective, ready to surge when called upon in times of crisis to fight and win the Nation's wars while defending enduring National interests. Our deployed forces in Europe now include 42,000 Soldiers, of which 17,000 are not permanently assigned to Europe. In the Africa and Central Command areas of operation, there are more than 23,000 Soldiers committed. On standby, are 74,000 Soldiers serving as part of the Immediate or Crisis Response Forces. Serving alongside each of them is a Family enduring the stress of a loved one away from home or prepared to leave at a moment's notice. Their sacrifice is not unnoticed.

Thank you for all the work you have done to support your Army. It has been my honor to serve over the past 30 years and the impacts of your support could not be clearer. Fiscal Year (FY) 23 investments in military housing demonstrates your commitment to improve the quality of life (QoL) for our Soldiers and their families. The \$3.375 billion in Army Military Construction and Army Family Housing funding — which provides more than \$491 million toward family housing, \$292.7 million for barracks, and \$77 million for Child Development Centers (CDCs) directly targets soldier and family QoL.

Additionally, the passage of the Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022 has an immense impact for our families by granting professional license reciprocity to all Soldiers and spouses moving due to military obligation.

Families support every facet of our Nation and help make the Army the greatest force the world has ever known. The Soldiers, their families, caregivers, survivors, and Army Civilians are the cornerstone of your Army, and we have not waived on our commitment to them. Our foundational priorities continue to be people, readiness, and

modernization. We are focused on all three, ensuring that your Army is ready and remains true to our Army Values and Warrior Ethos while fostering a professional, safe, and inclusive culture.

To further build on those priorities, the Secretary of the Army outlined four focus areas: 1) keep the Army on a sustainable strategic path to transform to the Army of 2040, 2) strategically adapt the way we recruit and retain talent, 3) reduce harmful behaviors, and 4) improve the quality of life of our Soldiers, particularly with housing. My role is to ensure the Army can fight and win our Nation's wars by building cohesive teams — founded on trust — that are highly trained, disciplined, and mentally, socially, and physically fit.

### **Improving Quality of Life**

We are forging a culture where Soldiers are treated with dignity and respect and they are required to be physically fit, well-trained, and disciplined. Attracting and retaining the highest quality individuals our country has to offer is a top priority. The ability to maintain our readiness and grow our lethality, now and into the future, depends upon us not just filling our ranks to capacity but ensuring we have qualified and quality individuals who have a desire to be part of something righteous and with purpose. Your Army's future and the safety and security of the United States of America depends on their dedication and commitment to our country.

Providing quality housing, barracks, childcare, and services for our Soldiers and their families is a key factor in retaining talent. With your help, the Army is committed to sustaining quality housing conditions for Soldiers and their families. I am working with the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Installations, Energy, and Environment), Headquarters Department of the Army (HQDA) G-9, and Army Materiel Command on the development of an Army barracks resourcing plan to set us on an immediate improvement path for the quality of unaccompanied housing across the Army by defining "quality barracks" and holding ourselves accountable to it.

Family housing, privatized housing companies are in the middle of a \$3 billion investment cycle that runs from 2020-2026. We have approved the universal lease at all 50 Army privatized installations and have fully implemented all 18 rights set out in the Tenant Bill of Rights at all Army installations with privatized housing. We require every privatized home on our Army installations to be inspected during change of occupancies or after a life-health-safety work order. Your assistance and oversight have materially contributed to improve the quality of Army on-base housing.

Supporting military families with access to affordable quality childcare is another area of significant focus. The Army initiated a robust facility investment program that includes three CDCs under construction (Fort Wainwright, Alaska and two at U.S. Army Garrison Hawaii). One CDC is in pre-construction at Fort Johnson, Louisiana along with five in various stages of design (Fort Eisenhower, Fort Leavenworth, Fort Knox, Fort Meade, and Fort Liberty). In addition, 12 CDCs throughout the Army are currently under renovation.

Ongoing staffing challenges continue to impact childcare availability at some locations despite initial pay increases, bonuses, and expanded hiring initiatives for childcare workers. To address unmet demand for childcare at installations, the Army offers fee assistance in community-based care options to all military and Civilians who are geographically dispersed or at garrisons with long wait lists for installation-based care.

In addition, the Army executed an Intergovernmental Service Agreement with West Liberty, Iowa and Clay County, Missouri to assist Reserve Soldiers in finding and funding childcare during weekend drill, which has proven life changing and career-sustaining for some Soldiers.

More than 431,000 spouses play an essential role in readiness and soldier intent to remain in the Army. When spouses can build and transport their careers, have access

to quality employment options, and are satisfied with overall quality of life, they are more likely to support their Soldier's continued service. The Army continues to support meaningful spouse employment by working with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) to improve and promote My Career Advancement Accounts, a workforce development scholarship worth up to \$4,000 to pursue licenses, certifications, or associate degrees in portable occupations. The Army continues to communicate the Military Spouse Employment Partnership, which connects spouses with approximately 700 partners employers committed to hiring military spouses and continues collaboration with the Defense State Liaison to improve state license reciprocity and professional license compacts and will continue to work with OSD on implementation of licensure reciprocity as mandated by the Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022.

The Army acknowledges we must continue improving the experience for Soldiers, Civilians, and families to avoid hardships caused by Permanent Change of Station (PCS) expenses. Updated policies and processes to provide PCS orders to Soldiers and Civilians 120 days prior to report dates have enabled better forecasting and scheduling for contracted movers. The Army established a Relocation Advisory Committee made up of Army spouses, subject matter experts, and Army leaders to address PCS issues within its purview or to be raised to OSD for action. The Army continues to work with OSD, the U.S. Transportation Command, and other Services to develop and implement meaningful policy changes to make improvements and reduce stressors on Soldiers and families throughout the PCS move process.

Approximately 46.8K Soldiers (about 10 percent of the force) have 57.9K Family members enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP). The Army is committed to a comprehensive, all-inclusive approach to coordinate community support as well as educational, medical, housing, and personnel services to support families enrolled in the EFMP and help them remain ready and retained in the Army. As we work with these families, we always try to balance Army readiness with their wellbeing. We

must ensure EFMP families are stationed where they can receive appropriate medical care and support services.

In 2022, we launched the integrated Army Enterprise EFMP system to improve enrollment, transparency, assignment coordination, and Family support access for EFMP families. The system can complete EFMP enrollment, enrollment update, disenrollment, assignment inquiry, and overseas Family Member Travel Screening. Additional system features include resource content management on EFMP resources, community forum to allow families to connect and share information; and mobile capability with 24/7 technical access.

In accordance with the FY21 National Defense Authorization Act, we are in the process of standing up the HQDA EFMP central office to ensure consistent application and processes across the Army enterprise. Our goal is fully operational capability by the end of FY24.

We continue to listen to families to make EFMP improvements and make Family support access easier for Soldiers and their Family members. The Army understands that increased quality of life for Soldiers and families is directly tied to increased mission readiness. It is crucial that Army continues to standardize and reform the EFMP to support our Soldiers and their families so they can excel in their jobs and build successful careers and lives in the Army, increasing our ability to fight and win on tomorrow's battlefields.

### **Recruit and Retain Talented Soldiers**

FY23 has been about winning the war on talent in a competitive marketplace. The gifted men and women who raise their right hands and say "yes" to service have chosen to join and remain in the Army at a pivotal point amid many global challenges facing the Nation.

We can only do this by investing in America's sons and daughters, who are more than

up to this challenge, requires us to find innovative ways to communicate the unlimited opportunities that exist and hope they take advantage of the life accelerator the Army can be for them. Building on the momentum from 2023 initiatives, the Army will continue to drive positive change in 2024 with how we recruit, develop, retain, reward, and sustain our all-volunteer force.

In response to the most challenging recruiting environment since the 1973 establishment of the all-volunteer force, the Army implemented the Future Soldier Preparatory Course (FSPC) program in August 2022 at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. This program is an investment in America's youth to assist them in overcoming barriers to service by providing focused academic and fitness instruction to help recruits meet and exceed the Army's desired accession standards for body fat composition and academic test performance prior to basic training. Access to this program allows individuals who already meet all other qualifications for enlistment, to include moral and medical accessions standards, and provides a successful pathway to service.

In FY23, the success of the FSPC program provided upwards of three Brigade Combat Teams (BCT) (12,887 Soldiers) worth of additional combat power to the Army. 47 percent of graduates are scoring in Test Score Category IIIA or higher, thus ensuring we maintain our continued goal of accessions quality over quantity. 96.6 percent of academic track graduates and 95.4 percent of fitness track graduates have graduated BCT which is higher than standard BCT graduation rate of 94 percent.

FSPC graduates continue to be selected for leadership positions in training units at a higher rate than their peers and a large number are scoring above 500 on the Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT).

While this program is relatively new, the Army is continuing to conduct longitudinal analysis on FSPC graduates through their term of service to better inform future FSPC efforts. Initial FY24 returns indicate continued positives trends within the program.

The FSPC has proven success in unlocking potential within new recruits and demonstrates the continued Army investment in America's youth. Investment in these Soldiers results in a higher commitment to the Army.

With many initiatives to open the aperture for our qualified military age population we have found that creating multiple options and pathways resonates. Of the over 50,000 Future Soldiers who enlisted into the Regular Army this year, many took advantage of both the monetary and non-momentary options offered from critical skills bonuses to student loan repayment, choosing their first duty station, or the ability to attend other valuable training like airborne and ranger schools. Our Guard and Reserve Future Soldiers have enhanced incentives that allow Soldiers to continue their civilian pursuits while adding new skills through education programs to utilize Federal Tuition assistance and GI Bill programs. Non-prior and prior service Soldiers can qualify for the \$50K Student Loan Repayment Program (SLRP) with a minimum six-year commitment. Some National Guard States offer 100 percent Tuition waivers who serve in the National Guard.

Additionally, all components can participate in the Army's expanded Army Civilian Acquired Skills Program (ACASP) that increased from seven specialties to 44 and allow Civilians with experience in jobs that range from musicians to human intelligence collectors, and orthopedic specialists to vehicle mechanics can take advantage of the program. Enlisted Soldiers who meet qualifications will be awarded the rank of specialist, or E-4, and bring needed skills into the Force.

Once an eligible individual has chosen to enlist in the Regular Army, the Army has continued to see great success in retaining their talent across the total force. In FY23, the Army retained 56,239 Soldiers to remain in the regular Army and transitioned an additional 7,041 from the Regular Army into the Army Reserve or Army National Guard.



Over the past year to 18-months, the Army has revised its policies to increase opportunities for Soldiers to train into a new skill, including new military occupational specialties merging some roles in intelligence and field artillery and increased the stabilization periods for Soldiers who can reenlist to remain at their current installation for up to 30 additional months (increased from up to 18 months.)

The Army is continuing to leverage the Transfer of Education Benefits Program and is looking to increase the utilization of Continuation Pay through targeted increases for our most critical skills to enhance the retention program.

Igniting the call to service in future Soldiers means helping them see themselves in uniform. Four key storylines of the Army Communication Plan will help us accomplish this:

- We re-launched the Army's recruiting campaign last year revitalizing "Be All You Can Be" for the current generation. In August, we followed up our initial launch with new ads specifically aimed at informing the youth of America that the Army is a place of possibilities, where you can develop a community, find your purpose, and be all you can be.
- "Making a Difference" highlights how the Army responds to threats and protects American interests at home and abroad. To deter adversaries and maintain global stability, the Army conducts year-round training exercises alongside allies and partners. The Army along with the Army National Guard also prepare for and respond to disasters and National emergencies, including floods, hurricanes, droughts, and wildfires.
- "Army Life" provides a strong foundation for Soldiers and families. Soldiers get practical, hands-on training, belong to a tight-knit community with built in support, serve a purpose greater than themselves, have unique professional experiences and the opportunity to travel globally, progress in their education, and cultivate a full-time or part-time career that will collectively serve them during their service and beyond.

- “Army of 2030” focuses on our need to transform, leader development, and training to ensure we are on a sustainable, strategic path forward in times of competition and prepared for conflict worldwide.

These storylines help tell the Army’s story to potential applicants, but it’s our recruiters who are the face of your Army to most Americans. While the Army has not met its accessions goals, it is not because of the lack of effort from our recruiters. To better support them, we are looking at factors impacting their QoL and incentivizing high performers. U.S. Army Recruiting Command has initiated a “People Week” at the end of recruiting school to ensure our recruiters are fully informed on their benefits and other resources available to them to aid in their recruitment efforts.

The Army Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Strategy published in late 2021 to assist commanders in preparing squads to adapt to an environment that is constantly changing. The message is straightforward: construct cohesive teams comprised of individuals who are intellectually, socially, and physically fit, in addition to being highly trained and disciplined. They are expected to be capable of competing, contending, and triumphing in multi-domain operations on behalf of our Nation. To meet this expectation, we must develop and empower NCOs to utilize their knowledge, abilities, and conduct to lead in accordance with standards embedded within our Army values and NCO core competencies.

The Army is aiding these subordinate leaders in their endeavors to foster team cohesion via an assortment of programs and initiatives. Field Manual 6-22 (Leader Development) was revised last year to provide leaders with the necessary tools to coach, counsel, and mentor subordinates into leaders of character who are adept at assembling cohesive teams and understanding their Soldiers. It is my conviction that engaged leadership, a positive command climate, and unit cohesion are the Army's most vital safeguards against detrimental behaviors within the ranks.

This year, the Army planned and executed five Building Cohesive Teams Forums. The forums provided a direct line of communication among Command Teams, Army Senior Leaders, and HQDA to share best practices, identify, anticipate, and further build cohesive teams at echelon.

### **Preventing Harmful Behaviors**

In accordance with the Secretary of the Army prevention governance structure guidance, the Army Resilience Directorate moved from the Deputy Chief of Staff, HQDA G-1 to the Deputy Chief of staff, HQDA G-9 and merged with the former Soldier and Family Readiness Directorate to form the new Directorate of Prevention, Resilience and Readiness (DPRR), on July 1, 2023. This new organization serves as the Army's lead for prevention of harmful behaviors and continues the Army's paradigm shift from primarily focusing on secondary and tertiary prevention—intervention and response—to prioritizing primary prevention activities to prevent harmful behaviors.

We are implementing a comprehensive public health approach to suicide prevention through initiatives that address risk and protective factors, individual Soldier resiliency skills, destigmatize mental health, safeguard access to lethal means, and enhance access to counseling and support services. We're implementing an integrated prevention workforce called the Integrated Prevention Advisory Group (I-PAG) that, in concert with Commanders and program managers, will proactively address risk and protective factors that contribute to Soldier suicide, sexual assault, domestic violence, harassment, and child abuse and neglect. In FY23, we reached initial operational capability for Phase One, Hiring Locations, and began execution of Phase Two, Hiring Actions. Currently, we're actively hiring and growing the prevention workforce at 28 Army locations. These specialists play a crucial role in supporting Commanders to cultivate and sustain positive climates while mitigating sexual violence and other problems within our formations.

The Army is developing an integrated prevention system at echelon that fosters a

culture of prevention committed to protecting against harmful behaviors, increasing protective factors, and promoting command climates through an upstream approach that cultivates healthy communities and protective environments by bolstering the key domains of the social determinants of health. This work is being accomplished through a DPRR-led Tiger Team established November 2023.

The presence of harmful behaviors — like domestic violence, child abuse, suicide, sexual harassment and assault, racism and extremism, and domestic violence — are the antithesis of our values and have absolutely no place in the Army.

As the Army places more emphasis on upstream prevention efforts to reduce harmful behaviors, and increase awareness of available support services, we continue to invest in the Family Advocacy Program (FAP), the Army's prevention, education, and response to domestic abuse, child abuse and neglect, and problematic sexual behavior in children and youth.

The FAP, a congressionally mandated program, is the Army's domestic abuse prevention and response program. FAP provides a wide array of evidence-informed prevention education programs to strengthen families and enhance resilience by supporting healthy life skills, safe spousal and intimate relationships, and nurturing parenting skills.

When abuse incidents occur, FAP utilizes a multi-disciplinary team framework to facilitate a trauma-informed coordinated community response in partnership with medical, behavioral health, legal, command, law enforcement, and other community agencies on and off the installation, Army wide. FAP also offers evidence-based clinical assessment and treatment for all involved and 24/7 victim advocacy and referral services for victims of abuse.

Family violence is a threat to the health, welfare and safety of Soldiers and Family

members and it severely degrades warfighter readiness. The Army FAP helps to strengthen Army Families by enhancing resiliency and relationship skills and improving quality of life.

We have made significant progress within our Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) Program. The Army has initiated the transfer of Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs) and Victim Advocates (VAs) from the chain of command to an installation-based support model that will strengthen the sexual assault response workforce, create a reliance on full time personnel, and increase the level of expertise available to commanders and survivors. To support this effort, we established a supervisory structure at the installation level and a management structure at the operational level. This ensures a robust implementation framework with professional oversight across the entire force.

The Army is increasing the number of full-time SARCs and VAs who are thoroughly trained and have the requisite experience to effectively support victims of sexual harassment and assault. We are also ensuring that our military personnel continue to provide victim assistance in isolated and remote locations, per the recommendation of the Secretary's Independent Review Commission. This allows for sufficient personnel to be available to sexual assault victims to help them understand their reporting options and get the assistance they need. My focus will be on ensuring that everyone knows how to get the help they need.

To support our prevention focus, we have introduced enhanced command climate assessment tools, procedures, and policies. These measures will provide more timely indicators of harmful behaviors, empowering leaders to be more proactive.

To better prevent suicide in Army formations, we continue to emphasize the importance of "connecting to protect" Soldiers, Army Civilians and Family members from the stressors that may contribute to suicide and to enable successful service through

meaningful missions. Through training and awareness initiatives, we emphasize the importance of engaging and intervening when a teammate may be at risk. We are also conducting foundational research on how to enhance and strengthen culture and climate.

The Army published a stand-alone Suicide Prevention policy in September 2023 that codifies a public health approach to suicide prevention. This approach is designed to strengthen protective factors and reduce risk factors that may lead to harmful behaviors. In addition, we published the Army's first Lethal Means Safety Toolkit. This Toolkit helps Soldiers, especially Command Teams, and Family members recognize the importance of creating time and space between thoughts of suicide and the means to carry out the act, reducing the likelihood of suicide attempts.

Effective prevention strategies are hard to measure and sustain. In 2022, the Total Army experienced fewer deaths by suicide. However, in 2023 our numbers are trending higher. There's still much work to be done in this area and we must focus on the fact that each of those Soldiers left behind Family, friends, and squad mates who mourn them daily; our efforts must work to bring that number to zero.

As Sergeant Major of the Army, I have dedicated countless hours to eliminating these behaviors through the Monthly Solutions Summit.

This prevention initiative working group includes the senior-command Command Sergeant Majors from division and higher to develop and pilot ideas. Beginning this year, that working group will brief the Army Vice Chief of Staff for approval and resourcing of initiatives. We've allocated \$22 million towards these grassroots efforts—money that otherwise would have come from a units' training and operations funds.

The Monthly Solutions Summit uses research from academia and industry as well as an ongoing, iterative process to seek input from internal and external prevention experts on

the Army's prevention system and activities. The Monthly Solution Summit feeds into the Building Cohesive Teams Forum, where our senior leaders come together to address systemic issues across the Army and identify best practices which may provide potential solutions.

### **Holistic Health and Fitness**

People are at the heart of Army readiness and our strength is Soldiers and their Families. To remain combat-ready, our Soldiers must shoot, move, communicate, and bond through tough training and learning to overcome adversity. The Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) System is the Army's primary investment in building a better warfighter and increasing lethality and readiness. In today's unstable geopolitical environment this is the right time to invest in optimizing warfighter performance. H2F helps Soldiers achieve optimal performance, reduce injury rates, quickly rehabilitate, recondition, and reintegrate after injury, and improve Soldier and unit readiness across the Total Army. The H2F System empowers leaders with resources to achieve individual and unit readiness goals, while equipping Soldiers with tools to take charge of their health, fitness, and well-being to optimize individual performance and succeed in the face of adversity. The system optimizes health and fitness by developing and sustaining positive habits learned through the five domains of H2F: mental, spiritual, sleep, nutrition, and physical readiness.

The backbone of the H2F System is the H2F Performance Team. Currently, 50 Army brigades in the Active Component have embedded interdisciplinary H2F Performance Teams, consisting of Physical Therapists, Registered Dietitians, Occupational Therapists, Certified Athletic Trainers, Cognitive Performance Specialists, and Strength and Conditioning Coaches providing injury prevention and human performance optimization expertise. We plan to continue fielding H2F Performance Teams at an accelerated rate of 15-20 brigades each year, with the goal of 110 H2F-resourced brigades across the Army by FY29. We are also working to incorporate H2F in the National Guard and Reserve Component in a thoughtful, deliberate way to effectively

address the readiness challenges our Citizen-Soldiers face.

Initial results of embedding H2F Performance within brigades are extremely promising. H2F-resourced brigades are beginning to see fewer acute and overuse musculoskeletal injuries, fewer overall injuries, faster return to duty rates, improved ACFT scores, and improved Army body composition standards. Lethality measures, including weapons qualification scores, are also improving in H2F-resourced brigades. Most notably, substance abuse rates and suicide rates in brigades with H2F Performance Teams are declining compared to non-resourced brigades. Soldiers with H2F resources report that they have better access to behavioral health care and feel the command climate supports their progress. Commanders across the Army are excited about the positive impact the H2F System is having on their formations.

We are also exploring the incorporation of technology to make a better warfighter. The FY23 National Defense Authorization Act directed the Commanding General of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) to submit a report on the integration of wearable biometric technology in Army basic combat training. We are executing that pilot at Fort Moore this year incorporating wearables and a digital software platform solution for data inputs, analyses, and outputs. It is expected that the incorporation of technology will help the individual, unit, and organization see themselves, make better decisions, and understand the ramification of their choices. After all – we seek behavior modification and awareness as a primary first step to improve health and fitness.

The H2F Spiritual Readiness Initiative, developed by the Army Chief of Chaplains in collaboration with the Army Surgeon General and Chief of Behavioral Health, has been integrated throughout the Army in both operational and training environments. This initiative aims at helping Soldiers discover meaning and purpose in life through personal philosophical, and/or religious teachings and beliefs. Army leaders alongside the Army Chaplain Corps have been instrumental in integrating spiritual readiness through all



phases of a Soldiers career, contributing an evidence-based approach to the prevention of harmful behaviors. Additionally, the Chief of Chaplains is working with data scientists and psychology researchers to demonstrate the impact that a spiritual readiness has on preventing harmful behaviors.

This effort moves the Army's primary investment in caring for our people forward into the information age, directly addressing critical Secretary of the Army objectives to become more data centric, scale tools and resources to build positive command climates and care for Soldiers, connect our Soldiers and reduce harmful behaviors, and strategically adapt the way we recruit, manage, and retain talent. The H2F digital support platform will be critical to ensuring every Soldier is enabled with H2F through a flexible digital management system they can easily access; have a desire to interact with; which provides personalized training, education, and culture content; and leverages human performance data to assist individuals, leaders, and performance teams in enhancing and sustaining readiness for the Army. This capability will be critical to our success in the Reserve Component as well, as the majority these Soldiers are geographically dispersed with limited touchpoints with their units confined to weekend drills and annual training.

The H2F System provides a unified and holistic strategy to change the Army's culture of health and fitness to build a better warfighter. Investing in health and fitness benefits our Soldiers and their Families and ensures the sustainment of an agile and adaptive Army, ready to provide the Nation with a professional, lethal, and decisive force that will win against any adversary.

### **Highly Trained and Disciplined**

The Army's mission has not changed: deploy, fight, and win our Nation's wars. Building individual and team readiness is vital to accomplishing that mission. This will look different at each echelon and for each individual soldier. However, there are specific areas that apply to most of our Soldiers, and these provide the best

opportunity for improvement. One of the initiatives that we are extremely proud of is the alignment of standards for the Expert Infantry, Expert Soldier, and Expert Field Medical Badges. By doing this, units can provide more opportunities for Soldiers to train and earn these badges. Compared to the previous testing model, this concept has contributed to a nine percent increase in pass rate for all Soldiers, and a 353 percent increase in Expert Soldier and Field Medical Badges awarded.

These badges help build the individual, team, and unit readiness required to achieve strategic readiness. A great example of the Army's highly trained, disciplined Soldiers is the no-notice deployment of the 1st Armored BCT of the 3rd Infantry Division in February 2022. In less than one week, the Brigade deployed from the United States to Germany and were conducting live-fire exercises in with tanks from the Army Propositioned Stocks. Since moving into the position of the Sergeant Major of the Army, I have traveled to Europe, the Middle East, and met with my direct counterparts at other venues. Their feedback has been clear: there is no substitute for having American Soldiers on the ground for both reassurance and deterrence. This speaks volumes about the readiness and professionalism of your Army's Soldiers.

### **Conclusion**

As the Sergeant Major of the Army, the most rewarding aspect of my position is doing everything possible to ensure our Soldiers are the most lethal warfighters. I want to recognize the amazing work done every day by your Total Army and what they've accomplished this year to keep America safe.

People are our advantage and Army Readiness is predicated on the fortitude and resolve of our personnel, and it commences with the installation-specific infrastructure and programs. Your ongoing support ensures that our organization will continue to be an appealing choice for present and future generations, as we continue to foster cohesive teams, maintain tactical and strategic readiness, and sustain the momentum of modernization. The opportunity to deliver this testimony and your ongoing support of

our Soldiers, their families, and Civilians are greatly appreciated. Your support signifies an investment in the personnel of the Army as they fulfill their military obligations and transition back as exceptional individuals of their communities.