

**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE**  
**PRESENTATION TO THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL**  
**ON THE OVERSIGHT OF FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMS**  
**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**SUBJECT: FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMS**

**STATEMENT OF:**  
**CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT OF THE AIR FORCE JAMES A. ROY**

22 July 2009

**INTRODUCTION**

Thank you for this opportunity to present concerns important to our Airmen and their families before this committee. It is truly an honor and a privilege to appear here alongside my Service Senior Enlisted Advisor teammates as we pursue the best possible quality of service and quality of life for our Servicemembers and their families.

Thank you also for the outstanding support to our Airmen and their families from the Members here and from the entire House of Representatives. Your actions and efforts on our behalf are vital to our success as a Service.

Your Air Force is more than 660,000 strong. Behind every one of our Total Force Team, which includes our civilians and officer and enlisted Airmen – Active Duty, Reserve and Air National Guard – is a family. From our spouses and children who keep our home lives functioning and steady amidst our increased wartime operations tempo, to our mothers and fathers who journey to foreign lands to sit beside the hospital bed of their wounded warrior and bring them home, these families deserve our utmost support and our unswerving efforts to care for them.

We are focused on expanding child care capacity, caring for our special needs families, improving financial readiness, and providing educational and development opportunities for military spouses and children. We also know we can do more. Every day our Airmen and their families discover new ideas, new and better ways to live their lives. We are realizing efficiencies through process improvement programs like Air Force Smart Operations for the 21st Century and through grass roots efforts by our spouses in the Key Spouses Program, Officer and Enlisted Spouses Clubs and other informal groups and meetings.

Our families are incredibly supportive of our Airmen. These families make many personal and professional sacrifices. They pick up the entire family workload and household responsibilities when our Airmen deploy or leave on temporary duty, and they pick up and move across the country or across the globe wherever our Airmen are called to serve. The needs and care of our families touch every aspect of an Air Force member's career from accession to separation, and we owe it to these families to ensure they are safe, healthy, and have good educational and development opportunities.

America's Air Force is the best in the world. That's not just because of our equipment -- but also because of our people. Airmen are critical to mission success. As such, developing and caring for Airmen and their families is one of the Air Force's top priorities, and our efforts are focused towards this priority.

Throughout my Air Force career, I've seen how our Airmen demonstrate their commitment to service -- every day, around the world. Airmen make a decision to remain on duty based on many factors, one of which is the quality of support they and their families receive. This underscores the fact that caring for families has a direct impact on mission readiness. When we take care of Air Force families, Airmen are freer from distractions and better able to focus on the mission.

## **CARING FOR FAMILIES**

Air Force families lead challenging lives that include higher operations tempo, multiple deployments, increased mobilization, longer periods of time away from home, and frequent relocations, in addition to normal life stressors. Readily available, high-quality and affordable child care and youth programs continue to be workforce issues with direct impact on mission readiness.

Over the past year, we have tackled important issues for Air Force families, including expanding child care capacity, increasing child care support for Guard and Reserve families, improving financial readiness, and providing opportunities for children of Airmen whether they reside on military installations or in civilian communities throughout the United States.

We continued to increase available, affordable, high-quality child care spaces for Airmen. Thanks to the temporary legislative authority for child care projects, the “Growing Child Care Spaces” initiative funded 18 construction projects to increase available child care by 1,242 spaces. Seven additional military construction projects were approved, which will further increase child care spaces by 1,718. We funded 7 additional facilities through the economic stimulus package and will produce 836 more spaces as a result. When all funded construction is complete, projected to be done in fiscal year 2011, our known child care space deficit will be eliminated. We will continue to closely monitor these projects to ensure our families’ needs are met. Our next challenge will be to renovate or replace the aging infrastructure at child development and youth centers already in existence.

## **DEPLOYMENT SUPPORT**

Recognizing the importance of our military communities and families, we continue to tailor programs to meet the needs of single and married members and their families impacted by multiple deployments on both the home front and the front line. Programs and services offered across the three phases of the deployment cycle -- pre-deployment, deployment/sustainment and reintegration/reunion -- help Airmen and their families identify and resolve concerns related to deployment.

At the home station, information and referral services are offered directly to spouses and families. This past year, pre-deployment briefings for 100,000 members and families armed them with information and resources to prepare for extended separations, with special emphasis on personal, professional and legal matters. During deployment, Airmen and their families stay connected through access to free morale calls designed to increase communication and decrease a sense of isolation. Our Airman and Family Readiness Centers conduct workshops and activities with family members during the sustainment phase which help them address issues around financial stability, parenting solutions and stress management. More than 22,000 spouses received reintegration briefings this year, helping them understand changes during deployment, and gave them the opportunity to address those changes and plan ways to improve the quality of the reunion and reintegration.

Communication and life skills workshops were attended by more than 15,000 family members, and 24,000 requested and received financial counseling. More than 40,000 spouses received employment assistance to prepare them for portable careers. Although stressors associated with longer and multiple deployments may begin to wear on Air Force families, services and resources are at their disposal to help address their concerns. We continue to explore new and more effective ways to ease the trials on our families.

On the front line, the Airman and Family Readiness Center at a deployed location in Southwest Asia provided more 8,100 consultations last year. Keeping both single and married deployed Airmen in touch with their families provides an emotional link to family and friends back home. Some of the most requested services by deployed members were financial management, family reintegration, and personal and work life issues. Accessibility to morale phones, computers, and live video feeds allows deployed Airmen to make frequent contact with families and friends.

## **MILITARY CHILD EDUCATION**

Air Force families include 145,000 children ages 6 to 18 years. These children typically move six to nine times from elementary school through high school. Academic standards, promotion and graduation requirements, services for children with special needs, eligibility for sports and extracurricular activities, and transfer and acceptance of credits and courses vary greatly from state to state and district to district. While these are not new issues, national emphasis on quality education and higher standards for admission to many post high school education and training institutions increase the stakes for military children. In addition, the added stress of family separation due to deployments has combined with transition issues to increase the need for providing information and support to military families.

Under our new family structure which combines our child and youth programs with our Airman and Family Readiness Centers, progress in institutionalizing support for Air Force connected students attending public, private, DoD Dependent Schools, home and on-line schools has been made. Overseas, Air Force bases locally fund school liaisons and 12 stateside installations fund these positions as well. Other Air Force bases use their staff in the Airman and Family Readiness Centers to provide school liaison support as a collateral duty with other family support services. Despite limited funding, major commands and installations work creative initiatives such as providing webcasts of graduations so parents can share these occasions while deployed. Additionally, a senior military officer or DoD civilian has been designated to attend local school board meetings to advocate for the interests of Air Force families.

We sponsor training for staff working education issues in conjunction with the Military Child Education Coalition. We partner with the Army and Navy to offer training to schools near co-located installations. We continue to strengthen our partnerships with the National Military Family Association, Military Impacted Schools Association, Military Child Education Coalition, Department of Defense Education Agency, the other Services, and the Department of Education, in a concentrated effort to ease the tough challenges that face military students and their families.

## **SUPPORT FOR WORKING SPOUSES**

Today, many spouses work outside the home. While many spouses seek the fulfillment of professional careers, others must work to meet their families' financial demands in order to maintain reasonable quality of life levels, making spouse employment and career development opportunities crucial for recruitment and retention. Studies show more than 50 percent of Air Force Spouses currently work outside the home. These surveys show that military spouses typically earn less than their civilian counterparts, though 7 of 10 have some college education.

Air Force programs provide spouses with knowledge and skills to develop and maintain a successful career within the framework of the mobile military lifestyle. We work with local community employers to raise awareness on the value of hiring military spouses. Airman and Family Readiness Centers provide classes and individual consultation on career planning and all phases of the job search as well as assistance with on-line resources and access to computers.

We are also working with the DoD to support spouse employment initiatives through programs such as Spouses to Teachers and My Career Advancement Account (CAA). My CAA provides up to \$6,000 for our spouses to put toward education, licensure, certification, and continuing education for a portable career. We are closely watching the progress of implementation for the Executive Order on Spouse Federal Hiring Authority that will allow managers in all federal agencies to hire qualified military spouses through a military spouse preference program.

The Air Force Aid Society (AFAS) sponsors a Spouse Tuition Assistance Program which grants up to \$1,500 for spouses stationed overseas to defer the cost of college tuition and the Spouse Employment Training Program. AFAS also funds up to \$10,000 to Airman and Family Readiness Centers to develop programs that assist spouses with requirements for portable careers. So far in 2009, 32 grant proposals have been approved across the Air Force. Participants will train in medical transcription, pharmacy technology, computers, nursing assistance, and special needs education.

## **CHILD AND YOUTH PROGRAMS**

Significant progress has been made this year toward helping Airmen and their families balance the competing demands of parenting and military service. Readily available, high-quality and affordable child care and youth programs continue to be a workforce issue with direct impact on mission readiness.

The Expanded Child Care program provides 16,000 hours of child care each month to assist Airmen who require additional child care support during increased shifts, deployments, or when they work in excess of a normal duty day. The Returning Home Care program supports Airmen returning from a 30-day or longer deployment in support of contingency operations with 16 hours of free child care.

To ensure child care is affordable when a space is unavailable at the child development center or school age program, the Family Child Care Subsidy program provides an average subsidy of \$142 per child per month in Air Force Family Child Care homes.

Our partnership with the Air Force Aid Society in the Give Parents a Break program provides several hours of free child care each month to parents who are dealing with challenges inherent to military life, including deployments, remote tours of duty, and extended hours.

We also continue to expand the Home Community Care program, reducing out-of-pocket expenses for Air Reserve Component members by providing free in-home quality child care during drill weekends. The past year has seen significant expansion to new locations, with a total of 43 participating family child care homes in 37 locations across 26 states typically not near active duty bases. The program offered more than 57,000 hours of child care last year, with 24,000 hours provided in off-base, civilian contracted homes during Unit Training Assembly weekends. We expect the amount of off-base care to increase to 36,000 hours during 2009, and continue to advocate for funds to expand this program.

We proudly sustained outstanding youth development opportunities for Air Force children, from elementary school through high school. Providing support for geographically-separated families has been an area of focus this year, and partnership

opportunities have allowed us to reach additional families living in civilian communities and on active installations.

The European Keystone Summit and associated camps developed in partnership with the National Military Family Association provide residential youth camps during the summer. More than 25,000 Air Force youth participate in camps designed to help them achieve their potential, develop self-esteem, and build resistance to negative pressures.

We focus on fitness through Air Force FitFactor, a program designed to promote healthy lifestyles through physical activity and healthy eating selections for youth ages 6 to 18 years. We reach more than 15,000 youth each year. Our new Air Force FitFamily initiative will roll out in 2010 and allow families to register as a team to enhance family fitness and wellness.

Additionally, our Air Force has made great efforts to expand or create fitness programs for parents and families. Most fitness centers have a family-oriented fitness room and programs that allow parents to exercise with their children. For example, at Ramstein Air Base in Germany, fitness professionals create and support programs such as Mommy and Me, Yoga for Kids and aerobics with strollers. These and other initiatives allow families to participate in outdoor adventure activities, libraries, clubs, and community centers, providing an outlet for families experiencing stressors and connecting them to other military families.

## **EXCEPTIONAL FAMILY MEMBERS AND SPECIAL NEEDS**

As is the case across America, some Air Force families have special needs within their households requiring specialized care or treatment. To identify gaps in necessary services for these families, the Caring for People forum brought together more than 200 Air Force behavioral specialists, chaplains, family advocacy personnel and other family support professionals to focus on issues on deployment, families, schools, special needs, Guard and Reserve families, and single Airmen. The top 11 initiatives briefed to senior leadership included development of a special needs family support program, a social networking plan for military families such as on Facebook, expansion of family support resources for Air Guard and Reserve, expansion of schools support functions, and a focus on single Airmen.



The Air Force identified an emerging need to standardize support and advocacy for families enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP). We have a long-standing and successful process for identifying families and facilitating personnel moves and assignments based on their families' requirements. However, we have determined the need for a companion program to provide families support as they move from location to location. With more 14,000 families enrolled in the EFMP, it is important that each move does not have an adverse effect on their family or career. We are actively engaged in creating a comprehensive program that offers these families consistent support and reassurance through their moves, extended or repeated deployments, and throughout their military career.

### **ASSISTANCE TO SEVERELY INJURED SERVICE MEMBERS**

We have an unwavering obligation to provide care and assistance for seriously wounded, injured or ill Airmen. Our Family Liaison Officers extend support to families of fallen and combat-wounded Airmen, as well as to families of all seriously-injured Airmen who are receiving medical treatment away from their home unit. Family Liaison Officers provide a wide variety of assistance including local transportation, lodging arrangements, assistance with benefits, and referral to various agencies available to assist wounded warriors, their families, and families of fallen heroes.

Last year, we began the Air Force Recovery Care Coordinator program to be the single point of contact to assist seriously injured, ill, and wounded Airmen through the non-clinical aspects of their recovery. Our Recovery Care Coordinators work directly with hospitalized Airmen to develop individualized recovery plans that contain goals and a record of non-clinical assistance provided to our Airmen.

Our Air Force Wounded Warrior Program staff keeps in contact with our medically-retired wounded Airmen for a minimum of five years post retirement and provides a wide-range of assistance, including employment and benefits counseling and referral to a variety of agencies designed to assist wounded veterans. New Air Force policies offer opportunities for them to regain a career path with the Air Force, compete for promotions, and receive priority retraining opportunities if they are no longer qualified in their Air Force Specialty Code. For wounded Airmen with disability ratings of 30

percent or greater and who elect medical retirement or can no longer stay because of their wounds, the Air Force will facilitate offers of civil service positions.

## **SUMMARY**

Again, we thank you for your continued support of our Airmen and their families. Both at home and abroad, these Airmen and their spouses and children are incredible ambassadors for our nation.

They make many sacrifices for our nation. Our families go above and beyond to provide the support and care needed for our Airmen to complete the mission of defending our Nation, its interest and ideals. Their strength, courage and ability to overcome adversity are inspiring.

Our spouses and children watch as their loved one, their hero, is sent into harm's way. I have watched as they wipe the tears away, pick up the extra work load, and press forward with the life they have taken on and keep the home fires burning. These very same families are heroes in their own right. They miss their Airman on holidays and special occasions. They miss their Airman while gathered around birthday cakes, an anniversary table set for two but seated by one, and even a simple board game in the family room. Their children look over at that empty chair in the stands before throwing out a fast ball at the little league game. Yet when the deployment or the day is done, it's our Air Force families who welcome their hero home and back into the fold of family life.

These are only some of the reasons why it is imperative we continue taking care of our Air Force families. Our Airmen have incredible demands placed upon their shoulders as they answer our Nation's call to serve. These Airmen care very deeply for this Great Nation of ours. We as a nation need to do everything we can to care for the families who care for our Airmen.

Thank you and God Bless the United States of America.