

STATEMENT BY
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COMMITTEE

Chairman Punaro and distinguished Members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to talk about our Army Reserve Family Readiness programs. On behalf of General Jack Stultz, Chief of the Army Reserve and our 205,000 Warrior Citizens with their boots on the ground in Iraq, Afghanistan, throughout this great Nation and in 18 other countries around the globe, I welcome this hearing and its focus on Army Reserve Families.

Mr. Chairman, we recruit Soldiers, but we retain Families. Throughout our nearly 100 year history, our legacy has been on the backs of our community-based citizen soldiers who traditionally served one weekend a month and two weeks every summer. There were periods throughout our history where we deployed short-term surges of Soldiers. Most recently during the Gulf War, we deployed more than 84,000 Soldiers for six months in theater. That was last century. This century, we find ourselves fighting a larger, more dispersed enemy in the Global War on Terror. Throughout our century of service to the Nation, our Warrior Citizens have never experienced the operational tempo we are in right now. Our paradigm has changed. As today's Army Reserve, it is imperative that we not overlook the contributions our Army Reserve Families make to the Total Force.

The Army Reserve recognizes that Soldiers and their relationship with their spouse and their Family is critical to the overall effectiveness of the Soldier when they are deployed. Army Reserve Families have also never experienced this operational tempo. Unlike Families of Active duty Soldiers, our Army Reserve Families do not live on military installations and may not live in a community with a significant military population. In many cases, Army Reserve spouses are isolated from other Army Reserve spouses – they may live hundreds of miles from the nearest Army Reserve spouse who can understand the unique problems, concerns, and the changing family dynamics and relationships the Family undergoes when a Soldier deploys.

It's been four years since we implemented a deployment cycle support plan for Soldiers and their Families. It consists of a series of screenings at different stages in the mobilization, training and deployment cycles and when the Soldier returns home. I believe we do a good job of preparing our Families for the deployment of a loved one. On a report card, I would give the Army Reserve a "B" for our programs. But our programs do not now go beyond 180 days after a Soldier has been mobilized. Right now, we do not have the resources in manpower and structure to support a comprehensive reintegration Concept Plan to provide ongoing assistance and services to Soldiers and their Families for 180 days post-mobilization. We need additional resources to provide additional program support in the crucial six months post mobilization.

We know these programs are successful, but they have been seriously under funded. Most of our volunteers are spouses, the very people we are in desperate need of reaching.

An Assessment of Army Reserve Family Programs in 2004 found that improvements in Family Programs are needed to ensure that consistent and adequate support is provided. The audit concluded that resources were not prioritized in most instances and lacked command emphasis. Command support varies widely, and though no commander says Family Programs are unimportant, their commitment is not regularly or consistently emphasized to their subordinates.

A number of focus groups were conducted by Walter Reed with Soldiers in theater and found that more than half of those contacted during these focus groups reported that they were neither satisfied with Family Readiness Groups or rear detachments. Part of that dissatisfaction is that Family Programs are understaffed and cannot presently meet the diverse needs of Families during mobilization and surges. We need to change that.

Our Family Programs are designed to serve Families where they live. Because our Families are geographically dispersed, we must market our programs to Families through our web site, magazine articles and referrals. We partner with the Active Component and Army National Guard, as well as community based organization such as 4H, Veterans organizations, and the VFW to reach our Army Reserve Families.

Our most visible success has been the initiation of children's programs. The Army Reserve realizes the unique pressures children of Army Reserve Families face, especially when a parent deploys. During FY 2006, we expanded participation of children of Army Reserve Soldiers in Operation Purple camps. These camps represent a joint effort between the National Military Family Association, the Department of Defense, the National Guard Bureau and local camp providers to help children deal with deployment-related separation issues in a summer camp environment.

Our Child and Youth Services programs are designed to reduce the conflict between parental responsibilities and Soldier mission requirements.

The most significant issue Families raise when one or both parents are mobilized with the Army Reserve is child care. The Army Reserve recognizes this strain and has developed several programs to assist families.

These programs include Operational Military Child Care which helps families "buy down" the cost of child care by identifying state-licensed or regulated child care services in their communities at reduced rates. Operation Child Care is a nationwide voluntary community-based initiative that provides short-term respite and reunion care for children of service members returning home for their two week R&R leave. Operation Military Kids focuses on children of "suddenly military" families. Operation Proud Partners is a partnership with selected Boys and Girls Clubs around the country. The Army Teen Panel was started in 1995 to help teens communicate their concerns to the Army's senior leadership. The Educator Training program is a nationwide training program that helps educators understand the issues children of Army Reserve and National Guard Soldiers have when a parent is mobilized and deployed.

As we implement the Army Force Generation Model, ARFORGEN, which consists of the structured progression of training, resourcing and unit readiness over time, a six year readiness model that will establish predictability to Soldiers, their Families and employers, it is necessary that we receive additional resources in manpower and funding for Family members to attend Army Reserve Family Program events associated with ARFORGEN.

There is no argument that multiple deployments create stress on the Family and on a marriage. As I noted earlier, we recruit Soldiers, but we retain Families. One issue that we have heard often is that Soldiers are leaving the military because of the stress deployments have on the Family. If the Soldier deploying is the primary earner for the Family, occasionally their military salary is not as high as their civilian salary. The change in healthcare coverage that adds the entire Family along with the Soldier to the TRICARE system, often means they must adjust their healthcare coverage. Finally, the stress of not knowing when or if the deployed spouse will return home safely adds to the already elevated stress of the Family.

The Army Reserve has received funding to cover salaries for those leading and initiating this program. The "Strong Bonds" program must be fully funded by Congress to continue to be successful.

Mr. Chairman, General Stultz took command of the Army Reserve one year ago. I know in the past twelve months he has had the opportunity to meet with Soldiers in theater and their Families here at home. He has repeatedly mentioned that it is a honor to serve with what he believes are this century's "greatest generation." If we are to retain these great Soldiers and future leaders, we must make a commitment to our Soldiers and their Families. Full funding for Army Reserve Family Programs will enable the Army Reserve to continue to serve this great nation as an operational force.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you the status of our Family Programs. I look forward to your questions.