



The Adjutant General's Department

Testimony of Major General John Harris, Adjutant General for Ohio

Finance Subcommittee on Transportation

February 18, 2021

Chairman Patton, Ranking Member Skindell and members of the Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Transportation, I am Major General John Harris, and I have the distinct honor of representing and leading the more than 16,000 Soldiers, Airmen, State Defense Force members and civilians who are your Ohio National Guard.

My testimony today encompasses a brief description of our accomplishments across the past demanding year, comments supporting the budget submission before you, and my perspective on the Ohio National Guard's promising future.

Accomplishments

With more than three decades of military service, I never could have imagined the role that the Ohio National Guard has performed in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as civil unrest. This September will mark 20 years since the 9/11 attacks. During that time, the National Guard has become a fully operational force and a major contributor to combat operations and worldwide deployments in support of the national defense strategy. In 2020, in addition to those global demands, the National Guard validated its role as the nation's primary homeland response team. That change, though extremely difficult at times and without any historic precedence, forced the Ohio National Guard to fully test its agility, unique capacity, and absolute commitment to serving nation and state regardless of the environment or the mission.

As I testify before you today, your Ohio National Guard is helping to mitigate food insecurity at 14 regional food banks across this state, working alongside the Ohio Department of Health to rapidly receive and package life-saving COVID-19 vaccines, and supporting the Ohio Department of Aging in inoculating our most at-risk populations. We have provided trained and ready personnel, essential equipment, multiple facilities, and above all, expertise to protect our citizens and communities, mitigate COVID-19, and support law enforcement agencies when requested. We provided highly-trained forces to the National Capitol Region in support of the 59th Presidential Inauguration. We surged staffing into state and federal prisons when they faced COVID outbreaks. All of this while continuing to prepare and deploy our Soldiers and Airmen across the globe without missing a single obligation. The Ohio National Guard currently has over 800 members deployed worldwide and over 900 on duty here in Ohio. Moreover, there are currently over 160 Ohio Army National Guard members supporting the National Capital Region through March of 2021.

My intention in emphasizing our dual role and this demanding operational tempo is two-fold. First, to thank all of you for your enduring support of the Ohio National Guard and the continued trust that you have in our organization, its Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors, and civilian employees. We do not take public trust for granted and continually strive to illustrate a high return on investment for the funding we receive, while providing the best trained and prepared National Guard possible.

Second, to emphasize that maintaining highly trained and ready forces is more important now than ever. The Ohio National Guard requires adequate staffing to organize, train, equip, and direct our forces as we move into an uncertain future. Additionally, and as an often overlooked aspect of the budget discussion, to identify our readiness centers and training facilities as one of the most prominent factors in our ability to consistently and successfully fulfill short-notice, no-fail missions now and going forward. The ability of the Ohio National Guard to deliver ready forces is based partly on the quality and capacity of the facilities we use to assemble, train, and prepare for deployments throughout the state. These readiness and training facilities are becoming more vital to our mission as their lifespan and inherent limitations, such as technology, work space, and ability to renovate, become more evident.

Before I address the budget, I want to personally thank Sen. Theresa Gavarone and Secretary of State Frank LaRose for sponsoring and contributing to the passage of Senate Bill 52 during the 133rd General Assembly. The establishment of the Ohio Cyber Reserve has allowed the state of Ohio and the Ohio National Guard to take substantial steps toward protecting our state and municipalities by deterring, responding to, and mitigating cyber threats. The Ohio Cyber Reserve's unique

collaboration between the private sector, public agencies, and the military, draws together civilian volunteers, cyber experts and IT professionals to serve Ohio as cyber warriors. In that role, they assist the National Guard in responding to attacks, conducting vulnerability assessments of critical infrastructure, and helping develop the workforce of the future.

Recently, a member of the Ohio Cyber Reserve was mobilized on state active duty. His individual response as a member of an Ohio National Guard team was part of an integrated state government effort to assist a local government agency in mitigating a breach that included cyber ransom activities. The ability to provide very unique expertise to that response is a direct result of the passage of Senate Bill 52 and serves to highlight how the Ohio National Guard is preparing for evolving threats. We look forward to expanding our ability to assist in responses similar to this through continued funding of the Ohio Cyber Collaboration Committee (OC3), Ohio Cyber Range, and our Ohio Cyber Reserve.

Budget

The state budget is a necessary complement to federal appropriations for the operation of the Ohio Army and Air National Guard and as match to federal military construction (MILCON) funds. This proposed budget will enable us to continue to meet our state and federal missions while incrementally improving our facilities through a deliberate cycle of design, renovation, construction, and ongoing maintenance.

Our proposed General Revenue Fund (GRF) appropriation is \$11 million per fiscal year, which represents 6.9% growth from fiscal year 2021, and will permit us to

operate a sufficient maintenance program at 44 Army National Guard readiness centers encompassing more than 25,000 acres in 37 Ohio counties. These funds are a necessary part of our total budget and, taken as a whole, nearly matches the estimated \$11 million dollars in state payroll taxes generated each year through the salaries of our members. The GRF supports our core functions of administration, management, and cybersecurity. Primarily, \$3.6 million goes to directly support the Ohio Army National Guard, \$1.8 million to support the Ohio Air National Guard, \$3 million for central support of both the Army and Air National Guard, \$2.1 million to support the cyber reserve, and a half million to support State Active Duty.

The GRF funding allows the Ohio National Guard to match federal cooperative agreement funding in the amount of \$40.7 million. In addition to state appropriations made to the department we received \$674.4 million in direct federal funding in 2019, which we expect will be approximated in future allocations. Notably, commitment of federal dollars is based on the ability of our state to meet its share of the collective obligations. If state funding were not available, we would lose financial support at the rate of three federal dollars for each state dollar. In this budget there are also line items for dedicated purpose funds that are primarily self-sufficient and self-sustaining activities, including lodging programs at the Camp Perry Joint Training Center.

With a solid funding base from the State, the dedicated men and women of your National Guard have successfully supported, and will continue to support, our communities and completed missions in Ohio and around the world.

Facilities

The readiness centers and air wings where our members prepare for their state and federal missions are aging and outdated, with the majority of the facilities built more than 40 years ago. As the safety and health of our service members remain our first priority, we are also concerned with providing facilities that have the capacity to serve the needs of a modern military and, as required, to meet the needs of the state during emergencies and other contingencies as shelters, inoculation centers, distribution points, and key communication nodes. As our facilities have been at the forefront of the COVID-19 response for over 11 months, we have seen first-hand the impact of deferred maintenance, inadequate infrastructure (utilities, information technology, parking capacity), and fair wear and tear as multiple iterations of alert, mobilization, deployment, and redeployment have forced us to operate from buildings built for a different time and a very different operational tempo. We have moved from a strategic reserve to an operational force, but our facilities have not made the transition with us.

Our state staffing levels decreased by 20% over recent years and have held steady at the reduced level since 2017, with security, firefighting, and maintenance positions eliminated. This same State civilian staff has been essential in providing in-house payroll, administrative, budgeting, public affairs, and logistical support services to all of our members ordered to State Active Duty during 2020 and 2021. This tremendous reduction places a huge burden on a smaller state workforce that is being asked to accomplish a lot more, with a lot less.

Conclusion

Chairman Patton, Ranking member Skindell, and esteemed committee members, thank you for your continued support of your Ohio National Guard. Though I have

identified some pointed needs for the Ohio National Guard, I can honestly tell each of you that your National Guard will emerge from the current COVID-19 emergency stronger, more resilient, and more capable than ever because they are simply great Ohioans. The items Governor DeWine recommends for the Ohio National Guard in this budget provides us the required state funding to maintain a high level of readiness while also allowing us to improve our facilities, increase our state funded staff, and to expand our cyber capacity. As the GRF represents a vital part of building, maintaining, and sustaining the Ohio National Guard you have seen across this last year, your support for this budget allows us to continue to respond, when called, with ready units.

Respectfully submitted,

Major General John Harris

The Adjutant General