



The Adjutant General's Department

Testimony of Major General John Harris, Adjutant General for Ohio

Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee

April 28, 2021

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, I am Major General John Harris Jr., 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.

Though my testimony today is specific to the much needed expansion of the Ohio National Guard Scholarship Program, I want to take a few minutes to update you on the current scope of the Ohio National Guard's missions and our role in mitigating the spread and impact of the COVID19 pandemic in Ohio while continuing to support our numerous global commitments.

As I speak, over 600 National Guard and State Defense Force personnel are working in collaboration with federal, state, and local agencies and authorities to manage, coordinate, and rapidly deliver COVID19 vaccinations into the arms of our

citizens. For only the second time in the Ohio National Guard's history we established a Dual Status Command to effectively synchronize the combined capabilities of the active component and National Guard in order to accomplish the intent of the President and the Governor. In this instance, I selected Air National Guard Brigadier General Rebecca O'Connor, a traditional guard member, to lead a FEMA organized effort to establish mass vaccination sites at key locations across the nation. Her team's efforts at Cleveland State's Wolstein Center have consistently met or exceeded the daily vaccinating target of 6,000 individuals while compounding the success we are having among 15 regional mass vaccination centers and with our mobile vaccination teams. I can tell you that we are doing everything possible, within the resources we have, to vaccinate our citizens and to reinforce our fellow state agencies in their efforts to diminish the COVID19 threat. As of 26 April – we have supported or administered over 275,000 vaccination across 310 separate missions with a clear commitment to continue our efforts until told to stand down or change mission. As I look to the future, I continue to anticipate a need for Ohio National Guard augmentation to receiving and package life-saving COVID-19 vaccines and support vaccinations for our most at-risk populations in long-term care and assisted living facilities through this Summer and into early Fall.

In addition to critical COVID19 missions, your Ohio National Guard is helping to mitigate food insecurity at 14 regional food banks across this state, working with the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services to process an unprecedented volume of unemployment claims, and to remain ready to answer calls for stateside natural disaster response or requests for assistance to local and state law enforcement. We continue to provide trained and ready personnel, essential

equipment, multiple facilities, and above all, expertise to protect our citizens and communities, and to deliver highly-trained forces to the National Capitol Region or overseas missions in accordance with National Defense Strategy. The Ohio National Guard currently has over 800 members deployed worldwide in addition to over 900 on duty here in Ohio. Additionally, there are 81 Ohio Army National Guard members supporting the National Capital Region through May of 2021.

Expansion of the Ohio National Guard Scholarship Fund

My intention in describing our current and future missions has two aims. 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, State Defense Force members, and civilian employees. We do not take public trust for granted and continually strive to demonstrate tangible returns on the funds and appropriations we receive, while providing the best trained and prepared National Guard possible.

Second, to emphasize that attracting and maintaining a highly trained and ready forces is more important now than ever. As the Ohio National Guard leverages the scholarship program as a key facet to our recruiting and retention efforts – it must remain responsive to the needs of the job market for today and for tomorrow. As the scholarship program has changed very little in the last decade, we believe we have reached a distinct threshold where a college degree is no longer the sole path to better compensation, opportunities, or a career for our members. Additionally, as the most recent census results remind us with the loss of a US house seat, it is clear that we must do more to attract and maintain talent in Ohio.

As the job market increasingly looks towards licensure, credentials, apprenticeships, and certifications as determinants of ability, skill, and ultimately relevance – the Ohio National Guard seeks to expand the scholarship program to encompass state and federally approved post-secondary education programs through the Chancellor of Higher Education and Office of Workforce Development. This expansion will not incur additional appropriations, but will create two anticipated outcomes. First, to create a significantly broader approach to how our members are better able to apply their earned benefits in ways that meet their personal goals, timing in entering the workforce, and ability to participate in life-long learning that adjusts to changes in the economy and the job market. For example, a service member could apply a portion of the 96 credit hours toward initial licensure or credentials with the option to expend the remaining credits later as new skills are required or a career change is expected or pending. From a retention perspective this provides real incentives for Ohio National Guard members to re-enlist and remain in service in order to retain their education benefits beyond a six year enlistment period.

Second, we expect to expend less or the same amount of scholarship funds based on how individuals will choose to pursue post-secondary education. As attaining a two or four year degree would no longer be a limitation to scholarship participation, we believe that many Ohio National Guard members will choose shorter routes to the job market resulting in less funds expended or wasted in pursuit of a degree. Here, it is beneficial to the Ohio National Guard to revise its recruiting strategy to focus on other opportunities created by licensure, credentials, apprenticeships, and certifications. Close coordination with the Office

of Workforce Development is critical in shaping the right messages and environment for the expansion.

Before I begin to describe our formal biennium budget request for 2022 and 2023, I wanted to pause and answer any questions you may have on the readiness and posture of your Ohio National Guard or any items concerning our desire to expand the scholarship program.

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 14 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 Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Williams, and esteemed committee members, thank you for your continued support of your Ohio National Guard. 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. Additionally, the expansion of the scholarship program, at no additional cost, allows us to recruit and retain the very best that Ohio can provide while increasing the efficiency and viability of our education benefits. I believe the long-term economic impact of the requested

expansion bears significant consideration and look forward to providing that information in the future.

Respectfully submitted,

Major General John Harris

The Adjutant General