



The Adjutant General's Department

Testimony of Major General John Harris, Adjutant General for Ohio

House Higher Education Committee

October 18, 2023

Chairman Young, Vice Chairwoman Manning, Ranking Member Miller and members of the Higher Education Committee.

I am Major General John Harris, the Adjutant General for Ohio and Commanding General of the Ohio National Guard. Thank you for allowing me to provide interested party testimony and express some concerns about how House Bill 242 will significantly and adversely impact the readiness of the Ohio National Guard. If passed, the ability of the Ohio Guard to sustain readiness to respond to the citizens of Ohio will be placed in jeopardy.

House Bill 242 is part of a nationwide effort by the members of the United States Army Reserve and represents to pass responsibility for readiness of federal forces from the Pentagon to the states. Recently, a similar initiative was unsuccessfully introduced in New Hampshire recently.

It is important to understand that the National Guard differs from all other reserve components. Not only are the other components federal forces that receive all funding from the Pentagon, none of them have the added responsibility of responding to emergencies at the call of the governor as does the National Guard.

While many elements of the reserve components mobilize and deploy for federal missions, the National Guard carries the greater workload in that regard. Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Guam are but a few examples of deployments in which the Guard has carried the lion's share of reserve component obligations.

In addition maintaining the highest operational tempo for overseas missions, the Guard is also the DoD entity tasked with almost all homeland security requirements. The Army Guard has been the continuous go-to force for service on the Southwest border to support U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Additionally, the Ohio National Guard is one of few states tasked to provide air defense units to protect the skies over our nation's capital. Fighter jets and crews able to scramble within 15 minutes to protect defend our skies against threats over the Midwest is a yet another requirement placed on the Ohio Guard for which there is no comparison in other reserve units in Ohio.

In addition to carrying a disproportionate burden for federal missions. The National Guard is the only reserve component with the statutory mandate for no-notice response to natural and manmade disasters. That mandate requires Ohio Guard Soldiers to maintain an incredibly high state of personal readiness. This state of readiness applies not

only to the servicemembers but also to their families and employers. Therefore, business, family, and pet care plans that support same-day responsiveness are the norm for National Guard members.

Recent examples of the Ohio Guard being called to duty with same-day notice include staffing to nursing homes, hospitals, prisons and foodbanks during the COVID crisis, response to civil disturbance in the wake of the George Floyd killings, response to cyber attacks on county and local government systems, and mitigation of damage resulting from ice storms in Lawrence and Gallia Counties. Each of the aforementioned situations were Guard only missions with our Soldiers and Airmen under command and control of the Governor. No federal reserve units in Ohio are required nor are they prepared to respond in the same manner.

Another important distinction is that the National Guard is required to recruit for itself. The US Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) provides new recruits to the Active Component and Army Reserve but not the National Guard. Worse yet, the Guard's recruiting force is carved from a full-time manning pool that is already woefully understaffed compared to the Army Reserve. Unlike the federal reserve components, the Guard relies heavily upon state funding to achieve adequate recruiting levels.

In spite of meeting the same training requirements, enduring higher utilization rates and meeting higher readiness requirements, national policies provide less support and benefits to Guard members than to their reserve counterparts. For example, when a member of other

reserve components complete a short period of service, they are considered veterans. By contrast, many members of the National Guard complete entire careers and retire honorably and are still not considered veterans, denying them important benefits, to include burial in national cemeteries. This is but one example of the many disparities in benefits and entitlements between members of the National Guard and members other reserve components that make recruiting and retaining talent difficult.

In that regard, the most important factor challenging the Guard's ability to maintain readiness is the rapidly transforming recruiting environment. Shifting Ohio demographics create a rapidly shrinking population of recruitable age individuals. Moreover, attitudes about military and public service within that demographic are shifting away from military service and toward other career fields. Finally, the small segment of the population with military service represents a decreasing number of influencers within households who guide young men and women toward military service.

Over the last three years, these factors combined to create a very difficult recruiting environment for the Ohio National Guard. In that period, the assigned strength of both Army and Air National Guard have declined. While both remain above 100 percent manning, failure to reverse the decline in recruiting will jeopardize the future of Ohio's National Guard. Ohio's scholarship programs is the most important tool to ensure the Ohio Guard is able to respond when called with ready units. Introduction of a competing program puts the Ohio National Guard at a significant disadvantage compared to other reserve components with far fewer demands.

The Pentagon is responsible for providing fiscal programs to the federal reserve components. Senior military leaders set priorities for DoD funds. It is unreasonable and unfair to ask states to provide that funding. Most importantly, creation of a program that would compete with Ohio's National Guard scholarship would apply Ohio taxpayer dollars to put Ohio's own response force at a significant disadvantage and put our ability to respond at risk. It would pass a federal burden to Ohio taxpayers and give a significant recruiting advantage force that has no obligation to the citizens of Ohio.

Chairman Young, thank you for the opportunity to provide this important testimony.