



The Adjutant General's Department

Testimony of Major General John Harris, Adjutant General for Ohio

House Public Safety Committee

February 11, 2025

Chairman Abrams, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the House Public Safety Committee, good morning. I am Major General John Harris and as the Adjutant General for the State of Ohio it remains my privilege to again testify before this body and represent the more than 16,000 Soldiers, Airmen, State Defense Force members, and Civilian team members who are always ready, always there - your Ohio National Guard.

Introduction

I want to begin my testimony by describing the Governor's objectives for the Ohio National Guard, my expectations of the organization, and what I think Ohioans deserve to understand about its military and how this budget impacts our capacities and capabilities. The fundamental purpose of the Adjutant General's Department is to recruit, organize, direct, sustain, and posture an agile military organization able to simultaneously serve the needs of Ohio and its communities, our nation, and our allies across the globe. For Governor DeWine, this requires a National Guard that is not only capable of providing immediate response to those emergencies and natural disasters that affect Ohio - but a Guard that is able to proactively and collaboratively address complex and often unfamiliar threats imposed on us by increased narco-criminal activity, cyber-based crimes,

and other emerging challenges to our state and nation. We clearly have great obligations not only to serve at a moment's notice when Ohio needs us most, but also to exemplify the ideals of this state and nation. The strength of the Ohio National Guard begins at the community level, and I believe our commitment to these communities is essential to our long-term success and ability to attract and retain the very best that Ohio offers. Governor DeWine's budget request serves that purpose, to allow the Adjutant General's Department to continue to focus on critical community issues that have state and even national implications.

Accomplishment

To understand Ohio's military now and how it is posturing for the future, I offer the following. Our cyber capability has continued to evolve since its inception. In October 2019, Governor DeWine signed Senate Bill 52, creating the Ohio Cyber Reserve. It rapidly expanded from 52 members in 2022 to 171 members in 2024. Volunteers, all cyber experts, coming from public and private entities across Ohio to offer their skill and knowledge in assisting cities, municipalities, schools, and state agencies in preparing for and mitigating cyber-attacks. This year the Ohio Cyber Reserve completed 88 non-emergency cyber missions resulting in \$1.65 million in cost-savings to the state of Ohio and municipalities through assistance and vulnerability assessments it provided at no charge. The Ohio Cyber Reserve completed all of this while responding to three significant cyber-attacks against two Ohio municipalities and a school district. I believe our ability to continue to fund and expand the Ohio Cyber Reserve is one of the most important issues for my agency and others working to protect the public. So important, that we have established the Ohio Cyber Integration Center in conjunction with Ohio Department of Public Safety and Ohio Division of Homeland Security to monitor and rapidly communicate threats and serve as a command center during responses to cyber-attacks.

An additional and equally important focus, the Ohio National Guard, through the Counter-Drug Program, provides administrative and technical support to federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies in their efforts to counter the flow of illegal narcotics into the state. In 2024, the Counter-Drug Program expanded from 58 Ohio National Guard members to 83. During that same period the program contributed to drug investigations that resulted in seizures totaling

over \$22 million in traditional cash, over \$192 million in crypto currency, and the arrest of 997 individuals. The relationship between the Adjutant General's Department and law enforcement has never been stronger and has evolved consistently to meet the increased trafficking of narcotics into Ohio and our communities. This budget maintains support for necessary personnel and resources to continue to reinforce these efforts and to contribute to community based opioid abuse awareness campaigns and anti-drug grass-roots efforts.

The Adjutant General's Department provides crucial administrative and logistics support when we respond to State Active Duty deployments and emergencies within the state or in support of other states. In March of 2024, the Ohio National Guard responded to the aftermath of a EF3 tornado that hit Logan County. Governor DeWine immediately activated 35 Air National Guard members from the 200th Red Horse Squadron to support the Ohio Department of Transportation and Ohio Department of Natural Resources in removing debris and regaining access to areas adjacent to Indian Lake. The Ohio Air National Guard removed nearly 1,100 tons of debris and cleared 2 miles of road allowing infrastructure to be restored and mitigation and remediation efforts to begin. In September of 2024, the Ohio National Guard deployed in support of relief efforts for Hurricane Helene in North Carolina and Hurricane Milton in Florida. Combined, these Emergency Management Assistance Compact deployments placed 53 Army and Air National Guard members on the ground to expedite rescue and recovery operations, and a return to normalcy for thousands of residents. None of this would have been possible without the combined work of the 284 state employees of the Adjutant General's Department. This budget request allows the Adjutant General's Department to retain the capacity to alert, mobilize, and deploy personnel and equipment anywhere in the state or nation at a moment's notice by maintaining staffing levels.

Budget Request

Governor DeWine's SFY26-27 budget compliments federal appropriations for the operation of the Ohio Army and Air National Guard. Primarily, it allows the Adjutant General's Department and the Ohio National Guard to continue to meet state and federal obligations while also continuing to expand programs that directly impact our communities, this state, and our Guard. Our proposed General Revenue Fund appropriation is \$16.79 and \$16.99 million for fiscal years 2026 and 2027,

respectively, which results in a 12 percent increase for fiscal year 2026 and a 13 percent increase for fiscal year 2027 when compared to fiscal year 2025.

In relating budget cost, the following items are informative. The Adjutant General's Department maintains approximately 1.5 million square feet of buildings and infrastructure. We operate from 55 facilities across 36 counties including three major training areas and four air wings located near Springfield, Mansfield, Toledo, and Columbus. This is one of the largest single infrastructure footprints of any state agency and it takes a complete and competent staff to maintain this vast enterprise. Additionally, this budget allows us to expand our commitment to our uniformed team members by providing additional investments in mental health care specialists focused on addressing Soldier and Airmen mental health readiness and resilience.

Conclusion

Chairman Abrams, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas, and committee members, thank you for your support of the Ohio National Guard and considering the Governor's budget request for the Adjutant General's Department. I can answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

Major General John Harris

The Adjutant General