

**House Resolution 243**  
**Proponent Testimony**  
**House Veterans and Military Development Committee**  
**November 5, 2025**

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Chair, Central Ohio Defense Group

Chair Richardson, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Lawson-Rowe, and members of the House Veterans and Military Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony on House Resolution 243.

My name is Steve Tugend. I chair the Central Ohio Defense Group and am an attorney at Kegler Brown Hill + Ritter. In my capacity as the Chair of the Defense Group, I offer this testimony as a proponent of House Resolution 243 sponsored by Representatives Tracy Richardson and Haraz Ghanbari.

**Central Ohio Defense Group Mission**

The Central Ohio Defense Group is an organization comprised of government, nonprofit and corporate members that is concerned about preserving and growing defense-related jobs in the Central Ohio Region, including jobs in the area of aerospace. The members of the group include One Columbus, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, the City of Whitehall, the City of Columbus, the Columbus Partnership, the Columbus Regional Airport Authority, The Ohio State University, the City of Canal Winchester, Battelle, the Columbus Chamber of Commerce, Franklin County, the Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority, and Kegler, Brown, Hill + Ritter. Together, we advocate for policies that strengthen Ohio's role in our nation's defense supply chain.

**The Current Situation**

The Rickenbacker Air National Guard Base currently hosts the 121<sup>st</sup> Refueling Wing that contains 12 K-135 Stratotanker refueling jets. There are currently 1,200 men and women serving in the 121<sup>st</sup>.

The U.S. Air Force is in the process of recapitalizing its tanker fleet – the jets that can refuel our country's military aircraft in midair. Right now there are 466 Air Force tankers, of which the vast majority are KC-135s; however, these KC-135s are rapidly aging with the youngest KC-135 built in 1964.

For this reason, the Air Force developed and procured the KC-46 airframe to replace about a third of the KC-135s in service. While most of the locations for this new airframe have been identified, the Air Force, in conjunction with the National Guard Bureau, is undertaking a process to select the Air Guard location to swap in 8 KC-135 to replace the chosen installation's KC 135s. In military terms, this is referred to as Main Operating Base 7 or "MOB 7."

Rickenbacker is in contention with 6 of its peer Air Guard Bases around the country in this selection process. Rickenbacker is the only installation in Ohio that is being considered as a possible receiving site.

### **Why HR 243 Matters**

Ohio's defense sector is vital to both national security and our state economy. Here in Central Ohio we have one of the state's premier defense assets in the 121<sup>st</sup> Air Refueling Wing at Rickenbacker Air National Guard Base.

House Resolution 243 is an essential way for Ohio to show support for Rickenbacker's unmatched operational capabilities and strategic location, including:

- Two 12,000-foot heavy-rated runways, upgraded through more than \$62.9 million in infrastructure investment since 2017.
- KC-46 capable ramps and taxiways, supported by the nation's leading air-road-rail intermodal network.
- A new flying operations and simulator facility suitable for the next-generation refueling aircraft.
- A low natural disaster risk, ensuring mission reliability.
- Proximity to over 60% of Department of War customers within four hours, making Rickenbacker an ideal hub for readiness and rapid response

The 121st Air Refueling Wing has repeatedly demonstrated superior performance. In 2024, it was recognized as the Air National Guard's top KC-135 wing, flying more than 3,290 hours and offloading over 17 million pounds of fuel to more than 3,600 aircraft. The Wing operates at 109% manning, has supported eight overseas deployments and 24 major exercises in just five years, and is on track to open a new Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility (SCIF) in 2026.

These achievements are not just statistics — they represent a record of excellence, leadership, and readiness that make Rickenbacker an ideal site for the KC-46 Pegasus.

## **Strategic and Economic Benefits**

Selecting Rickenbacker as a KC-46 operating base would bring major strategic and economic benefits to both Ohio and the nation:

- **Strategic Readiness:** The base's central location, logistics access, and proven performance strengthen U.S. mobility and refueling capacity in support of global defense missions.
- **Economic Impact:** The KC-46 mission would secure and expand hundreds of high-skill, high-value jobs in maintenance, aviation, and logistics throughout Central Ohio.
- **Innovation Ecosystem:** The KC-46 wing would be co-located with leading defense research institutions and private-sector partners such as Anduril.

For these reasons, HR 243 is not simply a symbolic statement — it is a strategic call to action that demonstrates Ohio's unified to national defense and the men and women who serve in it.

It is important for decision makers who are engaged in the site selection process to hear from our state's leadership. HB 243 will deliver this needed message.

By adopting this resolution, you would be joining members of our state's Congressional delegation, who have written a delegation letter in support of Rickenbacker receiving the KC-46.

## **Conclusion**

On behalf of the Central Ohio Defense Group, I respectfully urge the committee to adopt House Resolution 243. The 121st Air Refueling Wing has earned the right to be a central pillar of the next-generation Air Force refueling mission. Selecting Rickenbacker Air National Guard Base for the KC-46 Pegasus will strengthen national security, create economic opportunity, and reaffirm Ohio's longstanding leadership in defense and aerospace innovation.

Chair Richardson, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Lawson-Rowe, and members of the committee — thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.