



The Adjutant General's Department

Testimony of Major General John Harris, Adjutant General for Ohio

Finance Subcommittee on Transportation

March 21, 2023

Chairman Patton, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Transportation, I am Major General John Harris, the Adjutant General for the State of Ohio. It is again my privilege to testify here today representing over 16,000 Soldiers, Airmen, State Defense Force members, and civilian team members who are always ready and always there - your Ohio National Guard.

My testimony today begins with describing the Ohio National Guard's key accomplishments since my last budget testimony. As I believe in transparency and good stewardship of public funds, we remain conscious of demonstrating tangible returns stemming from the public's investment of appropriations and resources toward the Ohio National Guard and the Adjutant General's Department. I know this transparency is critical in understanding who we are as an essential part of state government and national defense strategy. It is also critical in understanding how we are

constantly applying appropriations to evolve and innovate while meeting our obligations to the state of Ohio and to the nation. As I believe we are living in a time of unprecedented and accelerated change, the appropriations the Ohio National Guard receives today allows us to proactively prepare for a very uncertain future.

Accomplishments

We experienced the highest operational tempo in our modern history across the span of 2019 to 2022. Significant to this period was our enduring support to COVID mitigation efforts, critical contributions to law enforcement in the wake of persistent civil unrest, and continued responses to natural disaster at home and throughout the nation. Our operational span encompassed direct support to hospitals in augmenting staff shortages, managing and distributing COVID vaccinations, establishing and managing COVID testing sites, supporting the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction in securing prisons, and assisting the Ohio Department of Aging in ensuring that long-term health care facilities remained viable throughout the state. At our peak we mobilized over 2,500 Army and Air National Guard members including our Ohio Military Reserve and Ohio Naval Militia. All this was accomplished in addition to providing equipment and capabilities to the Ohio Department of Transportation to complete road clearing and debris removal in Southern Ohio, sending forces to Louisiana in the aftermath of Hurricane Ida, and continuing to support contingency operations and deployments worldwide. Most recently your Ohio National Guard provided local authorities with state-of-the-art HAZMAT assessment and modelling capabilities through our Civil Support Team and skilled military police personnel from the National Guard Response Force fully able to support the Ohio State Highway Patrol in securing and safeguarding our fellow citizens.

Since the passage of Senate Bill 52 in early 2019, we have continued to develop a versatile cyber response capacity while expanding on unique partnerships with the University of Cincinnati and University of Akron cyber ranges. In the last year alone, our Ohio Cyber Reserve responded to incidents involving two cyber-attacks against county and municipal governments. In both instances the intent in establishing an organized cyber capability within the Adjutant General's Department was achieved as experienced and skilled volunteers, members of the Ohio Cyber

Reserve, were able to respond in the exact same way the National Guard responds to State Active Duty. In contemplating the imminent risk of cyber-attacks and combined challenges posed in maintaining and securing the cyber domain, my instincts tell me that this area of threats will increasingly consume more time, resources, and effort than anyone can image. My intent is to remain proactive in our engagements with private industry and higher education to understand the current cyber environment while continuing success in attracting new members to the Ohio Cyber Reserve and expanding our participation with Ohio's cyber ranges and the Ohio Cyber Collaboration Committee (OC3).

Budget

This budget compliments federal appropriations for the operation of the Ohio Army and Air National Guard in addition to expanding existing Adjutant General's Department programs and establishing a new recruiting incentive. Significantly, it allows the Ohio National Guard to continue to meet our state and federal obligations while also enabling our organization to adjust to unforecasted expenses incurred by inflation, rising energy costs, and a pressing need to expand our recruiting capabilities to maintain necessary personnel strength. Additionally, and as a consistent budget driver, are increases to federal Air and Army National Guard funding that requires a state match to secure federal appropriations for employee payroll, facility maintenance, and utility costs. Our proposed General Revenue Fund appropriation is \$14.3 and \$14.7 million for fiscal years 2024 and 2025, respectively, which results in a 21.1 percent increase for fiscal year 2024 and a 24.1 percent increase for fiscal year 2025 when compared to 2023.

In relating budget cost, I believe the following items are tremendously informative. The Adjutant General's Department maintains approximately 1.5 million square feet of buildings and infrastructure. This is one of the largest single infrastructure outlays of any state agency. We operate from 44 facilities across 37 counties including three major state training areas and four air wings located near Springfield, Mansfield, Toledo, and Columbus. Of note, three of these air wings currently provide fighter jets, Remote Piloted Aircraft, and in-air refuelers on continuous alert status. Though these missions are vital to our national defense, they further increase our facility and utility costs and will continue to do so into the near future.

For maintenance, \$550,000 each year is dedicated solely to Ohio Army National Guard facilities, the average age of which is 48 years. As I am often reminded, our facilities not only serve as a visible reminder of the Ohio National Guard's presence in our communities, but also as forward operating bases across the state. This fact was apparent during the Ohio National Guard's COVID-19 response, as our armories and readiness centers provided essential platforms able to rapidly receive, prepare, and stage Soldiers, Airmen, and State Defense Force members for onward movement across the state of Ohio, where and when they were needed. As I anticipate inconsistent federal funding for military construction in the near term, our ability to effectively prioritize construction and maintenance efforts must occur in conjunction with seeking increased funding for our facilities.

As I mentioned response capacity and our armories, equally critical to our ability in meeting the needs of the state and nation is recruiting new members for the operational force and for the administrative staff of the Adjutant General's Department. In this budget I have asked to increase our state staffing by 12 team members and to allocate \$500,000 each year to establish a cash enticement that serves to motivate our current members to recruit new military members. As the entire National Guard and all components of the military are facing distinct enlistment challenges, our approach is to incentivize members to recruit friends, family, and coworkers; to assist our recruiting teams in identifying individuals who share our values and possess a willingness to serve our state and the nation.

The increase to staffing for the Adjutant General's Department creates only three positions, of the 12 requested, that are funded completely by the General Revenue Fund. All other positions are eligible to receive federal proceeds subsidizing salaries through an 82% percent federal to 18% percent state match. Two of the three position allow us to expand the reach of the Ohio Cyber Reserve by creating a more capable full-time staff focused on outreach to private industry and higher education. This overall increase to state employee strength, achieving 300 total team members, reverses an acute reduction in manning from the 372 state employees that existed in 2010. As I can attest, this reduction resulted in noticeable deterioration in administrative capacity

and installation management for the Adjutant General's Department and in our ability to adequately support the entire Ohio National Guard throughout day-to-day business operations or during crucial periods of emergency response. I believe this increase will significantly impact the scope and quality of key functions across program management, finance, human resources, and facility maintenance.

For response capability this budget allocates \$349,000 in fiscal year 2024 and \$400,000 in fiscal year 2025 for upgrades to the Ohio Cyber Reserve. In addition to funding the two positions mentioned previously, these funds also allow the cyber reserve to continually acquire the most current computers and software available. My request provides \$550,000 each year to increase Ohio Cyber Range capacity by expanding educational classes and workforce outreach that leads to information technology credentials and in-demand certifications for any of Ohio's students interested in STEM and the increasingly lucrative cyber career field. Based on our continued use and success with the Ohio Cyber Reserve and Ohio Cyber Range, I believe that this investment is key to ensuring that our cutting-edge cyber platforms and programs remain agile and postured to mitigate current and emerging cyber threats aimed at state agencies and local municipalities. This investment has paid dividends in our response capabilities and will continue to set the state of Ohio apart from our peers.

As two final requests for this budget, I am asking to replace 144 critical radios systems that have reached the end of their lifecycle. This replacement requires \$450,000 for fiscal year 2024 and fiscal year 2025 and permits the Ohio National Guard to remain compatible with the state MARCS radio network used extensively by first responders and emergency management agencies across the nation. For the State Defense Force, I am asking for \$70,700 and \$77,720 for fiscal years 2024 and 2025, respectively, which allows the Ohio Military Reserve to expand their training, operations, and administrative capacity. From my perspective and based significantly on their combined contribution to the state throughout our COVID-19 response, the State Defense Force has clearly earned its own appropriations line in the Adjutant General's budget. Previously, we managed State Defense Force costs through the central administration line item, or through funds received from State Active-Duty service. Moving forward, I see the Ohio Military Reserve's

expansion into Unmanned Aircraft System operations and continued competency in mass care and logistics as critical to how the Adjutant General's Department remains postured to respond and assists state agencies and our citizens during emergencies.

Conclusion

Chairman Patton, Ranking member Skindell, and esteemed committee members, thank you for your continued support of your Ohio National Guard and the Adjutant General's Department. The items that Governor Dewine has requested for this budget provides us the required state funding to maintain a high level of readiness while allowing us to improve facilities, increase our state funded staff, and to expand our organized militia and cyber capacity. I am prepared to answer your questions and discuss any of your concerns.

Respectfully submitted,

Major General John Harris
The Adjutant General