



Key Quality of Life Issues Supporting Service Members and Families



- 1. Increase Key Support for Guard and Reserve Members and Their Families:** The high deployment levels of the Guard and Reserve necessitate a reciprocal level of support for the needs of our service members and their families. The desired outcome is that states provide important benefits perceived as 'best practices' by Service members which should be common throughout the states.
- 2. Ensure Deployment Separation Does Not Determine Child Custody Decisions:** Extended separations due to military service necessarily alter short-term custody/visitation arrangements and can have long-term consequences. The desired outcome is for states to appropriately balance the interests of service members who are absent due to military service while preserving the best interests of the child; address delegation of visitation rights; and consider expedited court dockets and the use of electronic communications systems to appropriately accommodate military demands.
- 3. Increase Access to Quality, Affordable Childcare for Military Families:** Demand for child care continues to out-pace capacity. The desired outcome is that states will integrate DoD effectiveness standards into their Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) for childcare programs. Through statewide QRISs, DoD can identify providers eligible for 'approved' status (subsidized care) and partner with other providers to help them reach that status.
- 4. Minimize School Disruption for Military Children During Transition and Deployment:** The mobile military lifestyle creates challenges for children who attend ~8 schools in 12 years plus endure the anxiety of parental separation during deployments. The desired outcome is that states participate in an interstate compact which provides a vehicle for establishing common guidelines for handling issues (class placement, records transfer, immunization requirements, course placement, graduation requirements, and extra curricular opportunities) that impact military children as they transition between schools.
- 5. Enhance Opportunities for Portable Careers for Military Spouses:** Frequent moves and cumbersome licensing and certification requirements limit career options for military spouses. The desired outcome is that states provide alternative certifications, expedite licensing procedures to support portable careers, and employ other considerations for the unique needs of working military spouses.
- 6. Provide Unemployment Compensation Eligibility for Military Spouses:** Frequent moves substantially impact the income of our Service families. The desired outcome is that states recognize that, unlike the private sector, a move mandated by military orders is not 'voluntary' and therefore, the trailing spouse should qualify for unemployment compensation if otherwise eligible.
- 7. Promote Enforcement of the Predatory Lending Regulation:** Some lending practices create a cycle of debt for service members and their families, thus impacting quality of life and military preparedness. The desired outcome is for states to fully enforce DoD Regulation (32 CFR Part 232) which places 36% APR limit on payday, vehicle title, and refund anticipation loans.
- 8. Improve Absentee Voting for Military Members and Their Families:** Citizens need assurance their vote will be counted. The desired outcome is that states authorize flexible processes for absentee voters in the areas recommended by the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) Office.
- 9. Comport State Laws with DoD Rules on Disposition:** Many states require disposition of remains be determined through state-specific documentation or by a priority sequence of next of kin. The desired outcome is for states to recognize the person authorized to direct disposition (PADD) selected by the service member on DD Form 93 (Record of Emergency Data), in accordance with Federal law.
- 10. Satisfy Foreign Language Requirements:** Foreign language proficiency is critical to the United States' ability to meet its security and economic objectives. The desired outcome is for states to work with their business and education sectors to develop centers of influence to enhance language and culture education which meet their requirements and assist with meeting national objectives.

Staff point of contact: Ed Kringer, 703-602-4949 x114, ed.kringer@osd.mil
www.USA4MilitaryFamilies.org

Testimony for the Texas Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs and Military Installations

U.S. Army Garrison, Fort Bliss, Texas

24 August 2010

Good morning Chairman and Committee members. I am the Deputy Garrison Commander for Fort Bliss Transformation. I would like to thank the committee for allowing me the opportunity to talk about Ft. Bliss growth and expansion.

Let me begin by saying Fort Bliss could not have accomplished its unprecedented transformation to date without the unwavering commitment and partnership with El Paso civic leaders and the greater El Paso community. I have not witnessed in my 22 years of service a city and community so closely linked with its military neighbors like El Paso is with our installation. We are without a doubt teammates in our efforts to improve Fort Bliss and the city of El Paso.

Throughout our distinguished history, Fort Bliss has served as an infantry post, a cavalry post and most recently a first class Air Defense Artillery Center of Excellence. Rated number one in military value according to the Department of Defense 2005 BRAC report, Ft. Bliss' 1.1 million acres of training area, which is larger than the state of Rhode Island, coupled with our ability to fire every weapon system in the Army's inventory makes us the premier training, mobilization and deployment installation in the continental United States in our assessment.

As a result of the BRAC announcement, Fort Bliss has transformed from a Training and Doctrine Command post into a Forces Command mounted maneuver warfare installation with the 1st Armored Division as our centerpiece.

In 2005, the Fort Bliss population consisted of approximately 9,000 Soldiers, 15,000 Family members and 6,500 school aged children. By 2012, our population will have tripled to 34,000 Soldiers, 48,000 Family members and 18,000 school aged children, based on Army modeling, as a result of BRAC, Global Defense Posture Realignment, the Army Campaign Plan, Army Modular Force, and Grow the Army initiatives. In addition to the population growth projections, Fort Bliss will support an almost 2,000 person Installation Management Command (IMCOM) civilian personnel workforce, over 77,000 retirees and their families, and thousands of mobilizing and demobilizing service members fighting in overseas contingency operations.

Once the full complement of Soldiers arrive in 2012, we will have an estimated annual local economic impact of approximately \$3.9 billion based on a University of Texas at El Paso economic study. As our partner in Fort Bliss expansion, the city of El Paso developed and executed a Regional Growth Management Plan that encompassed housing developer incentives to attract development in the community, construction and expansion of local area schools in largely military populated districts, and expansion of roads and transportation networks to name a few noteworthy accomplishments.

In support of installation growth, Fort Bliss will execute approximately \$4.9 billion in programmed construction projects which equates to numerous operational, quality of life, and training ranges and

facilities. To date, approximately \$3.2 billion has been obligated with \$2.5 billion worth of physical construction completed. More specifically, our Fiscal Year 2010 construction program totals \$391 million and contains the final funded increments to the Combat Aviation Brigade and Heavy Brigade Combat Team number three projects which will complete BRAC-funded construction.

Fort Bliss is executing a three-pronged construction program encompassing operational buildings, quality of life facilities, and state-of-the-art training ranges. Our intent is for all three components to keep pace with one another in construction programming and execution to ensure our Soldiers and Family members have adequate facilities to work, train, recreate and live.

As of today, we are in multiple stages of completing our programmed operational, or unit, facilities: barracks, motor pools, and company thru brigade administrative headquarters. Our accomplishments include completion of one temporary modular Brigade Combat Team complex in 2005 and two Heavy Brigade Combat Team complexes in 2008 and 2009 respectively. Currently, construction is on-going for multiple projects including our third Heavy Brigade Combat Team complex, two Infantry Brigade Combat Team complexes, and Combat Aviation and Fires Brigade facilities as well.

In terms of quality of life projects, we are executing incremental builds of child and youth services, medical and dental, and recreational facilities. These planned and completed projects include three child development centers (new-born to 5 yrs), three school aged services (6 – 10 yrs), two youth activity centers (11 – 18 yrs), two dental clinics, two Soldier/Family health clinics, Warrior in Transition Unit complex (232 bed barracks, Soldier/Family Assistance Center, administrative headquarters, Oct 09 to Feb 11), chapel, physical fitness center, indoor aquatics center, community activity center and outdoor pool, and new Military Police and Fire Station.

Of particular note is our new William Beaumont Army Medical Center hospital campus that should begin construction in fourth quarter, Fiscal Year 2011 with a five year completion timeline. This fully authorized and incrementally funded \$950M hospital will consist of state-of-the-art equipment and capabilities. For this specific project, the TRICARE Management Authority (TMA) will utilize an evidence-based design approach to provide the best possible facility for our active duty and family member population.

Our training areas, where we prepare Soldiers to conduct full spectrum operations, have experienced significant transformation as well. With a weapons range construction program of approximately \$400 million, we have planned and programmed world class training facilities to include, but not limited to, Urban Assault Courses, Light Demolition Ranges, Shoot-houses, an Infantry Platoon Battle Course, Digital Multi-purpose Training Range and Complex, a Digital Air Ground Integration Range, and a Combined Arms Collective Training Facility.

As good stewards of the environment, we are cognizant of the fact that our increased maneuver and weapons training activities will affect the surrounding community particularly with regards to noise. To mitigate these effects, we have effectively used the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program and the DoD Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative (REPI) to prevent incompatible land use

adjacent to the installation. As part of our on-going operational noise program, we will continue to work with the City of El Paso and surrounding communities to address noise and land use concerns.

In summary, Fort Bliss has benefitted from an absolutely superb working relationship with the El Paso community led by Mayor Cook and the City Council. Our combined planning, and execution, efforts have achieved success thus far, and I am confident we will sustain this momentum well into the future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Fort Bliss.