

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

**KENNETH O. PRESTON
SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE ARMY**

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

FIRST SESSION, 111TH CONGRESS

ON ARMY FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMS

JULY 22, 2009

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION
UNTIL RELEASED
BY THE COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES**

STATEMENT BY
KENNETH O. PRESTON
SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE ARMY

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I want to thank you for this opportunity to sit before you today and represent the 1.1 million men and women of America's Army.

Your support in the past year and your continued support today have had a tremendous impact on our Army's ability to prevail in the Nation's war against terrorism. Your support allows us to ensure our Soldiers are fully prepared for their missions and to support their Family members who wait patiently for their Soldiers to come home.

Today, the American Soldier is busier than ever. We currently have more than 260,000 Soldiers forward deployed to 80 countries around the world. We have over 150,000 deployed to Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa in Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs), multi-functional brigades, functional brigades and other force enabling units. Additionally, 260,000 Army Civilians are performing critical missions in support of the Army. More than 4,100 of our Civilians and more than 33,000 U.S. contractors are forward-deployed, performing vital missions abroad. In addition, there are 67,300 of our National Guard and 30,900 Reserve Soldiers mobilized today, serving all around the world. Soldiers deployed to the Horn of Africa are training the Djiboutian and other armies, while denying terrorists a sanctuary in which to run their terrorist camps. Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan take the fight to the enemy every day while recruiting, training, and equipping their armies and police forces to provide a safe and secure environment for their citizens.

During the past year, I traveled to visit, speak, and listen to Soldiers and their Families all over the world. I have seen daily the tremendous work and sacrifices of the American Soldier, our Army Civilians and their Families. The culture of innovation fostered by our young men and women in Iraq and Afghanistan continues to show the American spirit of ingenuity, even under the most challenging of environments.

Family Programs

Recognizing the commitment and increasing sacrifices that our Families are making every day, on April 17, 2008, we launched the Army Community Covenant. The Army Community Covenant is a partnership with civic leaders at both local and state levels with our installation leaders. Local communities and installations signed Community Covenants over the past year at all installations around the world. The Covenant recognizes the commitment Soldiers and their Families are making every day, and the strength of the Community comes from the support of Employers, Educators, Civic and Business leaders, and their Citizens, partnering with our installation leaders to enhance quality of life.

The Army Family Covenant

Recognizing that the strength of our Army comes from the strength of our Army Families, the Army leadership unveiled the Army Family Covenant in October 2007. The Covenant institutionalizes the Army's commitment to provide Soldiers and Families – Active, Guard, and Reserve – a quality of life equal to their level of commitment and service and recognizes the important sacrifices they make every day to defend the Nation. The Covenant compels the Army to improve Soldier and Family readiness by standardizing Soldier and Family programs and services, increasing accessibility to health care, improving Soldier and Family housing, ensuring excellence in schools and child and youth services, and expanding education and employment opportunities for Family members. The Army Family Covenant conveys our commitment in seven general areas: standardizing Family programs; increasing access and quality of health care; improving Soldier and Family housing; ensuring excellence in our schools, youth services, and child care facilities; expanding education and employment opportunities for Family Members; improving Soldier quality of life in recreation, travel, and the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers program; and improving relationships with local communities and marketplaces. In FY08, the Army committed \$1.4 billion to our existing Family Programs creating an immediate, positive impact on our Families.

The Army Family Covenant incorporated programs designed to build resilience of Children and Adolescents through improved services and programs that mitigate depression, anxiety, behavioral problems, and the stress of frequent military moves. The Army Family Covenant hired 161 additional School Liaison Officers and 72 Child Behavioral Consultant at 44 high operational tempo Garrison installations. The Covenant assigned 67 Military Family Life Consultants to the 2009 Summer Enrichment Programs. We established the Military Child and Adolescent Center of Excellence (MCACOE) at Madigan Army Medical Center at Fort Lewis, Washington. The MCACOE develops and implements best practices from military and civilian programs to support children of Soldiers.

We hired 1,079 new Family Readiness Support Assistants to provide additional support to Family Readiness Groups in deployable units across the Army. As members of the brigade or battalion commander's staff, FRSA's coordinate FRG activities within units and update commanders on program status and services available to Soldiers and their Families. FRSA's link Family members with other Army support agencies and programs. FRSA's serve as the linchpin between the commander, the FRG leader, and the installation to ensure all participants are linked and supported.

FRSA's assist with the preparation of pre-deployment and redeployment activities, schedule and coordinate Family readiness or unit-sponsored training, assist in development and distribution of unit newsletters, coordinate video teleconferences for Families and deployed Soldiers, and serve as links between garrison community agencies and units. FRSA's utilize Army One Source to gather information of value for the FRG leaders. The FRSA position remains in place when the unit is not deployed, providing continuity in a world climate that requires units to participate in multiple deployments. We supported 249 enduring Army National Guard Family Assistance Centers to assist Soldiers and Families in accessing support services regardless of their geographic locations.

The Army Family Covenant is in its second year, and the commitment is enduring. The Soldier and Family Action Plan provides the roadmap to review and strengthen existing programs and services. Although there is much work to do, the Army has made significant progress in improving Soldier and Family programs; health care; housing; child, youth, and school services; recreation; education; and employment opportunities. We have closed the staffing gaps in Army Community Service, and we are systematically evaluating Family programs through surveys, feedback, and focus groups in order to calibrate services to address customer needs.

The Army Family Covenant continues a legacy of service and support to Soldiers and Families. It reflects a continuum of Army dedication to sustain and partner with Soldiers and their Families to build an environment where they can prosper and realize their potential, all essential in sustaining an All-Volunteer Force.

Army Community Covenant

Recognizing the commitment and increasing sacrifices that our Families are making every day, on April 17, 2008, we launched the Army Community Covenant. The Army Community Covenant is a partnership with civic leaders at both local and state levels with our installation leaders. Local communities and installations signed 60 Community Covenants over this year at all installations and communities around the world with 23 scheduled through November 2009. The Covenant recognizes the commitment Soldiers and their Families are making every day, and the strength of the Community comes from the support of Employers, Educators, Civic and Business leaders, and their Citizens, partnering with our installation leaders to enhance quality of life.

Soldier and Family Assistance Centers

The Army developed Soldier and Family Assistance Centers (SFACs) at installations with Warrior Transition Units (WTUs). Centers provide a safe haven where Warriors in Transition and DoD Civilians and their Families can gather for

mutual support and camaraderie to aid physical, spiritual, and mental healing. Services include transition support, financial counseling, child care and education counseling. SFACs act as a conduit for other federal, state, local and non-governmental agencies.

Military One-Source

Military One-Source continues to be a multi-component approach for community support and services to meet the diverse needs of Soldiers and Families. The Army further developed Army One Source (AOS) to provide Soldiers and their Families the service specific care they require to sustain themselves. AOS integrates Family Programs and services for all Active, Guard, and Reserve Soldiers, and Families. AOS provides Soldiers and their Families single portal access for all programs and services. AOS provides 24-hours a day, 7-days per week toll-free information, referral telephone line and internet based services. We released the eArmy Family Messaging System, a key component of AOS. The eArmy Family Messaging System is a state of the art, multi-media tool for deployed commanders to improve communication with Army Soldiers and Family members at home by mail and Short Message Service (SMS) text messages. AOS provides 14 baseline services at the installations' Army Community Services office, National Guard Family Assistance Centers and Reserve Readiness Centers. In FY08, AOS received more than 20 million visitors per month. To date, there are more than 125,000 registered users Army wide.

To support Families geographically dispersed away from traditional installations, we initiated a Virtual Family Readiness Group (vFRG). The vFRG is a web-based system that provides all of the functionality of a traditional FRG in an on-line setting to meet the needs of those geographically dispersed units and families. Unlike traditional FRGs that are immediately located with the unit, the vFRG links the deployed Soldier, their Family, the FRG leader, the unit commander, the rear detachment, and other Family readiness personnel on their own controlled access web portal. The vFRG facilitates the exchange of

information and provides a sense of community, using technology to automate manual processes and provide enhanced services and communications. Over 1,300 vFRGs have been established, linking Families on the home front to those forward deployed.

The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) provides support for Soldiers and Families of the National Guard and Army Reserve to make them self-reliant and resilient throughout the entire deployment cycle. The deployment cycle includes all phases of pre-deployment, deployment, demobilization, and post-deployment reconstitution. The YRRP consists of 30, 60, and 90-day post-deployment requirements that are hosted at conferences at no cost for Soldiers and Family Members. YRRP includes partnerships with all military support services within the state; all major veteran service organizations, all relevant state government departments and agencies, civilian organizations established to assist military families, relevant community service organizations, and organizations with a role in disaster response. In FY 2009, 800 YRRP events were held nation-wide. More than 45, 000 Soldiers and 51,000 Family Members were served.

Medical Care

TRICARE is the health care program serving the Active, Guard and Reserve members, retirees, their Families, survivors and certain former spouses worldwide. As a major component of the Military Health System, TRICARE brings together the health care resources of the uniformed services and supplements them with networks of civilian health care professionals, institutions, pharmacies and suppliers to provide access to high-quality health care services while maintaining the capability to support military operations.

TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS) is a premium based health plan that qualified Guard and Reserve members may purchase unless eligible for coverage under the Federal Employees Health Benefits program if either the member or spouse is eligible to purchase the FEHB then the member and family are not eligible to purchase TRS. TRS offers coverage similar to TRICARE

Standard and TRICARE Extra, and a monthly premium is charged at \$47.51 for the Soldier or \$180.17 for the Soldier and Family. They receive comprehensive coverage with access to TRICARE-authorized providers. They may access care from a military treatment facility on a space-available basis only.

TRICARE currently has 9.4 million eligible beneficiaries worldwide. There are 59 military hospitals, 413 medical clinics, and 413 dental clinics. For active duty members, Purchased Care Systems provide medical treatment for small populations of Soldiers, areas of rapid growth of Soldier populations, distance to a Military Treatment Facility is too far or the needed medical service is not available at the military treatment facility. Our Army medical facilities are consistently accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations and are well maintained and operated. Medical technology is advancing at an enormous pace, and DoD is continually evaluating how to ensure the medical treatment facility infrastructure continues to support the demands of modern medicine while providing the most efficient and patient focused facilities to support our wounded warriors, family members and retirees. Soldiers and Family members routinely list access to quality medical care as a priority to them and as one of the main reasons they opt to stay with the Army Team.

We created 32 Warrior Transition Units to support more than 9,000 wounded, ill, or injured Soldiers, with a singular focus on warrior healing and support to their Army Families. We established 9 community-based health care organizations to help our wounded, ill, and injured Soldiers focus on their treatment, rehabilitation, and transition. We enhanced care for mild Traumatic Brain Injury (mTBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and conducted a TBI/PTSD chain teaching program for all Soldiers and Families. The chain teaching program focused on educating Soldiers and leaders about the symptoms of TBI/PTSD and to work towards eliminating the stigma associated with asking for help.

Survivor Outreach Services

Survivor Outreach Services (SOS) provides a standardized, multi-agency, decentralized approach to improving support for Survivors of Fallen Soldiers in communities closest to where Families live. The program standardizes services for Survivors and provides trained experts in benefits counseling, financial counseling, grief counseling, and casualty assistance. The SOS process also places emphasis on the Soldier's responsibility to prepare, prior to deployment, for the possibility of death. This preparation involves the Soldier, the Soldier's spouse, children, and extended Family. SOS supports Soldier and Family readiness during and after the painful and devastating experience of the loss of a loved one.

SOS provides support to Casualty Assistance Officers to ensure Families receive the most current information on benefits and entitlements and have access to long-term financial and emotional support. Legal support for survivors includes estate planning, will preparation, probate planning, and assistance in preparing estate-related tax documents.

Service delivery strategies include a variety of services such as Web-based accessibility, outreach, face-to-face, and group services. SOS is available 24/7 with foreign language and special needs accommodation capabilities. Services are offered at stateside, overseas, and geographically dispersed locations.

The Army Family Action Plan

The Army recently celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the creation of the Army Family Action Plan (AFAP). On August 15, 1983, Army Chief of Staff General John A. Wickham published a groundbreaking white paper *The Army Family*, which identified the need for the Army to increase support to its Families. General Wickham asserted that a healthy Family environment allows Soldiers to concentrate more on their mission. He set a new vision and course for Army Families that carries on to this day.

The mission of the AFAP is to help Army leaders address the needs and concerns of the Army Family from a grass roots perspective. The program uses Army Family representatives from around the world to identify issues that will improve the standard of living for Soldiers and Families. This feedback to leaders provides a way for policy change to become a tangible end-product for the Army Family. It addresses quality of life issues for Soldiers, retirees, Department of Army Civilian employees, and their Family members, and now includes Warriors in Transition (WT) and Survivors of Fallen Soldiers. The Army remains committed to AFAP as a means for Soldiers and Families to let the Army know what works, what does not, and what they think will fix it.

During AFAP's 25 years, 651 issues have been worked by the Army. Of those: 84 are active, five have been combined with other active issues; 442 have been completed; and 120 have been determined to be unattainable. AFAP issues have resulted in 110 legislative changes, 155 changes to Department of Defense (DoD) or Army policies; and 177 new or improved programs or services. Over 60 percent of AFAP issues impact all Services. The majority AFAP issues are related to force support (32 percent), followed by medical (21 percent), relocation (20 percent), Family support (17 percent), and youth (10 percent).

As a result of Congressional legislation passed in 2008, three of the most critical active AFAP issues were successfully resolved: Distribution of the Montgomery G.I. Bill Benefits to Family Members, Paternity Permissive Temporary Duty, and In-State College Tuition. Thank you for hearing and supporting our Families' issues by passing this legislation.

Quality of life and support to Soldiers and Families will remain a primary focus through AFAP and the Army Family Covenant. AFAP will continue to support the Army Family as emerging quality of life issues are brought to the Army leadership for resolution. AFAP will continue to be the "Voice of the Army Family," taking on issues such as increasing support for Warriors in Transition and Survivors of the Fallen, refining Soldier Family Action Plan tasks, and reaching out to geographically dispersed Soldiers and Families.

Military families routinely move from installation to installation both here in the U.S. and overseas. These frequent moves pose unique challenges to the Families of school aged children. These challenges include the transfer of records and credit, course sequencing, graduation requirements, redundant or missed entrance exams, and kindergarten and first grade entrance age variations. The average military child averages two moves during their high school years and can experience six to nine different school systems in their lives from kindergarten through 12th grade. The Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, in cooperation with the Council of State Governments, drafted a Department of Defense Interstate Compact that addresses these issues. The Compact is now active in 25 states with Ohio being the last state to sign on July 20, 2009. I ask your support and emphasis for this critical state legislation as it deals directly with our school-aged children, removes barriers to educational success imposed on the children of all Military Families, and allows for a more uniformed treatment of Military children transferring between school districts and states.

Army Child, Youth, and School Services

Army Child, Youth, and School Services (CYSS) are an immeasurable force multiplier. CYSS's is mission essential for our Soldiers and Families in helping to reduce the conflict between their responsibilities as parents and their mission as Soldiers. Several factors contribute significantly to the necessity of child care and youth supervision for our Families. Military Families are generally younger than the average American family and are often separated from their own extended family support system. Forty-eight percent of Soldiers who deploy have children under the age of two. Soldiers' duties require child care and youth supervision options up to 10 to 14 hours a day including early mornings, evenings, and weekends. Remote duty stations and overseas locations often lack adequate care options, when one spouse deploys we create a geographical single parent. Last year, CYSS expanded deployment cycle support by increasing operating hours for Child and Youth Service Programs and increased

respite care from 5 to 16 hours per child per month. Child Development Centers offer more hourly and respite child care services to help parents and guardians find the time to address personal needs such as medical appointments or to have a break from the stress of being a geographical single parent during the deployment cycle. Families of deployed Soldiers have the opportunity to access and receive respite child care at no cost. CYSS eliminated registration fees and reduced other program fees to ease the financial burden of Families. CYSS increased support for Warriors in Transition such as no-cost hourly child care to Families and caregivers during medical appointments. To help meet the increasing demand for available spaces, the Army added 72 centers in FY08 with an additional 11 centers programmed for fiscal years 2010 through 2014.

Since Army Child, Youth, and School Services are critical to the Army's All Volunteer Force, we plan to construct 8 permanent Child Development Centers in FY09. The Army Chief of Staff directed that Army Child Care Programs reach an end state of providing 80 percent of the demand by the end of FY09 (from an original target date of FY13). Soldiers consistently rate these two programs as important to their Family's quality of life and heavily weight these programs to their decision to remain with the Army Team. Army Child, Youth, and School Services programs send a clear message that the Army cares about Families, wants to minimize Soldier and spouse lost duty time, wants to influence Soldier and spouse decisions to stay with the Army team, to allow Soldiers and spouses to concentrate on their jobs, and provide positive growth and development opportunities for children.

Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers

The mission of the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) program is to enhance the morale and welfare of single Soldiers, increase retention, and sustain combat readiness. BOSS is the collective voice of single Soldiers through the chain of command. The program also serves as a tool for commanders to gauge the morale of single Soldiers regarding quality of life issues. BOSS also sponsors a variety of activities before, during, and after

deployment to maintain the morale of single Soldiers affected by increased operational tempo and deployment stress.

The BOSS program consists of three core components aimed at maintaining a balanced life: leisure and recreation, community service, and quality of life. BOSS affords Soldiers the opportunity to assist in planning and execution of recreational activities for single Soldiers and provides direction for Soldiers interested in performing military and civilian community service-related projects. Community service projects provide Soldiers valuable experience, skills, and a sense of community pride and ownership. In FY07, 22 garrison BOSS programs received the President's Volunteer Service Award for efforts representing over 150,574 volunteer hours.

The BOSS program also serves as a tool to address many of the issues and concerns that our Army faces today. The program gives the Army the ability to tackle tough issues through peer-to-peer leadership. Single Soldiers assist the chain of command in dealing with suicide prevention, sexual assault, and sexual harassment issues that single Soldiers living in barracks might experience.

Our Installations are the Army home to our American Soldiers. The quality of life for all our Soldiers and Families is an inseparable element of our readiness posture. To improve quality of life, we focused our initiatives and our resources on the areas most important to our Soldiers and Families.

One of the Army's key strategies to improve Family housing is the application and use of privatized housing where practical. The Residential Communities Initiative (RCI) is providing quality, modern, state of the art housing in communities that our Soldiers and their Families can proudly call home. RCI became a critical component in our effort to eliminate inadequate Family housing and has made a significant positive impact in improving our Soldiers' and Families' quality of life. By the end of FY09, we will have privatized 80,000 homes at 43 installations. Our FY10 request for family privatized housing will provide 1,900 new homes. Our RCI program began in 1999, and is on a glide path to successful completion. Our housing strategy is working!

The Way Ahead

In closing, I want to recognize the amazing work being done by our Soldiers and Army Civilians around the globe. Soldiers represent what is best of our Nation and work to build lasting relationships wherever they deploy. Soldiers today are the greatest of their generation. Like our Veterans throughout our 234 year history, we will feel the impact of their service for many years to come. Every generation has its heroes, and this one is no different.

We announced 2009 as the Year of the NCO. During this year, we will accelerate previously approved strategic NCO development initiatives that enhance training, education, capability, and utilization of our NCO Corps. We will showcase the NCO story for the Army and the American people to honor the sacrifices and celebrate the contributions of the NCO Corps, past and present.

Our NCOs lead the way in education, training, and discipline. They share their strength of character with every Soldier they lead, every officer they serve, and every civilian they support.

Thank you again for your continued support of our Soldiers and their Families. We have made great strides by your commitment to improve their quality of life. We still have challenges but with your help, I am positive we can continue to take care of our Army family.

I appreciate this opportunity to speak before you today and represent "America's Army" and all it stands for. Thank you.