



NATIONAL GUARD ASSOCIATION OF TENNESSEE

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As we approach the end of the 2019 calendar year, it provides us an opportunity to look back and review recent **Accomplishments** and upcoming **Priorities** of the National Guard Association of Tennessee (**NGATN**) and the National Guard Association of the United States (**NGAUS**). Your membership in these organizations is vital to our success in representing all the Soldiers and Airmen of the Tennessee National Guard at both the state and federal level. Thank you for your continued support of YOUR associations!

COL (Ret) Byron Deel
Executive Director, NGATN

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Issue

National Guard members have deployed under 12304b orders since 2012 for preplanned missions in support of combatant commands, but, unlike other overseas mobilizations, were not provided access to the same benefits provided under other overseas mobilization authorities.

The Fix

The FY19 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) authorizes High Deployment Allowance accrual for all reserve component servicemembers, as well as non-reduction in pay protections for reserve component servicemembers who are also federal employees.

The FY18 NDAA provides predeployment and transitional TRICARE health coverage to those servicemembers on 12304b orders.

The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 expanded Post-9/11 G.I. Bill eligibility for National Guard members, including:

- Increased benefit accrual for reserve-component members who serve fewer than 36 months on active duty
- For service members on active duty between 90 days and six months, benefit accrual increased from 40 percent of the full benefit to 50 percent of the full benefit
- For service members on active duty between six to 12 months, benefit accrual increased from 50 percent of the full benefit to 60 percent of the full benefit
- Elimination of the 15-year cap on using G.I. Bill benefits
- Increased ability to reallocate transferred benefits to other beneficiaries if sponsor or dependent passes away

The Issue

Numerous National Guard officers wait in excess of six months for the Defense Department to recognize promotions between O-1 and O-5, as well as between W-1 and W-5.

The Fix

The FY19 NDAA authorizes the Secretary of the Army and the Secretary of the Air Force to adjust the effective date of promotions for National Guard officers experiencing undue delays in federal recognition of their promotion through no fault of their own.

Although wait times have decreased over the past year, delays are still falling short of the timeline mandated by a Congress.

The Issue

National Guard and Reserve Equipment Account (NGREA) funding is vital to maintaining the readiness and relevance of Army and Air National Guard equipment and weapons systems, primarily through commercial off-the-shelf items.

The Fix

The fiscal 2019 Omnibus Appropriations bill provided \$1.3 billion in NGREA funding, including:

- \$421 million for the Army National Guard
- \$421 million for the Air National Guard

The Issue

National Guardsmen and Reservists face unique mental-health challenges compared to active-component service members, such as limited access to timely, quality care and programs tailored to reserve-component operational needs.

The Fix

Congress expanded TRICARE benefits for behavioral and mental health, as well as indefinitely extended a service member's ability to make medical claims for injuries, including:

- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- depression or other physiological, psychological and/or behavioral disorders
- A feasibility study to develop a pilot program on the mental-health readiness of reserve-component service members was authorized by the fiscal 2018 National Defense Authorization Act.

FY19 DoD appropriations legislation provides \$8 million for the National Guard preventative mental health pilot program allocating \$4 million each to the Army and Air programs.

***Please see the attachment entitled "Historical Accomplishments" for more information on the history of**

PRIORITIES

The Issue

Under current law, a member of the National Guard or Reserve who is also a federal employee is ineligible to enroll in Tricare Reserve Select (TRS).

Recommendation

Authorize TRS eligibility for Guardsmen who are also federal employees, including the more than 70,000 dual-status National Guard and Reserve military technicians.

The Issue

Due to increased readiness requirements, Guardsmen are required to perform an increasing number of military duty days and training events annually.

Recommendation

Amend U.S.C. Title 5 to increase federal military leave from 15 to 30 days.

The Issue

Law currently caps the amount of money individuals can annually contribute to one or multiple retirement accounts to \$18,500. Guardsmen are therefore restricted from contributing \$18,500 to EACH of their military and civilian retirement accounts.

Recommendation

Amend the law to allow Guardsmen to contribute up to the maximum amount for BOTH their military TSP and civilian retirement accounts.

The Issue

Guardsmen who travel at least 100 miles to their duty station for military duty are able to deduct travel-related expenses when filing tax returns.

Recommendation

Reduce the threshold that servicemembers are able to deduct military travel-related expenses from 100 miles to 50 miles.

The Issue

The Tennessee STRONG Act only provides state tuition assistance funding for members of the Tennessee National Guard who are seeking their initial Bachelor's degree.

Recommendation

Funding restrictions be expanded to include:

- Tuition for a Master's degree
- Certification from Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCAT) institutions.

The Issue

Having transitioned from a “strategic reserve” to an “operational reserve”, the reserve component is fully integrated in ongoing national security missions around the globe. This has led to increased training requirements which can go beyond the statutorily required 39 days of Drills and Annual Training to requirements often totaling 80 or more days per year. In addition to the effects on the Guardsman families, employers also undertake additional demands.

Recommendation

Enact the “Reserve Component Employer Incentive, Compensation, and Relief Act” which amends the law to provide employers who employ Guardsmen and Reservists an annual \$1,000 tax credit, plus an additional amount dependent on the number of days of military service each employee performs.

The Issue

The Army National Guard and the Air National Guard rely on a percentage of their overall personnel to work in a full-time capacity to ensure rapid emergency response, provide administrative and logistical execution of training events, and maintain National Guard facilities and community relations.

Recommendation

- Authorize and fund the Army National Guard full-time support personnel at a minimum of 20% of the total authorized Army National Guard end strength.
- Maintain the Air National Guard full-time support personnel at a minimum of 35% of the total Air National Guard authorized end strength.