



Letter of Support – Base Retention Grant Amendment

Wednesday, January 15, 2025

Chairman Wanzek and Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee – Government Operations Division,

For the record, my name is Cale Dunwoody, and I have the distinct pleasure of serving as the Vice President of Public Policy for the Fargo Moorhead West Fargo Chamber of Commerce (FMWF Chamber). On behalf of our over 1,700 members, I respectfully offer testimony in support of Senate Bill 2018 and urge the committee to include funding for the Base Retention Grant Program.

The North Dakota National Guard is a tremendous asset for our region, state, and nation. Our local units are nationally renowned for their excellence and the North Dakota National Guard is always ready to respond to the call of duty, no matter the challenge. Their steadfast commitment and leadership are represented by their current global missions, along with their ability to respond to local and national needs, such as fighting floods in the Red River Valley, flying F-16s over our nation's capital, supporting the fight against COVID-19, and providing support at our southern border.

The mission of the Fargo-based North Dakota Air National Guard's 119th Wing is to provide trained and ready Airmen executing world-class MQ-9 precision attack and reconnaissance, kinetic, and non-kinetic target intelligence production, and expeditionary support capabilities for the nation and state. The 119th Operation Group is a leader in training and combat hours flown in the MQ-9 platform, which is a remotely piloted aircraft used for combat and intelligence collection missions. The 119th Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Group (ISRG), conducts kinetic and non-kinetic targeting support for Air Operation Centers located in Combatant Commands. Additionally, the 119th Wing is one of four regional training sites in the entire Air National Guard – these sites provide training on civil engineering, heavy equipment operation, and Rapid Airfield Damage Recovery (RADR).

These regional military units continue to effectively execute missions, that are critical to national security, and provide tremendous impact to our communities, and North Dakota must continue to work collectively across our communities to ensure the vitality of these military bases. Funding for the Base Retention Grant Program, along with significant private investments, further support our local Guard units by providing assistance with advocacy and awareness, advancement of personnel recruitment, and community-based programming and support. For example, one use of these funds is to enhance recruitment of military personnel. Currently, the end-strengthen of the 119th Wings is 94% with a goal to achieve 105% end-strength. Achieving this goal of 105% end-strength is crucial to the 119th Wing's ability to effectively perform their mission. This recruitment assistance, along with other strategic initiatives, further insulates our military units from potential Base Realignment and Closures, ensures adequate and modernized equipment, augments personnel recruitment, and provides community support opportunities.

In 2023, the economic impact on the North Dakota National Guard was over \$342 million across the state, with over \$123 million coming from the Fargo and West Fargo region. While these regional military units provide tremendous economic impact throughout the state, their total impact is far greater than economics. These men and women are critical to the vibrancy of our communities. They are first responders, educators, doctors, tradesman,

businessowners and these individuals and their families are interwoven into the fabric of our community and are fundamental to the growth and prosperity of our region.

Collectively the communities of Minot, Grand Forks, and Fargo respectfully request funds for the Base Retention Grant Program to augment the critical military activities that take place throughout our state and demonstrates the community's commitment to supporting and strengthening our local military units. As the committee considers Senate Bill 2018, we encourage the inclusion of this critical funding for these three communities so that we may continue enhancing North Dakota's military excellence and increasing the competitive advantage of our military units throughout the next biennium.

Sincerely,

Cale Dunwoody
Vice President of Public Policy
Fargo Moorhead West Fargo Chamber of Commerce