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on the Oversight of Family Support Programs, United States House of
Representative, Washington D.C., July 22, 2009*

Chairwoman Davis, Representative Wilson, members of this distinguished committee – I appreciate very much this opportunity to speak with you today about issues important to Airmen and their families.

I would like to first thank you Chairwoman, the Members of this committee, and the entire House of Representatives for your extensive support for our Airmen and their families. We greatly appreciate your efforts, actions and legislation on our behalf to expand our pay and financial benefits and to improve health care for servicemembers, veterans, and their families.

We are especially thankful for your visits to our wounded warriors. Our wounded warriors and the families who support and care for them sacrifice much.

Our American Airmen have answered our Nation's call to serve. No matter whether they are deployed to overseas contingency operations, or whether they are deployed in places at a Stateside base and supporting combatant commander requirement, our Airmen are doing an incredible job.

Their families serve also. They support and care for their own Airman; volunteer across a spectrum of support activities; and comfort other members of their family who experience an often-absent parent or spouse. Yes, our military families serve honorably.

Developing and caring for Airmen's families are one of our top priorities. We have focused much of our efforts in this area. Some of our recent initiatives have concentrated on expanding child care capacity, increasing child care for Guard and Reserve families, improving financial readiness, and improved education and developmental opportunities for spouses and children.

Our Airmen are experiencing an increased deployment schedule, so we are also providing increased deployment support – not only for our Airmen, but specifically for our military families. We offer programs and services across all phases of the deployment.

We have more than 14,000 families with special needs requirements enrolled in our special needs program – the Exceptional Family Member Program. We have a good process for identifying families and facilitating personnel moves and assignments based on special need families' requirements. However, we have determined the need for a companion program to provide families support as they move from location to location. We are improving our program to assist these families.

We are also working on leveling the playing field for our military children who experience differences in academic standards and transfer and acceptance of credits and courses. We are also concerned with variable elementary grade-level promotions and graduation requirements as well as eligibility for sports and extracurricular activities.

We are working with States to loosen up the eligibility of unemployment compensation for our military spouses who are compelled to leave their job when their Airman must change duty locations. We are working on providing opportunities to train and license in portable career fields to abbreviate the job search timeframe for these spouses.

We will remain engaged on our family support programs, and we plan on constantly improving the programs we already have in effect.

Thank you all again for your continued support of your Air Force. On behalf of America's Airmen and their families, I appreciate this opportunity to testify here today.

I look forward to your questions.