



PENNSYLVANIA NATIONAL GUARD ASSOCIATIONS

NATIONAL GUARD ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA ★ PENNSYLVANIA NATIONAL GUARD ENLISTED ASSOCIATION

**Statement of
Lt Col Preston Smith
President, National Guard Association of Pennsylvania
Vice-Chair, Pennsylvania National Guard Associations
Before the
House Transportation Committee
May 28, 2009**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the Pennsylvania National Guard Associations and the men and women who proudly serve their state and nation in the Pennsylvania National Guard, I appreciate this opportunity to provide this brief statement on House Bill 111 and Senate Bill 48.

I am Lieutenant Colonel Preston Smith. In my military capacity, I am assigned to the 111th Fighter Wing here in Horsham Township, and it is also my privilege to serve as the President of the National Guard Association of Pennsylvania and vice-chair of the Pennsylvania National Guard Associations. The Pennsylvania National Guard Associations or PNGAS, as we call it, represents nearly 19,000 Pennsylvanians who serve in the National Guard as well as retired members of the Guard. It is a joint association of the National Guard Association of Pennsylvania, which is now in its 105th year of service to the Pennsylvania National Guard, and the Pennsylvania National Guard Enlisted Association.

PNGAS has been involved in efforts to save the base at Willow Grove and keep a flying mission at the 111th Fighter Wing, Pennsylvania Air National Guard since the Department of Defense made its first BRAC recommendations in 2005. We fought the recommendation to deactivate the 111th, and our national association filed a friend of the court brief in the litigation that helped save the unit. And we've supported efforts by the Governor and the Congress to transform the Willow Grove installation into something new: a highly capable joint interagency installation.

When Congress first passed legislation to authorize the Horsham Joint Interagency Installation, the first user listed for the base was the Pennsylvania National Guard. And every Congressional enactment since then has made it clear that the Joint Interagency Installation can best accomplish its vital missions by providing facilities for use by the Pennsylvania National Guard.

PNGAS wants the JII to succeed as a robust, vital joint installation and a model hub for joint operations in support of national defense, homeland security and emergency preparedness. PNGAS strongly supports efforts to identify and assign a future flying mission to the 111th Fighter Wing, and we all know that the unit will have no chance of getting a future flying mission if it does not have access to a fully-functional operational airfield.

I won't repeat what General Sischo said except to say that the missions assigned to this installation by Congress are most important. And this base at this time has the location, the infrastructure and the staff resources to accomplish these missions both through the military enclave and the adjacent joint interagency installation.

The Willow Grove installation has been a good neighbor for Horsham Township for many years. The heritage of this installation, dating back to the earliest days of aviation, is a source of pride for us all. The origins of NAS Willow Grove date back to 1926 when aviation pioneer Harold Pitcairn bought a large section of farmland on the west side of Doylestown Pike, which is now Route 611. From 1926 to 1942, Pitcairn developed, tested, built and flew many different aircraft, most notable being the Mailwing and the Autogiro. In 1942, to help the nation rise to its defense, Pitcairn sold his flying field to the United States Navy. Some 250 Naval personnel took possession of the field that year bringing along with them 30 N3N biplane trainers. In January 1943, the field was officially commissioned the United States Naval Air Station Willow Grove. At its wartime peak, NAS Willow Grove housed tens of thousands of servicemen and women.

In the face of the threatened closure of the base under the Department of Defense BRAC recommendation, we all joined together to help save this installation as a government-owned and operated entity. While we would have all preferred that the Navy remain at this installation, we accomplished a large part of our goal with the establishment of the Horsham Joint Interagency Installation and the Pitcairn-Willow Grove airfield, which is an integral part of the base.

Like any new idea, the implementation of the Joint Interagency Installation plan presents challenges, but , with good will and a good measure of common sense, we are confident that these challenges can be addressed. It's easy to nitpick any new

idea and to place hurdles in the path of its success. We in PNGAS are calling instead for a concerted effort to help the Joint Interagency Installation succeed.

The community has expressed concerns about the airfield operations and other aspects of the joint interagency installation. Although we can all understand these concerns, it's important to remember that the installation of the future will remain a government installation, and the vast majority of its users will be government entities. As a result of the transfer of land ownership from the federal government to the Commonwealth, the local township and other authorities will exercise a greater measure of input and control over development at the installation than ever before. The federal government has passed legislation to govern the terms and conditions of transfer of the property to the state. The U.S. government maintains a federal interest in the property, and it has placed substantial limits on use of the airfield to address community concerns

This brings us to House Bill 111 and Senate Bill 48. PNGAS shares the concerns so well expressed by General Sischo. We believe that the state and the federal governments need to work with local governments to establish a prescription for success for the Horsham Joint Interagency Installation. We believe these bills, by imposing restrictions that go beyond those contained in the federal law and using wording that is inconsistent and open to interpretation and dispute, are a prescription for failure. We join the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs in calling for amendments to these bills to correct these deficiencies and bring them into line with federal law.

For us in PNGAS, this is not just a matter of legal interpretation and legislative initiatives. This is our future at Willow Grove. If the joint interagency installation is doomed from the outset by conflicting and unduly restrictive enactments, it will surely diminish the chance of attracting a flying mission to the 111th Fighter Wing and providing for robust Pennsylvania National Guard use of the installation.

The Pennsylvania National Guard Associations want the Horsham Joint Interagency Installation to succeed and we oppose anything that will be a roadblock to that success. We therefore ask you to defer actions on these bills until they can be amended in a way that helps build a sound foundation for the success of this installation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.