

## **HB 4914 TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE AFFAIRS**

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Chairman King, Vice Chairwoman Hernandez, and distinguished members of the committee,

My name is Ammon Blair, and I am a Senior Fellow at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. I am honored to appear before you today in strong support of House Bill 4914.

I bring 22 years of military experience, including service in the United States Army and the Texas Army National Guard. Throughout my enlisted military career, I served in a variety of leadership roles, including Drill Sergeant, Air Assault Instructor, Infantry Platoon Sergeant, Battalion S3 NCOIC, and Homeland Response Force J1. I was commissioned as an Officer on March 29, 2019, and was subsequently assigned as the Executive Officer for B Company, 1-141 Infantry Battalion. I later served as a Rear Detachment Commander during the unit's deployment and then as an Infantry Platoon Leader upon their return.

These experiences—both enlisted and commissioned—provide me with a comprehensive operational perspective that underscores the urgent need for the reforms proposed in House Bill 4914.

The United States is navigating its most complex security environment since the end of World War II, defined by the simultaneous rise of near-peer adversaries and unprecedented asymmetric threats to the homeland. Today's global landscape is characterized by conflicts of varying intensity across multiple regions, from large-scale conventional warfare in Ukraine to hybrid warfare in Gaza and Syria. These simultaneous challenges, combined with unrestricted warfare and gray zone operations by adversaries like China and Iran, demand rapid and comprehensive military modernization ([National Intelligence Council, 2024, p. 2](#)).

To maintain its position, the U.S. military must not merely keep pace with evolving threats, tactics, and technologies—it must decisively outpace them. This imperative drives the ongoing transformation of force structure, training requirements, and operational concepts across all warfighting domains, while maintaining robust homeland defense capabilities ([Fox, 2024, p. 1](#)).

Nearly 80 years have passed since America last fought a global conflict, and 35 years have elapsed since the Cold War environment shaped national defense planning. In this new era of contested domains and simultaneous crises, agility, innovation, and cost-effective force posture are no longer aspirational goals; they are essential elements of survival.

Since the attack on 9/11, the Department of Defense has increasingly relied on the National Guard for sustained overseas contingency rotations (Smith, 2023). This evolution marks a major departure from the Guard's historical role as an infrequently mobilized strategic reserve, transforming it into an integrated combat operational force struggling to balance federal deployments with domestic mission readiness.

Domestically, the operational tempo for the Texas Military Department (TMD) has risen dramatically. From 2023 to the present, TMD has responded to 23 State of Texas Assistance Requests (STARS) in support of disaster relief efforts, encompassing 219 days of operations and more than 196 search and rescue and survey flight hours. Funding for State Active Duty missions has grown accordingly, as the average number of responses has surged from three to five missions annually to 15 to 20 missions annually over the past three years. Recent responses include the Panhandle wildfire, Smokehouse Creek fires, the June 2023 tornado response, Hurricane Beryl operations, and the continued sustainment of Operation Lone Star ([Texas Military Department, 2024](#)).

This dual-mission burden has created mounting tension with the Guard's state-level responsibilities. The Texas National Guard has endured an intensified pace and complexity of operations over the past four years, straining resources across both domestic and international obligations. Operation Lone Star alone has demanded continuous deployments that divert manpower, focus, training and equipment away from their National Defense requirements and roles.

The Texas National Guard is constitutionally obligated to maintain crucial federal mission sets across multiple combatant commands. The degradation of unit readiness through personnel cross-leveling and equipment shortages compromises the guard's ability to respond to national emergencies or overseas contingencies. Furthermore, extended State Active Duty deployments often result in skill atrophy for all military occupational specialties, requiring extensive retraining before units can resume federal mission requirements.

Today, military readiness is deemed "grossly inadequate" to counter the full range of emerging threats ([Commission on the National Defense Strategy, 2024, p. 51](#)). In evaluating the readiness posture of U.S. military forces—and particularly the Texas National Guard—we must confront three critical questions: 1) ready for what types of conflicts and missions, 2) ready for when these challenges may emerge, and 3) which specific elements of the force must be ready to respond.

As the National Guard evolves into a fully integrated operational force, it must maintain the highest standards of combat readiness to meet both domestic and federal demands. This transformation—often referred to as Guard 4.0—ensures that the National Guard remains a critical component of national defense, ready to deploy, fight, and win when called upon ([Army National Guard, 2024](#)).

However, this modernization effort faces growing obstacles. Inflationary pressures and a surging national debt strain defense budgets, risking degradation of force capabilities ([Hernandez, 2024](#)). Difficult trade-offs between modernization priorities and operational readiness have emerged, particularly as the Department of Defense increasingly relies on the National Guard as an operational combat reserve rather than its traditional role as a strategic reserve ([Reserve Forces Policy Board, 2020, pp. 32, 40-66](#)).

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, under the leadership of President Donald J. Trump, has articulated a clear vision to restore American military supremacy through three interconnected initiatives ([U.S. Department of Defense, 2025](#)):

- Reviving the Warrior Ethos: Reinstating uncompromising standards of discipline, unity, and readiness to rebuild military cohesion and trust.
- Rebuilding Military Capabilities: Reforming the defense industrial base, streamlining acquisition, and rapidly fielding emerging technologies to maintain a decisive edge.
- Reestablishing Global Deterrence: Prioritizing robust homeland defense and deterring aggression from adversaries such as the Chinese Communist Party, while realigning force posture to confront key threats.

Secretary Hegseth's vision represents the critical component of this readiness transformation, focusing on enhanced lethality, strict standards, accountability and unwavering preparedness across the full spectrum of operations ([U.S. Department of Defense, 2025](#)).

Despite these efforts, the operational strain placed on the Guard at the federal level inevitably reverberates down to the states. Texas, with its unique border, infrastructure, and disaster vulnerabilities, cannot afford to depend solely on a National Guard increasingly drawn into national deployments.

In this environment, it is imperative that Texas develop an independent, mission-ready homeland defense force that can address threats swiftly and autonomously—one that is not subject to the competing demands of federal obligations.

Each Texas Army and Air National Guard unit—whether an infantry company, sustainment battalion, or airlift wing—is fundamentally built for combat operations. Units are organized under Tables of Organization and Equipment (TOE) or Tables of Distribution and Allowances (TDA), and they train to their Mission Essential Task List (METL)—a framework identifying the core tasks required for mission success in wartime ([Texas Military Department, n.d, p. 9](#)).

Combat readiness remains the foundational priority for these units. Maintaining METL proficiency demands consistent access to training resources, time, and operational focus. However, the escalating reliance on the Texas National Guard for state-specific operations has severely disrupted these cycles of combat preparation.

The Texas Military Department currently faces critical challenges in balancing its dual state and federal responsibilities. TMD's heavy operational focus on long-term border enforcement missions, particularly Operation Lone Star, has created a profound misalignment with national defense priorities, including the development of essential joint operations capabilities ([Texas Military Department, 2024a](#)).

This strategic drift is not merely theoretical—it has been openly acknowledged at the highest levels of military leadership. General Daniel Hokanson, former Chief of the National Guard Bureau, testified before the Senate Appropriations Committee: "The reason the Guard exists is to fight and win our nation's wars, period" ([Beynon, 2024](#)).

The prolonged diversion of Guard forces toward prolonged State Active Duty domestic operations missions systematically drains essential resources, erodes training time, and impairs critical combat preparation standards necessary for lethal force generation ([Beynon, 2024](#)). Over time, this strategic misalignment undermines the TMD's ability to "accomplish the President's mission to deter war, and if necessary, defeat and destroy our enemies" ([U.S. Department of Defense, 2025](#)).

The consequences of this operational erosion extend far beyond immediate mission sets. They pose a long-term threat to the Guard's ability to integrate into joint force operations, support national defense initiatives, and execute future wartime mobilizations on behalf of the United States.

The solution lies in a two-pronged approach: strategic reconstitution of the Texas State Guard (TXSG) as the state's primary homeland defense force, while simultaneously realigning the National Guard with federal readiness requirements. Drawing from Florida's State Guard model and its successful implementation of a professionally trained Special Missions Unit, a revitalized TXSG could assume primary responsibility for state missions, enabling the National Guard to refocus on its core function as a combat reserve and integration with joint force capabilities ([Williams, n.d.](#)).

Implementation requires immediate action along parallel tracks:

1. The Texas National Guard must reorient its doctrinal and operational focus toward combat readiness requirements, ensuring adequate resources for advanced military training and joint force integration.
2. The Texas State Guard requires modernization and proper resourcing to effectively assume primary responsibility for state homeland security and defense missions. This comprehensive approach addresses both the immediate readiness crisis and long-term state security needs, fostering a more resilient and effective defense infrastructure for Texas while maintaining the National Guard's essential warfighting capabilities.

However, for this two-pronged strategy to succeed, Texas must first address the deep structural weaknesses that currently plague the Texas Military Department. A revitalized Texas State Guard cannot be built atop a broken administrative framework, nor can the National Guard's warfighting mission be restored without confronting the bureaucratic and strategic misalignments that have eroded readiness. The findings of the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission provide critical insight into these systemic failures—and underscore the urgent need for comprehensive institutional reform.

The Texas Military Department occupies a critical role, managing Texas's military forces during federal deployments and state emergencies. However, a comprehensive review by the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission in 2019 revealed serious structural and operational failures that now undermine TMD's ability to fulfill its core missions—failures that directly threaten the success of any attempt to modernize the Texas State Guard or restore National Guard combat readiness ([Sunset Advisory Commission, 2019](#)).

The Sunset Commission found that TMD's overwhelming focus on federal obligations frequently eclipsed its responsibilities to Texas as a sovereign state. TMD repeatedly failed to comply with basic administrative standards for financial processes, state property accountability, and civilian oversight, as documented in multiple audits and internal reviews.

These structural failures matter because they create conditions where neither the National Guard nor the State Guard can be properly resourced, trained, or strategically directed to meet emerging 21st-century threats. Without immediate reform, Texas cannot build the resilient, independent domestic defense capability HB 4914 envisions, nor can it restore the Texas National Guard's focus on its true federal warfighting mission.

The Sunset Commission's findings reveal that TMD's internal mismanagement is not merely a bureaucratic inconvenience—it is a direct impediment to Texas's future security. Unless addressed, it will cripple both arms of Texas's military forces at the very moment when external threats to the homeland are growing.

Nowhere are the consequences of TMD's structural failures more visible—or more damaging—than in the condition of the Texas State Guard. As the only wholly state-controlled military force under TMD's authority, the TXSG should have been a cornerstone of Texas's homeland defense and disaster response capabilities. Instead, systemic neglect, chronic under-resourcing, and lack of strategic leadership have rendered it an underutilized and increasingly fragile institution. Understanding the depth of dysfunction within the TXSG is critical to recognizing why its removal from TMD control is not merely advisable—it is essential ([Sunset Advisory Commission, 2019, pp. 27-32](#)).

Without a deliberate force design, the TXSG cannot mature into a reliable, scalable component of Texas's homeland security architecture.

This collapse of institutional continuity marks a dramatic departure from the State Guard's historical significance. During World War II, the Texas State Guard fielded thousands of trained, mission-ready personnel to defend Texas communities when the National Guard was deployed overseas. It was once a cornerstone of the state's internal security infrastructure—a model of citizen-soldier service.

Today, however, the TXSG has been relegated to an auxiliary support role, lacking both the strategic vision and institutional support needed to inspire long-term service. This relegation has created a corrosive cycle: diminished prestige leads to reduced retention, reduced retention further weakens operational capacity, and weakened capacity undermines the Guard's relevance in the eyes of both state leaders and its own members.

Unless addressed, this attrition spiral will render the TXSG incapable of contributing meaningfully to Texas's security at precisely the moment when the need for an independent, state-controlled force is greatest. Reconstituting the Texas State Guard as a modern, mission-driven, professionally supported force is the only path to reversing this decline and restoring its strategic value to the people of Texas.

House Bill 4914 offers Texas a historic opportunity to correct decades of structural misalignment and build a truly independent, modernized homeland defense force.

The Texas Military Department's ongoing struggles demonstrate that the current integrated structure—combining state and federal missions under a single chain of command—cannot meet Texas's 21st-century security needs. HB 4914 addresses this by establishing the Texas State Guard as a distinct, fully autonomous entity reporting directly to the Governor. It severs the TXSG from the Adjutant General's federally oriented authority, ensuring that state missions are no longer subordinated to federal military demands.

This restructuring achieves several critical objectives. First, it creates a dedicated leadership structure for the State Guard, freeing the Adjutant General to focus exclusively on preparing the Texas Army and Air National Guard for combat operations and federal joint force integration. Second, it clarifies command relationships during emergencies, enabling faster mobilization, improved interagency coordination, and more effective responses to natural disasters, border crises, and asymmetric threats.

The establishment of an independent TXSG command also reduces administrative complexity and eliminates persistent conflicts between federal and state operational priorities. It allows Texas to maintain distinct operational channels: one focused solely on federal readiness (the National Guard), and one focused entirely on defending Texas communities and infrastructure (the State Guard).

HB 4914 also lays the foundation for a modern, mission-driven State Guard by authorizing the creation of specialized units designed to address specific operational gaps in Texas's current security architecture. These capabilities are specifically tailored to Texas's unique security environment, avoiding the dilution of focus that afflicts National Guard units balancing both federal and state obligations:

- **Crisis Response Battalions** capable of rapid deployment to disaster zones, civil disturbances, and mass casualty events.
- **Aviation Squadrons** integrating fixed-wing, rotary, and unmanned aerial systems for reconnaissance, medevac, and logistical support.
- **Maritime Response Units** equipped to secure ports, inland waterways, and coastal infrastructure—countering cartels, traffickers, and foreign actors in the Gulf of Mexico and the Rio Grande.
- **Special Missions Units (SMUs)** composed of prior SOF personnel, capable of conducting high-risk interdiction, intelligence gathering, and search and rescue missions in austere environments.
- **Cybersecurity and Technology Units**, forming the nucleus of a Texas Cyber Command, defending state networks and infrastructure from nation-state and criminal cyberattacks.
- **Border Security Forces**, modeled after elite tactical units like BORTAC and DPS's Tactical Operations Division, conducting drone surveillance, interdiction, and landowner-cooperative patrols.
- **Medical Units**, such as the Texas Medical Rangers, providing deployable field hospitals and tactical medical support during disasters or public health emergencies.
- **Engineer Battalions and Military Police Units**, reinforcing Texas's ability to secure critical infrastructure, construct defensive positions, and maintain civil order when needed.
- **Space and Satellite Operations Elements**, leveraging commercial and military satellite platforms for GPS-denied navigation, communications resilience, and persistent ISR.

Where the National Guard must remain balanced between combat readiness and federal deployment cycles, the restructured TXSG would remain rooted in the state, developing permanent relationships with local agencies, law enforcement, and communities. Its members would not rotate out—they would build depth, expertise, and trust.

This vision leverages Texas's greatest untapped asset: the thousands of veterans, first responders, and technical professionals living in our state who are willing to serve—but not under a broken bureaucracy.

Critically, the bill envisions a sustainable funding framework to support full-time professional staff, consistent training cycles, operational equipment, and regular joint exercises with partner agencies. This sustained investment is essential to ensure the TXSG develops into a reliable, scalable, and resilient force—not a volunteer auxiliary, but a professional military arm of the state.

By implementing this model, Texas can achieve what few other states have: a dual-component military structure where each force—National Guard and State Guard—operates at peak readiness, without competing or cannibalizing resources. The Texas State Guard would finally emerge as the state's dedicated frontline defense force, capable of protecting Texans against natural disasters, border threats, cyberattacks, and other 21st-century challenges with speed, professionalism, and autonomy.

House Bill 4914 provides the structural solution Texas needs. It restores balance between our state and federal military responsibilities. It unlocks the potential of thousands of willing Texans ready to serve. It enables us to build the most capable, responsive, and independent state military force in the nation.

House Bill 4914 is not merely a policy innovation; it is a strategic imperative for Texas's future security and sovereignty. HB 4914 is not just reform; it is reconstitution. It is a declaration that Texas will meet this century's threats on its own terms. Thank you for your time, your service to the state, and your commitment to defending the people of Texas.



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