



CHIEF's Sight Picture

6 July 2004

Air Force Housing -- A Commitment To Our Airmen

The foundation of our Air Force is our people. Caring for them and their families remains one of our highest priorities. One way we're making good on that commitment is by providing safe and affordable housing. We are committed to providing our Airmen the quality of housing that is commensurate with the society they protect. Through privatization, increases in the basic allowance for housing (BAH), and a new dorm standard, we are combating the problems of inadequate housing. There is a myth out there that the new ways of doing business mean that we have abandoned our commitment to ensuring all Air Force members have access to adequate and affordable housing. Let me assure you that nothing is further from the truth.

Secretary Roche and I are committed to ensuring all Air Force members have access to safe, adequate and affordable housing either in the local community or on our installations. Providing housing options in the local community is our first target. Since 2000, we have reduced the average out of pocket expenses for members from 18.9% of the cost of housing to 3.5% today through annual increases in BAH. We are on track to eliminate these out-of-pocket expenses by next year. These out-of-pocket expenses affect many of the nearly 60 percent of Air Force families who live off base. Through these increases to BAH, you will have a wider range of affordable housing options in your local community.

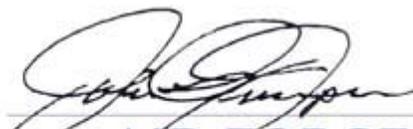
We are also aggressively targeting the problem of inadequate housing on base. At the beginning of this fiscal year, there were 40,000 inadequate military family housing units, but we plan to eliminate these through partnerships with private developers and military construction projects. Through a process we call "privatization," we partner with private developers who will build and maintain housing units for Air Force families. These partnership arrangements allow us to provide quality homes more quickly than we can through traditional military constructions. As of today, we have already built 4,934 new homes through privatization. By 2007, we will have eliminated all inadequate housing units in the CONUS, and two years later, we will have eliminated inadequate units overseas. Secretary Roche and I view the increased use of privatization as key to meeting these goals so we are working with private developers when it makes sense to do so. In cases where privatization is neither feasible nor cost effective, we will use traditional military construction programs. We also tripled our investment in Air Force-owned housing and improved the size standards to ensure our on-base homes are comparable in size and quality to modern homes available in the local community.

Although we may use developers to construct, maintain and operate military family housing, we have not outsourced our responsibility for the welfare of our Air Force families. We have been and always will be committed to providing the best available housing options for our members -- but our methods for achieving this goal have changed. These new methods provide greater flexibility to satisfy our housing needs. Increases in BAH provide our members greater flexibility to find housing off base. For on-base housing requirements, privatization provides us greater flexibility to build and renovate quality units, while ensuring that the contractors are responsive to the needs of residents. Currently, we have privatized over 6,000 units, and have a very high rate of resident satisfaction. Over the next three years, we plan to privatize a total of 45,000 units. In many cases, the privatized housing is on base property, or just outside the base, making it as convenient as traditional base housing. Privatization is one tool that enables us to provide quality housing to meet your needs.

We are equally committed to providing a quality living environment for our young unaccompanied Airmen. We currently have a shortage of nearly 2,400 rooms, but we are making great strides in filling that gap. From fiscal year 1996 through this year, we have spent \$1.3 billion in military construction money for new dormitories, and we plan to spend an additional \$735 million over the next five years. With this money, we will eliminate our room deficit and develop an improved room standard called Dorms-4-Airmen. This improved design provides a larger living/sleeping area and a private bathroom in each room. In addition, the new design improves social interaction by connecting four living/sleeping areas to a large living room and kitchen. Each living room/kitchen area will also have a washer/dryer available to the four occupants. We are also addressing dormitories for technical training. Currently we have a technical training dorm deficit of over 29%, with 40% of our existing technical training dorms having three students in rooms designed for two. However, this deficit will be eliminated by 2009, as we build new dorms each year for the next five years. We have already completed construction of eight new technical training dorms in the last five years and have three new dorms under construction today.

Even as we fight the war on terrorism, we have not lost focus on the importance of quality of life for our Airmen. Providing adequate housing allows Airmen to focus on the mission, knowing that their families have a safe place to live. Ours is the greatest Air Force in the world because of the remarkable people we attract and retain. The old adage that "we recruit individuals, we retain families" has never been more true. I am extremely proud of the progress we have made in our housing program as we strive to make it worthy of the outstanding men and women who make our Air Force the world's best.




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