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SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON OPERATION LONE STAR

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AUSTIN, Texas – In recent weeks, the Texas Military Department has been the subject of scurrilous accusations by seemingly reputable media sources. Specifically, allegations raised relate to the department's activation of military personnel to support Operation Lone Star, a state active duty mission related to a disaster declaration issued by Gov. Greg Abbott.

After multiple failed attempts to correct the record with these outlets, the Texas Military Department wants to set the record straight to ensure accurate reporting on this mission.

It is clear that reporters have gleaned information from anonymous sources and unverified documents, which have then been skewed to push an agenda. Allegations relate to the state's mobilization, deployment, and operations in support of Operation Lone Star. They specifically concern the rapid deployment, pay, hardship requests, suicides, equipment and living conditions, and COVID protocols.

Rapid Deployment

Some have attempted to compare our current disaster response effort to enduring federal overseas missions, which allow more time for planning and preparation. However, this mission is a direct response to a **State-Declared Disaster** occurring in our own backyard, requiring an immediate response. The department rapidly surged from 500 personnel to more than 10,000 in a matter of months, due to a dramatic influx of migrant caravans across the Texas-Mexico border.

In May 2021, Gov. Greg Abbott declared the disaster, which states, in part, "...the federal government has shown unwillingness, ambivalence, or inability to enforce federal immigration laws, to deter and stop illegal border crossings into the United States, or to meaningfully partner with Texas in pursuing these goals." Clearly, the state of Texas had to react to protect Texans and the nation.

Pay

There have been nebulous charges that service members are not being paid. **This is inaccurate.** While there have been administrative pay challenges, currently every service member assigned to Operation Lone Star is being paid.

Following Hurricane Harvey, the agency conducted a thorough after-action review, which identified issues with the pay system the agency was using at that time.

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Based on the review, TMD procured and implemented a new pay system for state active duty missions. OLS has been, by far, the largest onboarding of service members into the current state payroll system and will be the longest-running state active duty mission utilizing this payroll system.

This has given TMD the opportunity to identify gaps within the system, which are being actively addressed. Specifically, on Sunday, Jan. 16, Pay Strike Teams arrived along the border to support individual service members with pay questions. To date, approximately 75 percent of pay discrepancies have been resolved, to include, back pay for those who have been paid inaccurate amounts.

In addition to their chain of command, service may utilize the 24/7 TMD pay hotline to address any pay discrepancies (512-782-1234).

Hardship Requests

There have been **false reports** that the Texas Military Department has systemically or routinely denied personnel hardship release requests. To date, there have been more than 900 requests received, 75 percent of which have been granted. It is important to remember, hardship requests are granted on a case-by-case basis depending on the individual service member's circumstances.

Suicides

In regards to four service member deaths, there has been **misleading and false information** pushed to the public without proper context, irrespective of family sensitivities and desires. Two of the four service members mentioned by outlets were mobilized in support of Operation Lone Star. Those investigations are still ongoing. However, there is no evidence to support an assumption that their decisions were made as a direct result of hardship denials. It would be irresponsible journalism at this point in time to tie these tragedies to Operation Lone Star.

In calendar year 2021, out of more than 22,000 personnel, the Texas Military Department has experienced 9 suicides within our ranks. TMD leadership has met with each of the families and is providing all available resources. At the request of the families visited, TMD asks the media to respect the family's right to privacy during their time of grieving.

Equipment and Living Conditions

There have been inaccurate reports and social media posts attempting to **malign and undermine** Texas Military Department efforts to support our service members along the

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border. Our personnel are trained to operate and adapt in austere environments at home and abroad. As with any mission, we continue to adjust as the situation evolves.

Commanders in the field have identified areas of improvement in regards to equipment and living conditions and are actively working with vendors and supply chains to execute those solutions.

Since the start of Operation Lone Star, thousands of vehicles and heavy equipment, including those with advanced optics, as well weapons, ammunition, ballistic vests and plates, have deployed into the Texas-Mexico border region to support the men and women on the ground. In recent weeks, supplemental cold and wet weather gear have been delivered to service members, ensuring those supporting Operation Lone Star have appropriate protective gear.

COVID-19 Protocol

Like all sectors of society, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted members of the Texas Military Department. As of today, **less than 1 percent** of the state's military force is in quarantine/isolation.

The Texas Military Department follows isolation/quarantine and contact tracing protocols for COVID positive members. Additionally, Guardsmen have access to personal protective equipment, testing, vaccines, and antibody therapeutics. TMD's medical professionals have oversight of these protocols and ensure service members are monitored on a daily basis while in isolation/quarantine, and are cleared prior to returning to duty.

Mission Effects

Because of our service members' outstanding work:

- Approximately 100,000 illegal migrants have been apprehended or referred to our partner federal and state law enforcement agencies;
- More than 9,000 individuals, attempting to enter Texas illegally, have been returned to Mexico;
- Significant drug and weapon seizures have occurred, including the lethal drug fentanyl;
- And the ongoing construction of temporary barriers along the border is further deterring criminal activity.

The Texas Military Department, alongside the Texas Department of Public Safety, have established a steel curtain of protection, comprised of personnel and heavy equipment, for public and private property owners across the state's southern border.

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