

# **IMPROVING SOLDIER RETENTION**

## **In The Virginia Army National Guard**

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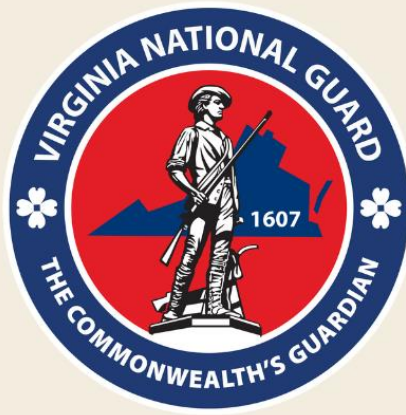
**TECHNICAL REPORT**  
**APRIL 2025**

Prepared For  
**THE VIRGINIA NATIONAL GUARD**

Prepared By  
**ANNA THOMAS**

# APPLIED POLICY PROJECT TECHNICAL REPORT APRIL 2025

PREPARED FOR:  
The Virginia National Guard



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## Disclaimer and Honor Statement

The author conducted this study as part of the professional education program at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, University of Virginia. This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the course requirements for the Master of Public Policy degree. The judgments and conclusions are solely those of the author and are not necessarily endorsed by the Batten School, the University of Virginia, the Virginia National Guard, or by any other agency.

“On my honor as a student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment.”

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Smith', is positioned to the right of the honor statement.

## Acronym Key

**AGR:** Active Guard Reserve

**ETS:** Expiration term of service

**FY:** Fiscal year

**MOS:** Military occupational specialty

**NGB:** National Guard Bureau

**R&R:** Recruitment and retention

**TAG:** The Adjutant General

**VAARNG:** Virginia Army National Guard

## Executive Summary

The Virginia Army National Guard (VAARNG) is battling consistently low soldier retention. The Fiscal Year 2024 retention rate was 64.11%, falling 11 percentage points short of the National Guard Bureau's goal for Virginia. This problem has persisted, with a five-year retention average of 63%. Notably, VAARNG attrition is concentrated in the junior ranks, meaning soldiers are not reenlisting beyond their initial contract.

The retention problem has short- and long-term implications for VAARNG operations. Low soldier retention undermines military readiness, increases pressure on recruitment to reach and maintain end strength, and leads to higher replacement costs. Additionally, low retention affects organizational stability by shrinking promotional pools, lowering competitiveness, and increasing the risk of promoting less qualified soldiers into VAARNG leadership.

The literature, as well as VAARNG interviews and survey responses, indicate a variety of attrition motivators that contribute to low retention. Pay dissatisfaction is often cited as a key motivator, especially considering the traditional guardsman is part-time. However, low job satisfaction—like a lack of flexibility, bureaucratic frustrations, or poor leadership perceptions—may more reliably explain a soldier's decision to separate from service. While soldier pay should be reevaluated, this report considers three alternatives to address retention by improving the *soldier experience*. The report evaluates the following options:

- 1. Leadership Feedback Surveys**

This alternative aims to improve “employee voice” by allowing soldiers to provide feedback on their unit's management standards and practices.

- 2. A Universal Free Drill Absence**

This alternative aims to improve soldier care by offering a flexible work arrangement whereby eligible part-time soldiers are permitted one excused weekend drill absence per fiscal year, with the opportunity to make up the absence for pay.

- 3. Increased Retention Workforce**

This alternative seeks to increase the number of career-focused personnel who can counsel soldiers, address grievances, and monitor career advancement outside of a soldier's official chain of command.

This report evaluates the alternatives against three criteria: cost-effectiveness, administrative feasibility, and immediacy of impact. While all the proposed alternatives are expected to improve retention in some capacity, this report recommends that VAARNG implement a Universal Free Drill Absence policy to standardize flexibility and enhance perceptions of leadership. This low-cost alternative is expected to increase annual retention by approximately three percentage points, with few obstacles to implementation.

VAARNG should initiate this policy within the G1 Personnel Directorate Staff Section. The action officer will champion and advocate for the policy while moving it up the chain for approval before sending it for concurrence from legal, finance, and other relevant staff sections.

With approval from the Adjutant General, VAARNG should prioritize strategic messaging to affected leadership and soldiers explaining the policy, its terms and conditions, its purpose, and the endorsement of upper leadership. Research indicates that failed organizational buy-in or a lack of a supportive culture will lessen or even reverse the retention effects of the program. While the Universal Free Drill Absence will create incremental progress, this report recommends a larger cultural shift toward retention, soldier experience, and high-quality leadership. Fundamental change ultimately requires the issue to become a top priority for VAARNG leadership.

Ultimately, this report recommends that VAARNG improve soldier retention by addressing soldier care and soldier experience. A Universal Free Drill Absence offers support and flexibility to soldiers while maintaining unit readiness and manpower.

## Introduction

U.S. military recruitment has become a national challenge among all three components—active duty, reserves, and national guard (Toropin, 2023; Vergun, 2023). Consequently, military manpower is at risk. Government reports and analyses are hyper-focused on innovating recruitment strategies (Collins, 2023; Olay, 2024; Spoehr, 2023), but to reach end strength (or the projected and maximum authorized number of personnel per fiscal year) (Congressional Budget Office, 2007), personnel management should address both ends: recruitment *and* retention.

This report defines retention as the re-enlistment of current service members beyond their initial contract. Specifically, the analysis focuses on the retention of first-term soldiers in the Virginia Army National Guard (VAARNG). The Guard is a unique military component with a dual mission, serving as a reserve component to the U.S. military and offering military defense to the unit's respective state (Virginia Army Guard, n.d.). The Guard predominantly comprises part-time service members with routine training obligations and on-call readiness. Thus, low National Guard retention rates reduce force strength and threaten combat readiness for federal and state mobilizations.

## Problem Statement

VAARNG consistently faces low soldier retention. Specifically, VAARNG experienced 64% retention for Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24), falling 11 percentage points short of the National Guard Bureau's (NGB) 75% annual retention goal for Virginia. Low retention rates correspond with high attrition—defined in this analysis as a soldier's voluntary separation from the Guard at the expiration term of service (ETS) or the completion of their enlistment contract. Put simply, soldiers that separate ETS are not reenlisting, thus contributing to retention shortfalls. The issue has persisted over time, with a five-year retention average of 63%.

Some attrition is natural and even healthy, such as retirements or medical discharges. However, VAARNG data indicates that attrition is highest for first-term enlistments, suggesting that soldiers are separating early, often due to job or pay dissatisfaction. In FY24, 60.8% of VAARNG soldier attrition was at the E4 level. Thus, the crux of the issue lies in retaining young, first-term enlisted soldiers to maintain force strength and readiness.



## Client Overview

### **Mission**

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The National Guard has two branches, the Army and Air Guard, distinct from the Army and Air Reserve components. The National Guard uniquely serves under both state and federal command. Specifically, the Virginia National Guard has a “federal mission to provide a combat reserve for the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force to fight our nation’s wars and a state mission to provide a response force that answers the call of the Governor to defend the commonwealth,” (Virginia National Guard, n.d.a).

The National Guard receives funding from the state government’s General Assembly and the federal government via the Department of Defense (DoD). In terms of federal oversight, the NGB, under DoD, oversees all 54 National Guard units from the states, territories, and the District of Columbia (Siripurapu & Berman, 2024).

### **Soldier Make-Up**

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VAARNG has approximately 7,200 soldiers (Virginia National Guard, n.d.a). Distinct from active-duty components, most National Guard service members are part-time “citizen soldiers” (Virginia National Guard, n.d.a) with regular training obligations to prepare for domestic mobilizations or international deployment with the U.S. Army. Aside from their part-time service, soldiers have full-time civilian jobs and hail from all industries and career fields. Although the Guard is generally diverse in its soldier makeup, it is predominantly male (which is especially true for combat arms). Additionally, first-time enlisted personnel have a minimum educational level equivalent to a high school degree, with many taking college classes while serving. More specifically, national data indicates that 77% of those in the National Guard (Army and Air) have less than a bachelor’s degree (Pew Research Center, 2011).

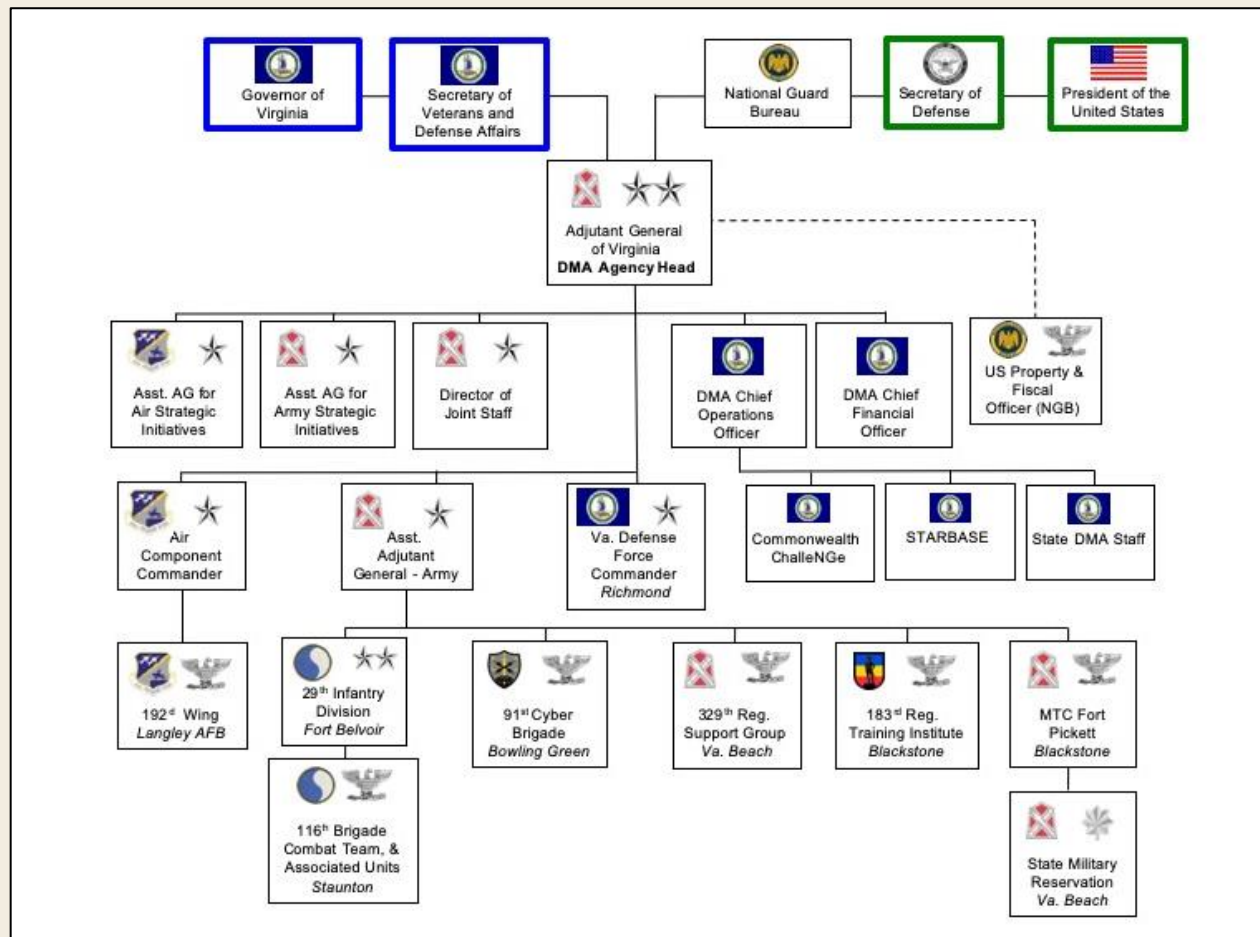
VAARNG soldiers typically enlist under an eight-year contract, often broken down by six years of part-time service and two years of on-call service for national emergencies, although contractual breakdowns vary. Research indicates retention is lowest across all military branches in first-term service members (Warner, 2012). This holds with VAARNG, with most attrition consistently from first enlistment ranks.

### **Organizational Structure**

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The organizational structure and leadership of VAARNG are strictly hierarchical. First, the Adjutant General of Virginia (TAG) is VAARNG’s highest-ranking military official responsible for all National Guard operations and administration within the state. The Joint Staff (both Army and Air Guard units) fall under TAG, which reports to the Governor of Virginia and the Secretary

of Veteran's and Defense Affairs (Virginia National Guard, n.d.c). Figure 1 shows the structure of state and federal authority.



**Figure 1:** Virginia Department of Military Affairs and VAARNG Authorities (Virginia Department of Military Affairs, n.d.).

Additionally, VAARNG is home to the 29th Infantry Division, which coordinates infantry brigades across multiple states (Virginia National Guard, n.d.). Generally, VAARNG organizational breakdown is more internal to the state and can be thought of in layers: Commands, battalions, and companies.

Commands comprise multiple battalions, which are mid-sized units of approximately 300-800 soldiers. Likewise, companies nest under a specific battalion. Each organizational level—commands, battalions, and companies—is typically led by a full-time officer (as opposed to an enlisted soldier) and has a more specialized operational mission than the parent unit.

## Background

### **Soldier Matriculation and Experience**

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When soldiers matriculate into VAARNG, they are assigned a sponsor of a higher grade outside their chain of command to help introduce them to service norms and expectations. Among such expectations includes reporting for drill (or training) one weekend a month and two weeks annually over the summer. Soldiers hail from all parts of the state and travel to their duty station from their primary residence. Weekend drills typically run from Friday evening to mid-day or late afternoon Sunday and can be either a home station drill or field drill.

Home station drills are standard weekend-long training at a soldier's home station. They include standard briefings and maintenance drills to prepare for more extensive training exercises. Field drills are more intensive. Soldiers arrive at their home station to check in and draw equipment before traveling to Fort Barfoot to train in wooden environments.

The President can mobilize soldiers for war and national emergencies or the Governor for state emergencies, including civil disturbance, natural disasters, or public health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. A soldier typically deploys with the active-duty Army every four to five years, with domestic mobilizations assuming the bulk of activations.

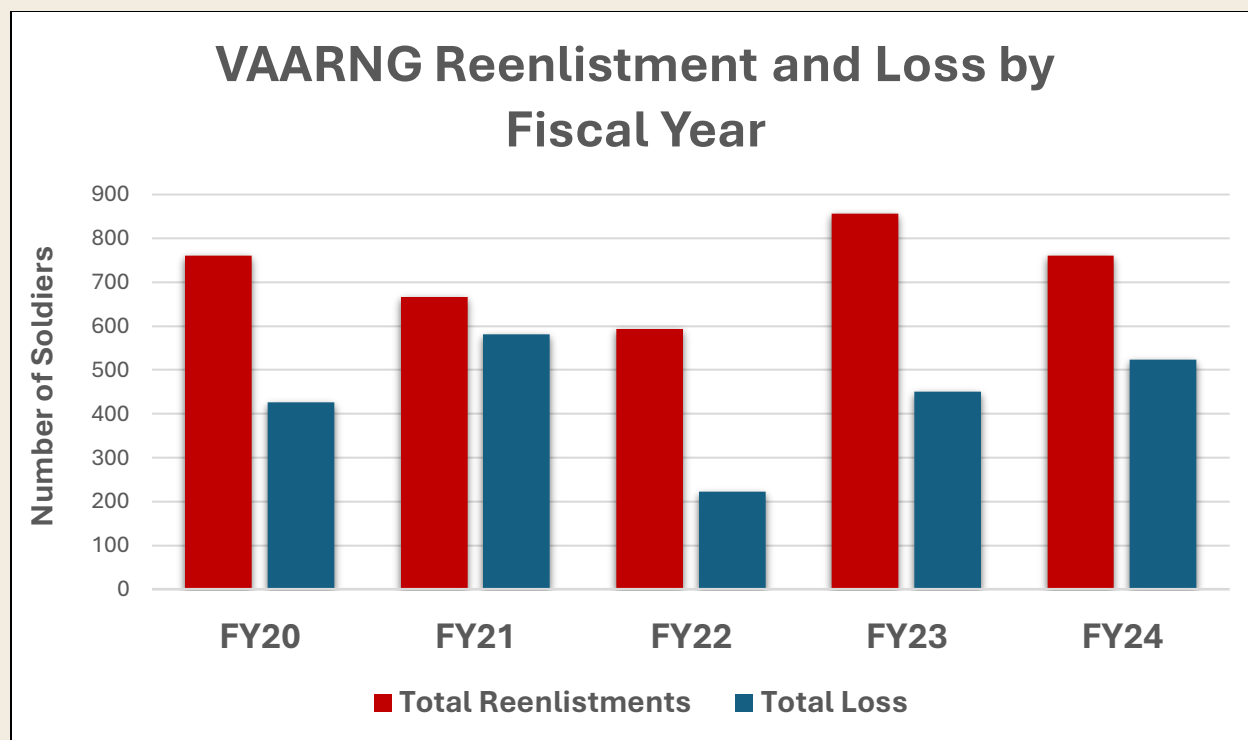
### **Retention Shortfalls and Survey Data**

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VAARNG Retention shortfalls have persisted over the past five years, albeit not without variation.<sup>1</sup> The highest retention rate of the five-year sample was 72.7% in FY22, and the lowest was 53.4% in FY23. Figure 2 portrays the retention rate over time, comparing annual loss to annual re-enlistments. It is important to note that every organization anticipates some level of natural turnover. However, Figure 3 shows that VAARNG attrition is concentrated at the E-4 rank, indicating high levels of separation for early-career soldiers.

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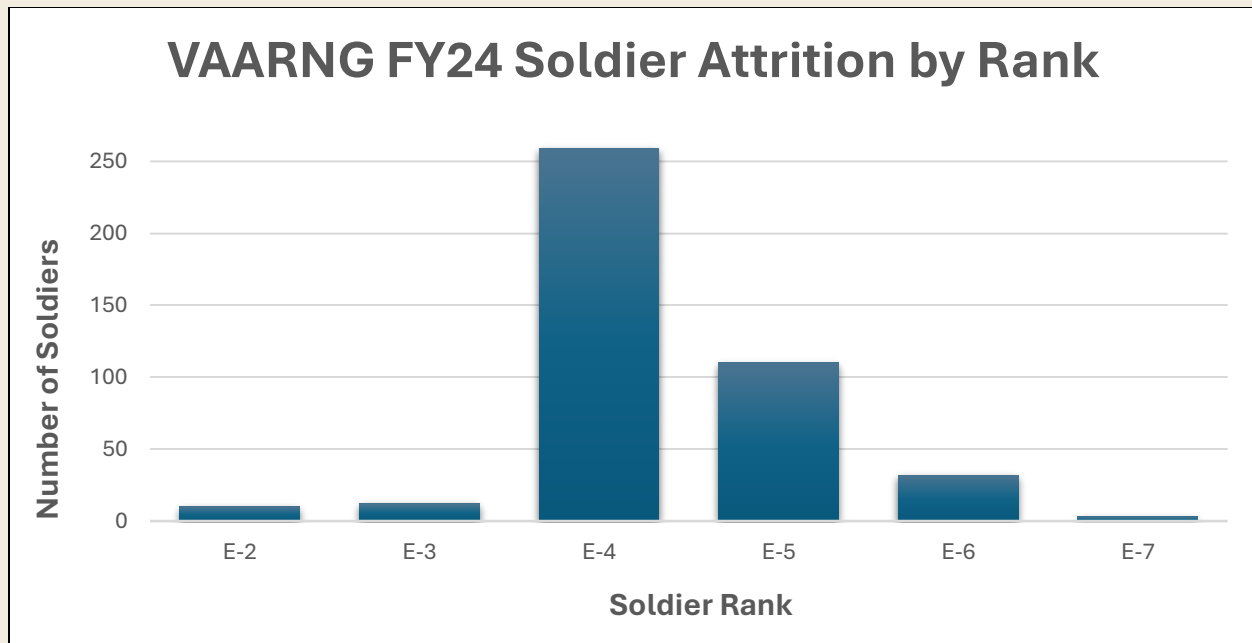
<sup>1</sup> This finding is based on five years of VAARNG retention data.



**Figure 2:** VAARNG Reenlistment and Loss by Fiscal Year

VAARNG has some survey results on soldier experience and feedback, although historical data and retrieval are flawed. Specifically, VAARNG has data from the “azimuth check” and the overall exit surveys. While the survey results likely exist, data collection for the exit survey is imperfect as it does not currently yield accurate observation numbers and muddles the collection dates. Meanwhile, the azimuth check survey has been more reliable. Still, it is typically distributed a year or two before a soldier’s ETS and thus does not provide feedback during separation. Neither survey system breaks down responses by demographic or MOS.

However, a recent VAARNG retention survey collected over a thousand soldier responses. Response collection dates range from January 8, 2025, to March 3, 2025. This report’s analysis narrowed the sample to 636 respondents with six years of service or fewer, focusing on the rank population most likely to attrit. Of such respondents, only a third indicated they were interested in reenlisting. In fact, 20% (127 of 636) of the junior grade respondents indicated they do not feel like their leadership is competent or interested in their development and nearly 18% (112 of 636) said they do not feel valued at their unit.



**Figure 3:** VAARNG Soldier Attrition by Rank in FY24

### **Recruitment and Retention Process**

The Recruitment and Retention (R&R) Battalion<sup>2</sup> has two companies broken down further by geographic areas. Each area is made up of recruiters led by a Section Chief. An area in Virginia typically has eight recruiters, although the number varies. Recruiters are classified as AGR positions, or Active Guard and Reserve, meaning they are full-time active-duty service members instead of the more standard part-time. The R&R Battalion has more AGR service members than any other battalion but still faces high turnover rates for recruiters.

Each recruiter has an annual mission or recruiting goal set by the Area Section Chief. Mission sets can be based on market share, rank, recruiting experience, time away for anticipated annual leave, and more. Whether it includes high school visits, individual appointments with recruits, or otherwise, recruiters have some discretion in their strategies to meet their quota. Incoming recruiters attend one month of schooling at the Professional Education Center (PEC) for training specific to the Recruiting MOS.

In terms of retention, VAARNG lacks formal programming and initiative. Recruiters do not have a retention mission, but the R&R Battalion does include a Retention Master Sergeant and his retention-focused subordinates. Still, individual battalion and command leaders often feel the retention onus at a more local level. This emphasizes the quality of leaders and their level of

<sup>2</sup> Much of this section's information pertaining to VAARNG's recruitment and retention processes comes from soldier and R&R interviews conducted by the author.

“soldier care,” or individual support and flexibility regarding a soldier’s service and unit experience.

Regarding pay, soldiers typically receive enlistment and re-enlistment bonuses when they sign or renew their service contract. Otherwise, the traditional part-time guardsman is paid hourly for their monthly and annual drill plus some benefits, including healthcare and education assistance. Appendices 13 and 14 depict FY22 reenlistment bonuses and benefit incentives, respectively. A soldier’s pay is based on various factors, including their rank and years of service. The compensation packages are particularly relevant, especially as this report later considers pay satisfaction under the intervention framework.

### **Consequences and Implications**

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The immediate consequences of retention shortfalls are the loss of trained soldier experience, less competitive promotional pools, the added cost of replacement, and readiness issues for mobilization, whether domestically or federally (Chun, 2005).

In terms of readiness, the VAARNG’s national mission as a reserve component keeps active-duty operations afloat (Chun, 2005; Griffith, 2022). For example, VAARNG played a critical operational role in the response to the terrorist attacks on U.S. soil on September 11, 2001. In 2002, nearly 70 soldiers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group were deployed to Afghanistan to support the Global War on Terror (Virginia National Guard History, n.d.). Meanwhile, the 116<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade was mobilized to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for base security operations (Virginia National Guard History, n.d.). Since the Global War on Terror began, 15,000 Virginia National Guard soldiers and airmen have deployed (Virginia National Guard History, n.d.).

The Guard’s personnel and end strength are critical to national security. Since military recruitment has become a national challenge among all military components (Toropin, 2023; Vergun, 2023), U.S. military manpower is already at risk. If national or state manpower is low, VAARNG risks critical defense operations for U.S. and Virginia state security.

In addition to sustaining operations, retention has long-term leadership implications. Like all U.S. military components, VAARNG promotes from within. However, if more soldiers attrit, the promotional pool shrinks and becomes less competitive, increasing the chance of promoting less qualified soldiers (Chun, 2005). However, a correlational study found that the military typically retains its highest-quality service members (based on education and performance on the Armed Forces Qualification Test) while those that separate ETS are, on average, of the same quality as those presently matriculating into the force (Buddin, 1984). This review will later note that poor unit leadership correlates with lower retention. In that case, low retention may contribute to a cycle of worsening leadership and soldier experience (Chun, 2005). On the contrary, if retention is too high, soldiers may suffer from a lack of promotional opportunities (Griffith, 2022). These findings are especially relevant, considering the highest rate of ETS separation is among the most junior enlisted soldiers (Hansen, MacLeod, & Gregory, 2004).

Finally, low retention leads to higher recruitment pressures to maintain manpower. It is expensive to recruit new employees (Singh & Loncar, 2010), especially with specific military training costs involved. A RAND study reported an average recruitment cost of \$15,000 per soldier in 2003 (Buddin, 2005).<sup>3</sup> Retention, then, matters not only for national or domestic security and readiness but also for organizational stability and longevity.

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<sup>3</sup> This is an Army estimate and is not specific to the Army National Guard, nationally or in Virginia.

## Intervention Framework

### **Addressing Soldier Pay**

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Research gives considerable attention to pay level and satisfaction in the decision to attrit. Literature generally finds positive correlations or positive causal inferences between employee compensation, retention, and job satisfaction (Babu et al., 2016; Steinmetz et al., 2014; Pertiwi & Supartha, 2021; Singh & Loncar, 2010).

A 2001 study found that if average civilian pay were held constant and military pay rose by 10%, we would expect first-term retention to rise by 20% for active components (Warner, 2012). Additionally, some causal analyses do cite higher pay as increasing retention for active-duty Army personnel, especially for combat MOS (Lakhani, 1988). Thus, income-based factors play a role in soldiers' decisions to stay in service.

Bonuses are also believed to have a positive relationship with retention (Warner, 2012; Grissmer, 1985; Lakhani, 1988; Goldberg, 2001). One study found that, holding other variables constant, soldiers who received bonuses reenlisted more frequently than soldiers who did not receive the bonus. However, the regression findings indicate a weak correlation, with bonuses increasing reenlistment rates by only 2 percentage points (Grissmer, 1985).

There does exist in the literature doubt on pay satisfaction as a trustworthy predictor of attrition (Allen, 2010) or, at least, doubt that a pay intervention is the best retention solution for a diverse set of attrition motives (De Vries et al., 2023; Chun, 2005). Presumably, soldiers know their benefits before enlisting, allowing factors previously unaccounted for to drive their attrition decisions. Thus, while pay satisfaction relates to attrition, the interventions that address factors that motivate a soldier's decision to leave, such as job satisfaction and personal life, may be more worthwhile solutions (Singh & Loncar, 2010). Besides, some argue that monetary incentives should only be employed if they are likely to address a specific problem and, in that instance, target pay is more effective than blanket bonuses or raises (Hansen, MacLeod, & Gregory, 2004).

### **The Focus: Job Satisfaction and Commitment**

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Literature supports that leadership's flexibility, communication, and fairness are associated with job satisfaction and engagement (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Workplace empowerment may be particularly relevant in combat arms or for enlisted soldiers, where drill duties may be oversimplified or feel monotonous.

Public employment often feels inherently purposeful because of its focus on the welfare of others (Lee & Olshfski, 2002), but such missions may not sustain employee motivation and commitment long-term. Commitment can be considered multi-dimensional with direct implications for retention. Additionally, commitment can be categorized in the following ways: affective commitment reflects desire to stay, normative commitment reflects a perceived need to stay, and



continuance commitment reflects a feeling of obligation to stay (Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993). Research indicates that continuance and normative commitment increase retention, but not job satisfaction, while more obviously, affective commitment was the strongest predictor of workplace engagement and retention (Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993). Similarly, the authors distinguish commitment to an organization from the occupation, with organizational commitment yielding a stronger association to retention and job satisfaction (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993).

While the study focused on students and registered nurses, the findings are especially relevant to the Guard service, particularly in organizational commitment and mission-driven service. Suppose a soldier is inspired to join the Guard because of their desire to serve (occupational commitment). In that case, workplace experience and organizational commitment are needed to retain a soldier beyond the point of having satisfied their “service itch.” Even in correlational analyses, commitment to individuals or groups at work (like coworkers or supervisors) is positively associated with intent to stay and job satisfaction (Becker, 1992).

Employees' workplace experience often reflects how they perceive their immediate manager's leadership quality (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Thus, managerial accountability is critical for fair and consistent leadership. Managerial monitoring, training, and formalization—the degree to which work processes and expectations are standardized, explicitly communicated, and enforced—increased *employee* accountability in African public sector workforces (Natria, Samian, & Riantoputra, 2022; Malek, Kline, & DiPietro, 2018). While there exist high levels of structure at all levels of the National Guard, these accountability measures may be relevant if applied to managers and unit-level leaders to increase accountability for the soldier retention under their command. After all, immediate supervisors are a critical liaison between human resource practices and the employees (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007).

Research indicates that management training and development positively correlate with employee retention (Malek, Kline, & DiPietro, 2018). A retail case study in the United Kingdom indicated that although HR had an appraisal policy that required bi-annual appraisals (one for pay purposes and one for training and development), managers often diverted from HR expectations (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Specifically, employees indicated an inconsistent frequency or lack of formal appraisals altogether. Forty-six percent of employee respondents said they wanted more recognition and appreciation, even though the company had recently initiated leadership training for managers to ensure consistent management (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Leadership practices and employee satisfaction improved after the company more strictly enforced managerial expectations via reapplication, condensing the management hierarchy, and redefining the roles (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Thus, to ensure a positive employee experience, HR must hold management accountable for their leadership and execution of company policies.

Finally, the literature emphasizes the importance of people-oriented interventions, perhaps as opposed to monetary incentives or organizational change (Solinger et al., 2021). Solinger et al. (2021) define people-oriented solutions as targeted investments in employees and their capabilities

to revitalize human capital and increase employee engagement, devotion, capabilities, and commitment. They find that people-oriented interventions (such as new HR programs) increase employee attitudes that are sustained over time, while cost-oriented interventions (like restructuring) lead to sustained reductions in job attitudes (Solinger et al., 2021). A mixed-method approach that combines interventions has little effect on attitudes (Solinger et al., 2021). Such findings may support solutions that address overall job satisfaction instead of pay satisfaction.

Interestingly, and as mentioned under the soldier pay discussion, monetary incentives improve retention, but increased contact with personnel may yield more impactful results. Asch *et al.* (2010) found that the most cost-effective active duty recruiting tool per high-quality recruit was not base pay (\$57,000 per recruit) or enlistment bonuses (\$44,900), but an increase in the number of recruiters (\$33,000) (Asch et al., 2010). This has profound implications for efficient interventions for recruitment and can likely be applied to retention, where money may motivate enlistment and re-enlistment but direct personal contact with R&R officials could yield the most cost-effective results.

Based on the literature, this report targets soldier retention from the perspective of workplace experience and human resource support. The following alternatives reflect opportunities to improve soldier retention by improving “soldier care.” Additionally, this report uses FY24 personnel and retention statistics to measure varying outcomes.

## Evaluative Criteria

This report considers three alternatives to address soldier retention. It evaluates them on three criteria, which are described below in detail: cost-effectiveness, administrative feasibility, and immediacy of impact.

### **Cost-Effectiveness**

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The cost-effectiveness criterion will measure the dollar per percentage point increase in retention. Thus, it evaluates a program's monetary costs and expected retention impact. Cost calculations primarily include labor and required materials and reflect expected costs *in the first year*. This report measures effectiveness as the percentage point change in soldier retention. The cost-effectiveness ratio puts varying costs across the three alternatives into perspective and considers the overall value of the policy investment. The score for this criterion will range from highly cost-effective (3), moderately cost-effective (2), to not cost-effective (1) and will be ranked relative to the other alternatives.

### **Administrative Feasibility**

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The administrative feasibility criterion will measure the difficulty level in implementing an alternative. Embedded in this assessment is the alternative's likelihood of implementation, with a higher difficulty in implementation corresponding to lower feasibility. Therefore, feasibility is measured in the number of administrative steps required to implement an alternative. An alternative with 10 steps or fewer is highly feasible (3), 10-15 steps will be moderately feasible (2), and more than 15 steps will be infeasible (1).

To account for varying difficulty levels embedded within administrative steps, we also assess evidence to gauge the likelihood of administrative success. Evidence of success is considered likely (3), evidence of partial success is moderately likely (2), and lack of evidence of success or evidence of failure is unlikely (1). The two scores (feasibility and probability/likelihood) will be averaged for an overall administrative feasibility score ranging from high (3) to low (1).

### **Immediacy of Impact**

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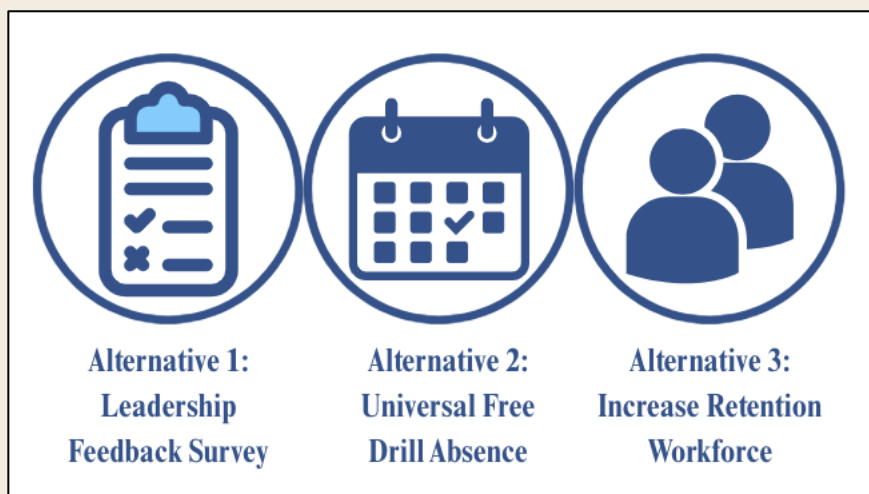
The immediacy of impact criterion will measure the period from the point of an alternative's implementation to the time of meaningful change in soldier retention. The immediacy of impact will be measured in the number of months, based on evidence from related policy changes.

Specifically, this criterion will be measured as an immediate impact (3), deferred impact (2), or a prolonged impact (1), based on evidence from related studies. Immediate impact implies the study saw effects within six months, deferred impact implies the study saw effects between six and 12 months, and prolonged impact implies that effects took over a year. This criterion does not project the exact timeline of an alternative's impact on VAARNG soldier retention, as it depends on when

a policy is implemented in a soldier’s enlistment. Additionally, VAARNG generally measures force retention annually, so effects are likely not observed until the conclusion of a full fiscal year.

## Findings

This report evaluates the following policy alternatives to address VAARNG soldier retention: Leadership Feedback Surveys, a Universal Free Drill Absence, and Increased Retention Workforce—each alternative aims to address the VAARNG soldier experience based on the above intervention framework. The policy evaluation applies the criteria and their corresponding rubrics to each alternative.



**Figure 4:** Summary of Proposed Alternatives

### **Alternative 1: Leadership Feedback Surveys**

This alternative will introduce a semi-annual supervisor evaluation survey for first-term enlisted soldiers. The survey will assess soldiers’ perceptions of their unit’s standards, practices, and leadership. Survey responses will remain anonymous and be reviewed by the battalion’s Retention NCO, the soldier’s supervisor, and R&R Battalion leadership, as needed. Leaders seeking feedback will invite subordinates to participate directly instead of an invitation from the R&R Battalion.

The alternative allows soldiers to participate in a follow-up interview to target and improve soldier care through “employee voice.” Soldiers interested in addressing their concerns are invited to interview with the Retention NCO outside the chain of command via a separate contact information form. This form will not link to their evaluation survey response, protecting survey anonymity. Those who opt in to the interview follow-up will be contacted within 30 days to schedule an interview.

**Criterion 1: Cost-Effectiveness:** A 2022 randomized control trial tested the effect of employee satisfaction surveys on retention for an Indian garment manufacturing and export firm after employees did not receive an anticipated wage increase (Adhvaryu, Molina, &

Nyshadham, 2022). The survey ( $n = 2,000$ ) included questions relating to all aspects of job satisfaction, including supervisor evaluations. The survey was conducted at the end of June and early July. The survey had statistically significant effects, and by November, quit rates were approximately two percentage points lower in the treatment group than in the control group. On average, the surveyed workers were 20% less likely to quit than those in the control group. At the average level of wage disappointment (from the failed wage increase), the treatment group was 16% less likely to quit than the control group. All findings were statistically significant.

Although not a direct comparison to VAARNG soldiers, the study applies in several ways. Specifically, the firm suffered from high levels of turnover prior to the intervention, the participants had an average tenure of less than two years (like the target VAARNG soldier in this analysis), workers were generally dissatisfied with pay, and the workplace had few opportunities for employee voice, which may mimic a hierarchical military experience.

Assuming leadership evaluation surveys decrease retention by 20 percent, then a 60 percent VAARNG take-up rate among E4s (the most likely rank to attrit) would increase total retention from 64.11 percent to 66.68 percent. Higher take-up rates are associated with greater effectiveness. Specifically, this report bases the expected take-up rate on Kolaja et al. (2023), which found an average take-up rate of 60 percent in a longitudinal study of The Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) survey response, which included follow-up waves. The MCS is the longest-running cohort study of military personnel, which examines the long-term health of service members and relies on continued survey participation.

This alternative is associated with labor and technology costs. Appendix 3 outlines the labor and material calculation for this alternative. The G1 Staff Section would create and administer the surveys across VAARNG. Total start-up labor is estimated to be \$4,650, and annual labor (in year one) is estimated to be \$8,097.20, based on hourly wages and the expected hourly commitment of involved staff members.

Assuming VAARNG requires a reliable survey software program, they may investigate commonly used software across government agencies. According to their website, Qualtrics serves over 650 state and local government organizations and 300 federal clients (Qualtrics, n.d.). Qualtrics offers an Employee Experience survey subscription (People Engage product) that costs an annual \$5,040 for 1,000 survey responses. Although a semi-annual survey will require a higher response capacity, this report relies on this preliminary estimate to represent basic licensing fees. Thus, the final cost-effectiveness is estimated to be \$17,787.25 per 2.57 percentage point increase (or \$6,923.45 per 1 percentage point increase) in retention in Year 1. **Cost-Effectiveness earns a comparative score of 1.**

***Criterion 2: Administrative Feasibility:*** This alternative relies primarily on internal approval and operationalization. The policy and corresponding survey will originate in the G1 staff section, with the action officer drafting policy and decision papers. The policy

would move up the G1 leadership chain for approval and require review and concurrence from other staff sections, including legal and fiscal review, before finally requiring final approval from TAG. Appendix 4 and Figure 5 outline the alternative's administrative steps in more detail, which are informed by consultations with the VAARNG G1 deputy. As shown in Figure 5, this alternative is expected to require 13 distinct steps between policy drafting, final approval, and implementation.

Evaluative surveys have military precedent, such as the Defense Organizational Climate Survey, a "Congressionally mandated unit-level survey" that helps DoD and the respective military component to assess organizational climate (Office of People Analytics, n.d.). However, a home-grown survey internal to VAARNG has the potential to ask targeted questions and provide immediate results to leadership and the R&R Battalion, allowing soldiers to realize their "employee voice" (Alfayad & Arif, 2017). In fact, as of 2015, the Army's Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback (MSAF) program required each officer to complete a 360 evaluation (Hardison et al., 2015).

Still, this alternative has two challenges. First, soldiers may feel "survey fatigue" (Ghafourifard, 2024), which may contribute to low levels of perceived employee voice. Second, the hierarchical military structure may resist leadership evaluations.

A 2014 RAND study considered 360 evaluations in the military. Through a literature assessment and stakeholder interviews, the report found that 360 evaluations were ill-advised for leadership evaluation but could be helpful for leadership development (i.e., serving a reflection and development purpose to supervisors) (Hardison et al., 2015). The current report does not evaluate this alternative to improve soldier retention by improving leadership behavior, but instead focuses on improving retention by increasing soldier/employee voice, so they feel heard. Leadership evaluations are strictly not intended in this alternative, but leadership development could be a positive byproduct. Research shows that 360 feedback results in minor but positive improvements in individual leader behavior (Hardison et al., 2015). Still, interviewees stated that 360 evaluations would not eliminate or fix toxic leadership.

Additionally, the RAND study pointed out leadership's concerns from the evaluative perspective, including creating a reluctance of leaders to discipline, eroding organizational trust, and legal and fairness concerns because of anonymous and troublesome survey responses that could warrant action and challenge confidentiality (Hardison et al., 2015). Although the RAND's interviewees expressed such criticisms for surveys with the purpose of leadership evaluation, and the current report evaluates the alternative as a mechanism of employee voice, this alternative's proposal and implementation may face similar organizational criticism.

Hardison et al. (2015) pointed out that a careful approach to survey implementation (e.g., clearly defining the purpose, considering appropriate personnel with response privileges,

and survey questions) may curb some cultural concerns. Still, a hierarchical and traditional military culture may challenge the endorsement of this alternative. Thus, Bureaucratic Feasibility earns a score of 3, likelihood of Success earns 2, and **Total Administrative Feasibility earns a score of 2.5.**

	Administrative Steps
Step 1	G1 action officer consults Battalion leadership to inform policy.
Step 2	G1 action officer drafts a survey or coordinates with a contracted surveyor <i>*Exclusively for Alternative 1</i>
Step 3	G1 Personnel Directorate human resource officer/staff member drafts policy
Step 4	Policy is reviewed and endorsed by the G1 Deputy (LTC) and Col.
Step 5	Concurrence from other staff sections (if applicable).
Step 6	Human Resource Officer review (if distinct from other staff concurrence)
Step 7	Cost Feasibility Analysis (if financial resources are required)
Step 8	Legal Department review
Step 9	Army Chief of Staff review
Step 10	Army Land Component Commander review
Step 11	Director of the Joint Staff review
Step 12	Approval by The Adjutant General (TAG)
Step 13	G1 Personnel Directorate drafts and publishes communication to command leadership establishing requirements, implementation, and monitoring plan

**Figure 5:** Administrative Steps, Alternative 1 & 2

**Criterion 2: Immediacy of Impact:** Adhvaryu, Molina, & Nyshadham (2022) found that the effect of survey intervention was delayed but persisted over time. It took approximately three months for the intervention to produce a significant impact. Specifically, for workers disappointed with their work situation (e.g., the lack of a wage increase), the intervention had little immediate effect in the months following its implementation. However, its impact



grew over time, becoming larger in magnitude and statistically significant from September through November, the studied months.

Applying findings from Adhvaryu, Molina, and Nyshadham (2022), this report expects the alternative to have an immediate impact on retention, relative to the timeframe of this criterion. **Immediacy of Impact earns a score of 3.**

## **Alternative 2: Universal Free Drill Absence**

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This alternative will introduce a VAARNG policy that allows soldiers one excused weekend drill absence per fiscal year without pay, starting after at least one full year of service. This absence cannot be used on the annual, two-week summer drill. Soldiers who use this benefit can make up the work hours, with pay, within a 60-day window of the drill absence. Notice of annual drill absence must be submitted no less than 30 days before the absence. This report suggests the alternative be administered on a first-come, first-served basis to ensure sufficient staffing at drill. This alternative will target workplace flexibility and job satisfaction for soldiers.

**Criterion 1: Cost-Effectiveness:** Research broadly indicates that flexible work arrangements, specifically telework options, increase retention (Choi, 2020; McNall, Masuda, & Nicklin, 2009; Caillier, 2016; Caillier, 2018). Lee & Kim (2018) use a quasi-experimental study to measure the effect of telework eligibility on federal employees' intent to stay (i.e., retention indicator), among other outcomes like job satisfaction and perceived fairness. The cross-sectional study uses the 2011 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) and found that the option to telework increases all three outcome variables, even when employees do not participate in telework after the option becomes available. Specifically, Lee & Kim (2018) find a 3.6 percentage point (0.079 SD) increase in intent to stay, statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level.

Although not a perfect comparison to the VAARNG soldier experience, the nuanced evaluation of telework *eligibility* on intent to stay is applicable by assessing the option of flexible work arrangements and how that changes employee experience and subsequent retention. The National Guard is a hierarchical and disciplined culture that lacks a sense of flexibility. After all, the part-time hours and strict reporting schedules create a sense of obligation with low pay that may, over time, erode the value of service for entry-level soldiers. Flexible work arrangements communicate a degree of trust and compensation.

Applying the findings from Lee & Kim (2018), this report expects the alternative to increase retention by 3.6 percentage points, from 64.11% to 67.71%.

This alternative is associated primarily with labor costs. Appendix 7 depicts labor implementation costs for the alternative, estimated at \$4,650. Cost-effectiveness is estimated to be \$4,650 per 3.6 percentage point increase (or \$1,291.67 per 1 percentage point increase) in retention in Year 1. **Cost-Effectiveness earns a comparative score of 3.**



**Criterion 2: Administrative Feasibility:** This alternative's administrative feasibility relies primarily on internal approval and operationalization. The policy will originate in the G1 staff section, with the action officer drafting policy and decision papers. The policy would move up the G1 leadership chain for approval and require review and concurrence from other staff sections, including legal and fiscal review, before finally requiring final approval from TAG. Appendix 4 and Figure 5 outline the alternative's administrative steps in more detail, which are informed by consultations with the VAARNG G1 deputy. This alternative requires 12 steps between policy drafting, final approval, and implementation.

Studies indicate that traditional guardsmen (i.e., part-time soldiers) prefer the current training schedule, requiring one weekend a month and two weeks a year, to alternative training schedules (Bond et al., 2021). In other words, training schedule and structure are not a foundational retention concern. Rather, inflexibility and inconsistent leadership impact soldier care and, consequently, a soldier's decision to reenlist. As mentioned earlier, soldier care and leadership grievances are commonly mentioned in VAARNG soldier survey responses.

The alternative targets flexibility and consistency by offering the same flexible work arrangement option across all units. Federal regulation Title 32 U.S.C. § 502(a) states that each National Guard unit must assemble for drill at least 48 times a year and participate in training encampments or exercises for at least 15 days annually (*U.S. Code*, n.d.). However, according to the National Guard Bureau (2021), soldiers can perform Equivalent Training (ET) within 60 calendar days of a missed drill date. The Department of the Army (2005) gives commanders the authority to grant excused drill absences. This report considers this alternative a relatively high likelihood of implementation success because VAARNG tracks drill attendance, and Army and NGB regulations provide avenues for ET and excused absences. However, to be feasible, the alternative suggests that absences be approved on a first-come, first-served basis and at least 30 days before the missed drill to affirm minimum or appropriate unit attendance for a given drill. As such, VAARNG would reserve the right to deny this absence on a first-come, first-served basis to assure the necessary staffing. Thus, Bureaucratic Feasibility earns a score of 3 and Likelihood of Success earns 3. **Total Administrative Feasibility earns a score of 3.**

**Criterion 2: Immediacy of Impact:** While Lee & Kim's (2018) cross-sectional study does not account for the timing of the effect, Joe & Karpinski (2024) found that the more flexible the work schedule, the more significant the impact on retention. However, their three-year longitudinal study found that the retention effect of flexible work arrangements (FWA) decreases over time. The study observed the greatest impact on retention in the first year. Other studies have found similar effects of flexible work arrangements on retention within one year (Timms et al., 2015), although most studies do not observe effects of FWA by month.

Therefore, I estimate that this alternative will improve retention within 12 months. Even if effects simmer over time for employees (Joe & Karpinski, 2024), I anticipate some degree of a renewed effect for incoming servicemembers. **Immediacy of Impact earns a score of 2.**

### **Alternative 3: Increasing Retention Workforce**

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VAARNG has a Retention NCO assigned to all 13 battalions. These Active-Duty Operational Support (ADOS) roles offer a temporary workforce (U.S. Army Reserve, n.d.), and their existence is contingent on annual state budget allocations. Research indicates that additional personnel lead to increased recruitment and retention. This alternative proposes two permanent Retention Specialists based out of the R&R Battalion to (a) support and centralize retention operations across all battalions by serving as a primary assistant to the Retention Master Sergeant (b) fill vacancies in the event of understaffed Retention NCOs and (c) serve as an on-call resource to soldier grievances and inquiries, outside a soldier's chain of command. To minimize costs and ensure personnel quality, the alternative suggests the pipeline for hiring to be former or current VAARNG recruiters.

***Criterion 1: Cost-Effectiveness:*** While monetary incentives can impact retention (Asch et al., 2010), increased contact with personnel may yield more impactful results. A RAND study found that the most cost-effective active duty recruiting tool per high-quality recruit was not base pay (\$57,000 per recruit) or enlistment bonuses (\$44,900) but an increase in the number of recruiters (\$33,000) (Asch et al., 2010). This has profound implications for efficient interventions for recruitment and can be applied to retention, where money may motivate enlistment and re-enlistment but direct personal contact with R&R officials yields the most cost-effective results.

Specifically, the study found that a ten percent increase in the stock of Army recruiters would increase recruitment between 5.7 and 6.2% (Asch et al., 2010; Warner, 2012). VAARNG currently has 13 Retention NCOs, one for each battalion. This report considers existing Retention NCOs as the existing retention workforce, excluding upper leadership, as the best proxy for recruiters in Asch et al. (2010). Thus, a 10 percent increase in retention personnel would equate to roughly two additional retention specialists. This report applies the more conservative finding (5.7%) to avoid potentially overstating the effect on retention. Applied to this analysis, two additional retention specialists would lead to a 5.62 percentage point increase in retention (from 64.11% to 69.73%). Appendix 9 displays the effectiveness calculations.

Still, this estimate assumes retention specialists are comparable to recruiters. For this to be effective, soldier outreach and counseling must be the primary role of existing and additional retention specialists. Thus, this alternative requires an increased workforce and a focused duty of soldier outreach, reserving administrative responsibilities, analysis, and

program oversight for leadership. The assumptions for this alternative's effectiveness are broad, relative to the first and second alternatives.

If the additional retention specialists are classified as ADOS and state-funded, VAARNG would need to reallocate funding from its fixed budget to establish them. If the retention specialists are federally funded ADOS or AGR positions, approval from NGB is required.

This alternative involves labor costs (for policy requests and justification) and personnel materials. It does not consider costs associated with the personnel compensation, as two of the three possible funding streams come from DoD.

Policy proposal costs are higher for this alternative than the previous one, as it assumes more thorough justification and review procedures for the greatest odds of endorsement at the federal level. This analysis assumes a more focused review at the levels prior to major leadership endorsements. We estimate labor costs of policy drafting, review, and endorsement to be \$5,124.19. This alternative does not account for training costs since it suggests hiring VAARNG recruiters who have completed relevant personnel training. However, this report considers the cost of materials for additional staff. According to ABM Federal (2020), the GSA AdvantageSelect BPA configurations include various pricing options for IT equipment. We estimate \$3,630.20 for laptop and desktop equipment per person based on these prices. This report inflates the finding to \$5,568.13 per person, adding the average laptop cost to account for other technological equipment (i.e., smartphones) and office needs. For two individuals, we estimate \$16,260.45. Appendix 10 outlines the costing calculations for this alternative. Cost-Effectiveness is estimated to be \$16,260.45 per 5.62 percentage point increase (or \$2,894.74 per 1 percentage point increase in retention) in Year 1. **Cost-Effectiveness earns a comparative score of 2.**

***Criterion 2: Administrative Feasibility:*** As stated earlier, VAARNG could hypothetically create the position through state or federally funded positions. State-funded positions have more bureaucratic feasibility in terms of approval, but it is unlikely due to budget constraints. Still, NGB and DoD approval is unlikely, as the federal agencies allocate such resources across all 54 National Guard units, each of which petitions for similar resources.

In his testimony before the House Appropriations Committee, General Daniel R. Hokanson, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, emphasized the need to revisit the cap on AGR positions, indicating that such changes necessitate legislative action by Congress (U.S. Army, 2024). Additionally, a Government Accountability Report shows that in FY19, the Air National Guard realigned over three thousand military technicians to AGR. However, full realignments were constrained due to statutory limits on AGR personnel end-strength set by the National Defense Authorization Acts (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2022). Thus, even when successful (and rare) AGR transfers are endorsed at the department level, it can require legislation, making it administratively

challenging.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Bureaucratic Feasibility earns a score of 2, and Likelihood of Success earns a score of 1. **The total Administrative Feasibility earns a score of 1.5**

***Criterion 2: Immediacy of Impact:*** Effectiveness findings in Asch et al. (2010) and Warner (2012) use quarterly-level analysis to assess recruiter elasticity. This indicator suggests that the effect of recruiter staff levels on enlistments is likely to occur within a matter of months. Again, this report applies these findings to the likelihood that increased retention specialists increase re-enlistments. Thus, we estimate the impact to happen any time after three months (one quarter). Because research does not specify, this report conservatively assumes impact within 12 months. **Immediacy of Impact earns a score of 2.**

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<sup>4</sup> Honor Disclosure: Artificial intelligence wrote much of this and the prior paragraph based on its analysis of the sources.

## Policy Recommendation and Implementation

This report evaluates three potential alternatives: Leadership Feedback Surveys, Universal Free Drill Absence, and Increased Retention Workforce. The outcomes matrix below compares the evaluation of each alternative against the chosen criteria: cost-effectiveness, administrative feasibility, and immediacy of impact. Based on the aggregate score across three criteria, this report recommends that VAARNG implement Alternative 2: Universal Free Drill Absence.

	Cost-Effectiveness	Administrative Feasibility	Immediacy of Impact	Total Score
Alternative 1: Leadership Feedback Survey	1	2.5	3	6.6
Alternative 2: Universal Free Drill Absence	3	3	2	8
Alternative 3: Increase Retention Workforce	2	1.5	2	5.5

**Figure 6:** Evaluation Outcomes Matrix

To effectively implement this alternative, the policy should originate with a mid-level soldier in the G1 Personnel Directorate staff section. The action officer should consult a sample of VAARNG battalion leaders for insight into potential challenges with the alternative. The action officer should use these insights to inform policy drafts, justifications, and decision papers. Justification should include external and internal evidence. This means that internal evidence from known organizational challenges through retention and survey data, and external evidence from academic findings or National Guard precedent will be used to anticipate policy success. Most importantly, justification should argue that the policy will not decrease overall military readiness.

Once drafted, the action officer should champion the policy within the staff section, earning endorsement up the chain of command and initiating review and concurrence across VAARNG staff sections.

When TAG approves and signs the policy, the action officer and G1 Deputy should coordinate with G1 and S1 staff members to confirm tracking protocol with unit leadership (specifically, company leaders that track monthly drill attendance).

Additionally, G1 staff should draft messaging to VAARNG soldiers and unit leadership. Messaging should include policy language, interpretation, process for requesting and approving a free absence, eligibility for approval, timeline for implementation, conditions or exceptions under which the request may not be granted, and procedures for reporting misconduct or misapplication

of the policy. Because the policy intends to improve trust between leadership and junior soldiers, the messaging may include the intended purpose of communicating leadership transparency and understanding. It may garner soldiers' trust to see an acknowledged attempt to improve the service experience.

The biggest challenge to implementation is battling any arguments concerning military readiness. Second to that challenge is the strict or unwavering militaristic culture. More traditional leadership may resent the increased flexibility. Even with internal approval, convincing VAARNG leadership and non-decision-making stakeholders could challenge success since research indicates that a supervisor's support of FWA impacts its effect on retention (Timms et al., 2015; Lee & Kim, 2018). Therefore, it is recommended to invest in preliminary conversations across VAARNG to develop organizational comfort with the policy before the formal proposal. If endorsement seems unlikely, the action officer may suggest a pilot program to test the policy. A pilot program may limit the period (e.g., a one-year pilot) or the scope (e.g., applied to certain units), depending on organizational concerns.

Finally, fundamental progress requires an organizational and R&R focus on retention. This report recommends that the R&R Battalion administer a reliable exit survey to every separating soldier immediately before ETS. This requires reliable survey and data software as well as data analysis. Such data should distinguish between all possible separation types, total years in VAARNG service, total years in prior service, distinction between first- and second-term enlistment turnover, soldier demographics like MOS, and any change in MOS over VAARNG service. All data that includes personal identifiable information (PII) should be labeled as controlled unclassified information (CUI). The R&R Battalion should regularly report centralized retention data to VAARNG leadership that addresses themes in the following areas: (a) common attrition motivators and (b) common attrition populations. VAARNG should continuously monitor retention success, national retention ranks, and potential program and policy solutions.

## Conclusion

This report evaluates policy options to improve soldier retention in the Virginia Army National Guard (VAARNG). While pay satisfaction is broadly considered an intervention point, this analysis bases its recommendation on a job satisfaction framework. This means that pay satisfaction is a factor in a soldier's decision to stay or leave. However, various attrition motivators surround it, such as perceived workplace fairness and leadership quality. Thus, this report addresses how VAARNG can improve the soldier experience to motivate reenlistment.

This report considers three alternatives: Leadership Feedback Surveys, a Universal Free Drill Absence policy, and Increased Retention Workforce. Each alternative was evaluated for its cost-effectiveness, administrative feasibility, and immediacy of impact. While literature indicates some effectiveness for each alternative, this report recommends that VAARNG implement a Universal Free Drill Absence policy to increase flexibility and improve the soldier experience. This alternative is low-cost and low-risk and requires no external approval policies. Still, we recommend that VAARNG consider increasing the retention workforce to better address soldiers' concerns and anticipate potential attrition motivators and risks.

While this recommendation moves the needle on retention, more fundamental progress requires VAARNG to prioritize soldier retention across all levels of leadership. All VAARNG supervisors should share the retention goal, while responsibility should be formalized and standardized in the R&R Battalion. Focused initiatives should include improved exit survey administration, detailed data collection and analysis, top-down retention messaging, and investing time and resources in professional counseling opportunities.



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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: FY24 VAARNG Total Retention

<b>FY24 VAARNG Retention (VAARNG, 2024)</b>	
Total Reenlisted	<b>761</b>
Total Attrition	<b>426</b>
Total Eligible for Reenlistment	<b>1,187 = 761 + 426</b>
Total Retention Rate	<b>64.11% = 761 / 1,187</b>
Total Attrition Rate	<b>35.89% = 426 / 1,187</b>

### Appendix 2: FY24 VAARNG E4 Retention

<b>FY24 VAARNG E4 Retention (VAARNG, 2024)</b>	
Where E4s make up 60.4% of FY24 attrition	
Total E4 Reenlisted	<b>250</b>
Total E4 Attrition	<b>259</b>
E4 Retention Rate (among E4)	<b>49.11% = 250 / 509</b>
Total E4 Retention Rate (among all soldiers)	<b>21.06% = 250 / 1,187</b>
Total E4 Attrition Rate (among all soldiers)	<b>21.81% = 259 / 1,187</b>

### Appendix 3: Total Year 1 Costs, Leadership Feedback Survey

Year 1 Costs: Leadership Feedback Survey				
Start-Up Labor Costs				
Operation	Rank	Hourly Wage	Hours	Cost
Policy Draft	E7	\$36.15	10	\$361.54
Division Chief Review	O5	\$66.21	1	\$66.21
G1 Deputy Review	O5	\$66.21	1	\$66.21
G1 Review	O6	\$77.75	1	\$77.75
Staff Section Concurrence	O5/4	\$77.75x9	5	\$3,498.96
Land Component Review	O7	\$92.23	2	\$184.46
Director of Joint Staff Review	O7	\$92.23	2	\$184.46
The Adjutant General Review	O8	\$105.24	2	\$210.47
Maintenance Labor Costs				
Operation	Rank	Hourly Wage	Hours	Cost
Soldier Follow-Up	E7	\$36.15	40x13	\$18,799.95
Survey Completion (by soldier)	E2-5	\$22.38	0.5x538	\$6,289.52
R&R Analytics	E7	\$36.15	10	\$361.54
Software Licensing				
License	Survey Type		Annual Cost	
Qualtrics	Basic; 1,000 / yr		\$5,040.00	
Total Year 1 Cost:			\$25,451.00	

*\*538 is equal to the totally number of eligible E4 reenlistments in FY24*

*\*Wage information sourced from Military.com (2025)*

*\*Qualtrics pricing sourced from Qualtrics (n.d.)*

#### Appendix 4: Steps for Alternative 1 & 2 Implementation

1. G1 action officer consult battalion leadership to inform policy.
2. G1 action officer drafts survey or coordinates with contracted surveyor  
*\*Exclusively for Alternative 1*
3. G1 Personnel Directorate human resource officer/staff member drafts policy, cover sheet and justification, and recommendation
4. Policy is reviewed and endorsed by G1 Deputy (LTC) and Col.
5. Concurrence from other staff sections (if applicable).
6. Human Resource Officer review (if distinct from other staff concurrence).
7. Cost Feasibility Analysis (if financial resources are required).
8. Legal Department review.
9. Army Chief of Staff review.
10. Army Land Component Commander review.
11. Director of the Joint Staff review.
12. Approval by The Adjutant General (TAG).
13. G1 Personnel Directorate drafts and publishes communication to command leadership establishing requirements, implementation, monitoring plan.

#### Appendix 5: Steps for Alternative 3 Implementation – Federally Funded

1. G1 Personnel Directorate (and assigned action officer) drafts justification memorandum, decision papers, and formal request.
2. Policy is reviewed and endorsed by G1 Col. (Combining Division Chief & Deputy's review into this step unless they need distinct approvals.)
3. Concurrence from other staff sections (if applicable).
4. Legal Department Review
5. Army Chief of Staff review.
6. Army Land Component Commander review.
7. Director of the Joint Staff review.
8. Approval by The Adjutant General (TAG); sends to NGB.
9. NGB Army G1 Personnel Division evaluates the request
10. NGB secondary staff sections review and Comptroller
11. Denied if Virginia's request exceeds AGR manpower cap
12. If not denied, moved to Department of Army and Total Army Personnel Planning
13. If approved at NGB level: The Office of the Secretary of Defense & Congress if it requires a change to AGR end strength
14. If denied at NGB level: resubmit in next Program Objective Memorandum cycle

#### Appendix 6: Steps for Alternative 3 Implementation – State Funded

1. Gather personnel data from G1, Human Resource Office, and Army Land Component Command



2. Coordinate with unit commanders to determine optimal reallocation
3. Compare unit staffing levels t authorized TDA allocations
4. G1 staff member drafts reallocation policy covers sheet and justification to include mission requirements, readiness impact, R&R trends
5. G1 Col review and endorsement
6. Concurrence from other staff sections
7. Legal and policy compliance review by JAG and Human Resources Officer
8. Army Chief of Staff review
9. Army Land component Commander Review
10. Director of the Joint Staff Review
11. Final Approval by TAG
12. G1 and HRO modify AGR authorization document and prepare to transfer or adjust AGR slots
13. Notify units of impending reallocation
14. Issue reassignment orders
15. Monitor and assess impact

Appendix 7: Total Year 1 Costs, Universal Free Drill Absence

<b>Year 1 Costs: Universal Free Drill Absence</b>				
<b>Start-Up Labor Costs</b>				
<b>Operation</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Hourly Wage</b>	<b>Hours</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Policy Draft	E7	\$36.15	10	\$361.54
Division Chief Review	O5	\$66.21	1	\$66.21
G1 Deputy Review	O5	\$66.21	1	\$66.21
G1 Review	O6	\$77.75	1	\$77.75
Staff Section Concurrence	O5/4	\$77.75x9	5	\$3,498.96
Land Component Review	O7	\$92.23	2	\$184.46
Director of Joint Staff Review	O7	\$92.23	2	\$184.46
The Adjutant General Review	O8	\$105.24	2	\$210.47
<b>Total Year 1 Cost:</b>				<b>\$4,650.05</b>

Appendix 8: Effectiveness, Alternative 1: Leadership Feedback Survey

<b>Leadership Feedback Survey Effectiveness</b>	
With 60% take-up rate (Kolaja et al., 2023)	
Surveyed workers were 20% less likely to quit (Adhvaryu, Molina, & Nyshadham, 2022)	
E4 retention with 60% E4 take-up	$21.1 \times (1 + .2)(.60) = 23.63\%$
New E4 reenlistments	$23.63 / 100 \times 1187 = 280.51$ soldiers
Non-E4 reenlistments	$0.75 \times 678$
New total retention with 60% E4 take-up	$(280.51 + 511.01) / 1187 = 66.68\%$
Total Retention with 60% take-up across VAARNG	$0.6411 \times (1 + 0.2)(.6) = \mathbf{71.80\%}$

*\*1,187 is the number of soldiers eligible for reenlistment in FY24*



\*75.37 is the non-E4 reenlistment rate for FY24

\*678 is the number of non-E4 soldiers eligible for reenlistment in FY24

#### Appendix 9: Effectiveness, Alternative 3: Increased Retention Workforce

<b>Increasing Retention Workforce</b>	
<b>+1% in recruiters generally lead to +0.57% in recruits (Warner, 2012) – Lower Bound</b>	
Current number of Retention NCOs	13
10% increase in retention staff (based on 13 NCOs)	$(0.1 \times 13) + 13 = 14.3$
% increase in retention staff with +2 personnel	$[(13 + 2) - 13] / 13 = 15.38\%$
% increase on VAARNG retention	$15.38 \times 0.57 = 8.77\%$
Total retention +2 retention personnel	$0.6411 \times (1 + 8.77) = \mathbf{69.73\%}$

#### Appendix 10: Total Year 1 Costs, Increased Retention Workforce

<b>Year 1 Costs: Increased Retention Workforce</b>				
<b>Start-Up Labor Costs</b>				
<b>Operation</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Hourly Wage</b>	<b>Hours</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Policy Draft	E7	\$36.15	10	\$361.54
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Director of Joint Staff Review	O7	\$92.23	3	\$184.46
The Adjutant General Review	O8	\$105.24	5	\$210.47
<b>Equipment &amp; Materials Cost</b>				
	<b>GSA Price</b>	<b>GSA BP Price</b>	<b>Average</b>	
<b>Avg. Laptop (GSA)</b>	\$2,140.28	\$1,735.59	\$1,937	
<b>Avg. Desktop (GSA)</b>	\$1,862.32	\$1,522.21	\$1,692.27	
<b>Avg. Laptop + Desktop</b>	-	-	\$3,630	
Account for Cell Phones or Other Office Materials: $\$3,630 + \$1,937 = \$5,568.13$				
For 2 Hires: $\$5,568.13 \times 2 = \$711,136.26$				
<b>Total Cost For Year 1: <math>711,136.26 + \\$5,124.19 = \\$16,260.45</math></b>				

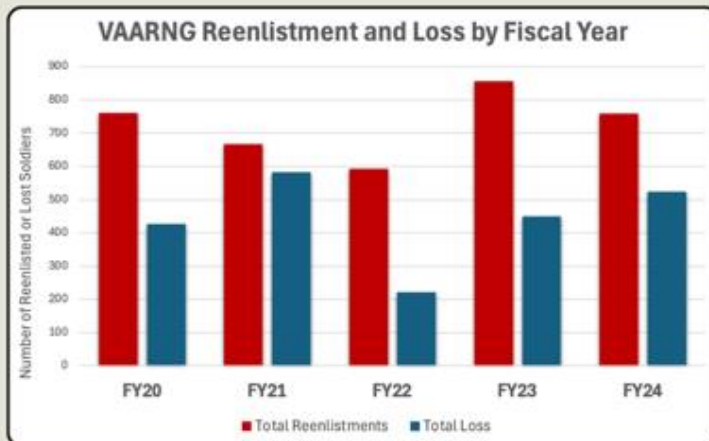


## IMPROVING RETENTION IN THE VIRGINIA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

Analyzing FY 2020–2024

### THE PROBLEM

**THE VIRGINIA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD (VAARNG) EXPERIENCED 64% RETENTION IN FY 24, 11 PERCENTAGE POINTS BELOW NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU'S 75% GOAL.**



### WHAT IS REENLISTMENT?

- REENLISTMENT IS THE RENEWAL OF A SERVICE CONTRACT.
- INITIAL ENLISTMENTS ARE TYPICALLY 8 YEARS TOTAL.
- MOST SOLDIERS SERVE 4–6 YEARS WITH REGULAR DRILLS AND ACTIVATIONS.
- REMAINING YEARS ARE SERVED ON-CALL FOR NATIONAL EMERGENCIES.

### THE SOLUTION: UNIVERSAL FREE DRILL ABSENCE



#### EFFECTIVE

TELEWORK OPTIONS FOR FEDERAL EMPLOYEES INCREASES INTENT TO STAY BY 3.6 PERCENTAGE POINTS (LEE & KIM, 2018).



#### LOW COST

NO NEW FUNDING REQUIRED; LABOR AND OVERSIGHT COSTS ARE ABSORBED BY EXISTING PERSONNEL.



#### FEASIBLE

THIS POLICY IS WITHIN VAARNG AUTHORITY AND REQUIRES NO OUTSIDE STAKEHOLDERS.



#### QUICK IMPACT

THIS POLICY IS EXPECTED TO SHOW RETENTION RESULTS WITHIN ONE YEAR (JOE & KARPINSKI, 2024).

**VIRGINIA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD**  
**Guide to Retention & Reenlisting**  
**\$ BENEFITS \$**

**TRICARE HEALTH SERVICE**

<b>MEDICAL</b>	Single Soldier \$46.70 month Soldier & Family \$229.99 month
<b>DENTAL</b>	Single Soldier \$29.12 month Soldier & Family \$75.71 month Sponsor & Family \$87.36 month

**WWW.TRICARE.MIL**

**SINGLE & FAMILY GROUP LIFE INSURANCE**

Single Life Insurance	Coverage up to \$400,000.
Family Life Insurance	Coverage up to \$100,000.

**WWW.BENEFITS.VA.GOV/INSURANCE**

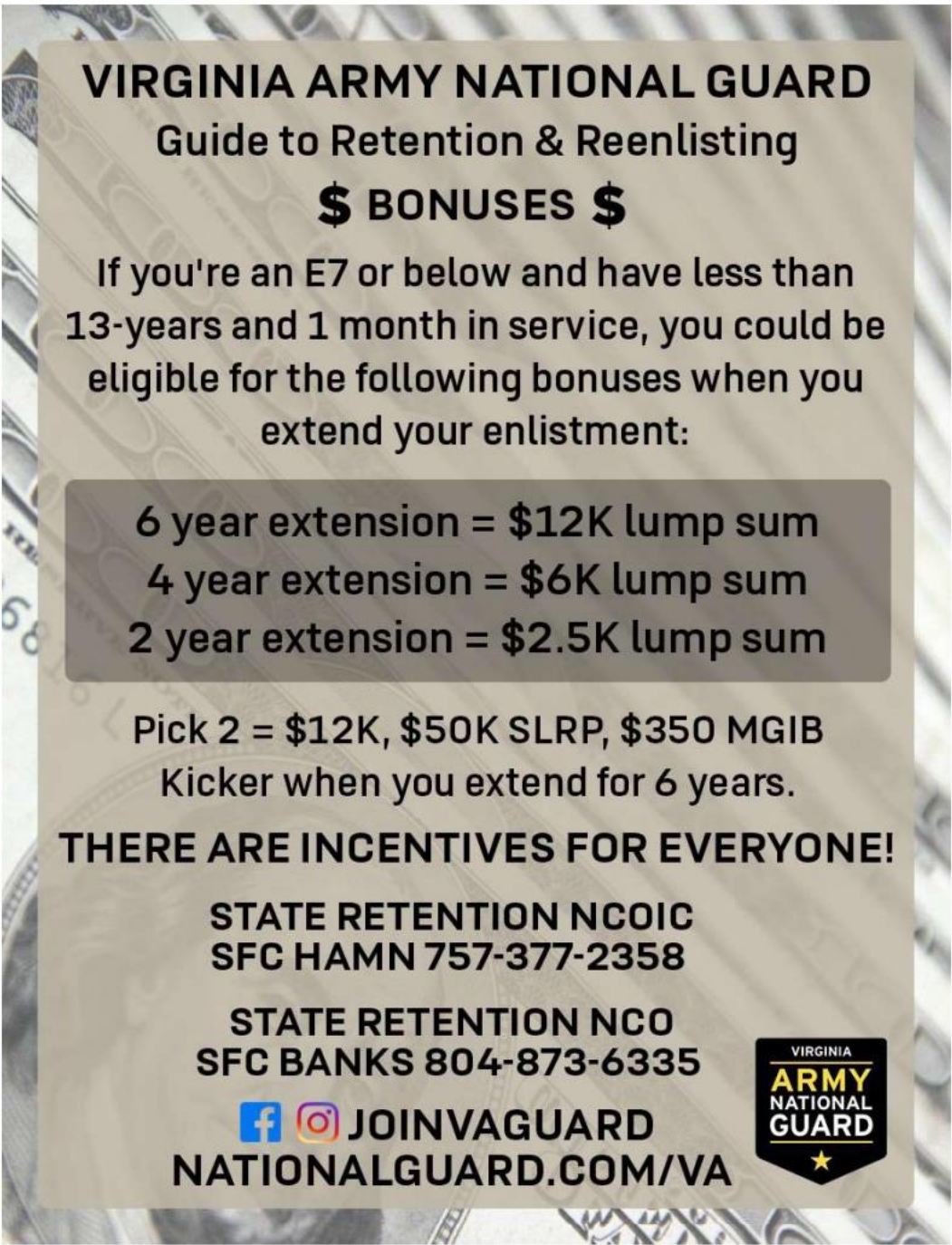
**EDUCATION ASSISTANCE BENEFITS**

Federal Tuition	Coverage up to \$4,000. VIVIAN MOSS 434-298-6329
State Tuition	Coverage up to \$7,000. SFC CANTOR 434-298-6237

**ADVANCE IN YOUR CAREER WHILE SERVING**

The Recruiting & Retention Battalion is ready to assist you with reenlistment, MOS changes, promotion tips and more.





**VIRGINIA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD**  
**Guide to Retention & Reenlisting**  
**\$ BONUSES \$**

If you're an E7 or below and have less than 13-years and 1 month in service, you could be eligible for the following bonuses when you extend your enlistment:



6 year extension = \$12K lump sum  
4 year extension = \$6K lump sum  
2 year extension = \$2.5K lump sum

Pick 2 = \$12K, \$50K SLRP, \$350 MGIB  
Kicker when you extend for 6 years.

**THERE ARE INCENTIVES FOR EVERYONE!**

STATE RETENTION NCOIC  
SFC HAMN 757-377-2358

STATE RETENTION NCO  
SFC BANKS 804-873-6335

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