

The April 21, 2017 Pioneer Press article, “Minnesota Legislature’s plans would underfund state military, officials say,” covers some of the issues related to the proposed budget shortfalls in the state Department of Military Affairs (DMA) budget.

The National Guard Association of Minnesota and the Minnesota National Guard Enlisted Association represent the interests of the officers and enlisted members of the Minnesota National Guard respectively, and as such, we feel it is critical to make sure their voices are heard on the impact of the this issue. The proposed cuts to the DMA’s agency budget go too deep and threaten to leave the Minnesota National Guard personnel and facilities in a state of reduced readiness.

The Senate’s current version of the bill (SF605) proposes a DMA budget of nearly \$12 million less than the Governor’s recommendation, rolling the agency back to its 2014-2015 levels. This bill balances agency forecasted increases in enlistment incentives by reducing the funds available for maintenance and sustainment of Minnesota National Guard armories and other facilities despite a documented \$140 million maintenance backlog. This is concerning considering the average age of Minnesota’s armories is 50 years old, requiring significant maintenance and upkeep costs.

The House version (H.F. 691) of the bill maintains DMA funding at its current level, however, does not address the forecasted shortfall in the Enlistment Incentives Appropriation which will result in elimination of enlistment and re-enlistment bonuses and a reduction in state tuition reimbursement levels for members of the Minnesota National Guard, key benefits used to both recruit and retain quality personnel into the guard.

Keeping the funding for the Department of Military Affairs and Minnesota National Guard at the levels it needs to continue to operate and maintain high-levels of readiness is an issue that impacts every community within our state that the men and women of the National Guard support.

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