

Testimony of Charles Rose
Director Freestate Challenge Academy
Before the
Pennsylvania Senate Committee
On Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness

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Good Morning Mr. Chairman and Committee Members, for the record I am Charles Rose, Director, Freestate Challenge Academy, here to share an overview of Maryland's Challenge Program.

Our program began in 1993 as part of legislation passed by Congress authorizing the National Guard to establish a pilot program called the National Guard Youth Challenge Corps. In just over 20 years of existence, the National Guard Youth Challenge Program has grown from its initial core of 10 programs to its current level of 35 programs in 27 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. The National Guard Youth Challenge Program continues to grow as nearly 12 new programs are scheduled to begin operations within the next few years. Nationally, over 150,000 youth have benefited from the Program, becoming self-sufficient, productive members of society.

The National Guard Youth Challenge Program is a strictly voluntary program made up of high-school drop-outs, ages 16-18, who are seeking a second chance in life. Many of these youth have been expelled from their respective schools, have repeated several grades, or have just dropped out seeking other opportunities in life. The quasi-military environment implements the teachings of military core values such as discipline and respect (both internal and external), following orders, leadership and overall accomplishment. Cadets are taught the eight core components of our program and must pass each one in order to graduate. These core components are:

Academic Excellence	Life Coping Skills
Leadership/Followership	Job Skills
Health and Hygiene	Responsible Citizenship
Service to the Community	Physical Fitness

Our program is located at Aberdeen Proving Ground South (Edgewood Area) in an area of consolidated Maryland National Guard assets and facilities. Our building consists of three levels with the administration area and offices located on the first floor, the male residential area on the second floor and the female residential area, along with storage rooms, on the third floor. We have a capacity for housing 197 cadets in our facility.

The Maryland National Guard Freestate Challenge Academy is funded by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) through the National Guard Bureau (NGB). The funding for the program is managed through a Master Cooperative Agreement. The OSD federal funds provide 75% of the program funds and the state provides 25% of the program funds. This is a no fee program for the cadet and his/her family.

It must be noted that the Challenge program is not a GED program, but rather a GED-preparatory program. We offer our cadets the opportunity to prepare, take and pass the GED; however, we do encourage our younger cadets (age 16 and younger 17 year olds) and work with their previous schools to allow them to return to school and receive their high school diploma. The older cadets in our program do continually prepare for the GED test. We purchase the vouchers for our cadets to take the GED test and provide an opportunity for them to repeat the test up to four times within a one year period.

New relationships with Departments of Juvenile Services and Social Services have been created to identify at-risk youth who meet our entrance criteria, seek a second chance to change their lives, and who wish to obtain their GED/Maryland High School Diploma. Judicial officials have readily accepted our program and use it as a tool for juveniles in their jurisdictions to get their lives on the right track to success. These new relationships have served as a good recruiting platform as DJS and DSS officials may recommend eligible candidates to apply and enroll into our program.

Education is very important to us at the Maryland National Guard Freestate Challenge Academy. In 2014, our program was able to procure a \$50,000 grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, a significant contributor to the National Guard Youth Foundation. This grant enabled us to develop a new computer lab, purchase 25 computers along with teaching and study materials for the GED subject matter taught in our classrooms. The GED teaching/study materials allow our instructors to work with our cadets and enhance their ability to learn and comprehend the various subjects tested on the GED. This is significant as the GED test has evolved from a 5-phase, ninth grade level test to a 4-phase college entrance level exam. The results of these materials and new teaching efforts means more of our cadets are able to successfully take and pass the new GED exam. This new computer lab has also allowed us to offer a Microsoft training program for cadets to learn how to operate and effectively use a computer for writing resumes and letters of introduction, completing applications, and much, much more. The State of Maryland now contracts with Pearson Vue, a nationally recognized company that offers the GED test along with various other course programs and tests, to conduct the GED throughout the state. We are one of a handful of Challenge programs around the country that have met the testing facility requirements established by Pearson Vue and are able to provide the GED to our cadets in our own computer lab! This is significant because previously we had to transport cadets to locations in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and other venues to take the GED. Now we do this on our own campus on the same computers our

cadets use on a daily basis. We expect to see an increase in our pass rate as a result of this new set up.

Another area of success for our program is the results attained on the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE). This test is given during the Acclimation phase and at the end of the Residential phase and measures the grade level of each cadet. The State of Maryland also uses this as a measurement tool for the success of our program as the education level of each of our cadets must be increased within this 22-week phase. Historically, our program has been able to attain a 2.7-3.0 grade increase, on average, for all our cadets. However, we have realized a 5.0+ grade level increase for our last two classes, Class #43 and #44. We attribute this larger increase to the establishment of our computer lab, the upgraded study materials purchased, through the outstanding efforts of our Lead Educator and her staff of teachers, and most importantly, the initiative and discipline applied by the cadets themselves.

Two new initiatives Freestate ChalleNGe Academy is taking are to provide vocational training in various trades and introduce STEM training to our cadets. The vocational training can be continued after graduating from the FCA while some training leads to immediate certification upon completion of that specific program. Course work in culinary arts, barbering and automotive are presently offered through an agreement with the National Center for Institutes and Alternatives (NCIA) with the automotive track leading to an immediate certification. Cadets in this track are trained and certified in automotive maintenance identical to that found in Jiffy Lube businesses around the country. Upon completion of this training and graduation from our program, they are certified to immediately work in any Jiffy Lube business. Additionally, cadets are able to take the Automotive Service Excellence exam which allows them to work on various components of automotive maintenance and repair. Credits from course work and training received in culinary arts and barbering are transferrable to a school that provides the final training and certification to work in these career areas. Cadets in culinary arts are also able to take the Serv-Safe culinary exam which, upon successfully passing, allows them to work immediately in a food service business.

We are introducing STEM training in math to a portion of our cadets during this current class, class #45. This program will introduce principles of learning math to a select number of cadets as a prelude to expanding our education opportunities and learning capabilities in science and social studies to future classes of cadets.

Another initiative we have established is the "Cadet for a Day" program. This program invites various school administrators, teachers, community and business leaders, legislators, state officials, and others to participate in a day of activities simulating exactly what a cadet experiences in one day. Participants receive a short briefing on our program, and then learn how to march in formation, make a bed with hospital corners and white collars, how to clean their respective areas, attend classes and observe what the cadets are learning in academics as

well as all of the core components. Participants will also take a simulated test similar to what the cadets take in preparation for the GED test. A significant part of the day is the opportunity to eat lunch with cadets and then meet with them to discuss the changes they are making in the Freestate Challenge Academy and the impact this program, and those applied changes, are having on their lives. We have found that the “Cadet for a Day” program has had a significant impact on the people who participate in it as they see the changes being made by the cadets, the results realized by the cadets from these changes, and understand the foundation for success the cadets have established for themselves after they graduate from the Freestate Challenge Academy.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I am happy to answer any questions you have about our program.