



Testimony
National Guard Youth Challenge
Hearing to the
Senate of Pennsylvania
Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness
November 19, 2015

Lieutenant Colonel (US Army Retired) Tim Gwinn
Executive Director, Pennsylvania National Guard Associations

Good morning Chairmen Vulakovich and Costa and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

My name is Timothy Gwinn I am a retired lieutenant colonel from the Pennsylvania National Guard. I retired four years ago and at that time took the position of Executive Director for the Pennsylvania National Guard Associations (PNGAS).

The Pennsylvania National Guard Associations represents the nearly 20,000 enlisted and officers of the Pennsylvania National Guard, as well as our Veterans. Our mission is to support the men and women of the Pennsylvania National Guard to ensure that they are well equipped, manned and funded to conduct their wartime mission and to also support the citizens of this great commonwealth during times of domestic emergencies.

We call it guarding the Guard.

In addition to the support we provide to our members and our Pennsylvania National Guard, our organization also supports programs for the greater good of the Commonwealth that involves the Pennsylvania Guard.

Youth Challenge is one of those programs that PNGAS supports because of the multiple positive aspects of this program for both the members of our Guard and the Commonwealth. Youth Challenge is a proven program nationally and will certainly be a great program to bring to the Commonwealth.

Today this committee is hearing from the leaders from the Youth Challenge Program, the National Guard Bureau and Pennsylvania National Guard on the benefits of this program. PNGAS, indeed, fully supports bringing a Youth Challenge program to the Commonwealth.

What I would like to speak to today is how this program will help both the **Commonwealth** and the **Pennsylvania National Guard**.

Supporting the Commonwealth

As an education program within the state, Youth Challenge uses the techniques developed by the military to educate as well as motivate the “at risk” youth of this state.

This voluntary program is a multifaceted platform that aims to help at risk adolescents achieve their goals and become productive and responsible members of our society. The youth challenge program intervenes in and reclaims the lives of 16-18 year olds, producing program graduates with the values, life skills and self-discipline necessary to succeed.

This award winning program has been recognized as one of the nations most effective and cost efficient programs for targeting youth who are at the greatest risk for substance abuse, teen pregnancy, delinquency and criminal activity.

The program welcomes individuals that desire to learn life and study skills that would allow them to graduate high school or complete a GED.

As you will see in the vast amount of materials provided, the Youth Challenge Program is not looking for individuals that do not want to help themselves. The potential graduates of the program must prove their desire to succeed in the program and in life.

The application process puts the onus on the applicant to prove they should be part of the program. The techniques used are ones that traditionally work in a structured environment allowing the program graduates to learn how to take responsibility for their own lives and through this structure discover their true potential.

The goal of the Youth Challenge program is to improve the life skills and employment potential of participants. Who better to teach these young men and women than those that have succeeded?

The traditional education program has proven not to work for THEM. By providing military-based training the Youth Challenge Program uses military members of the Pennsylvania National Guard to teach them how to succeed. The program's core components assist participants with the goal to receive a high school diploma or its equivalent.

The Youth Challenge system Program uses proven techniques these young men and women may never have been exposed to in order to develop their leadership skills and promote community service. But more importantly what they learn from a military based education system is to develop life-coping skills, job skills, improve physical fitness, health and hygiene in a TEAM building environment. To think of the group not just themselves.

The Pennsylvania National Guard Associations believes that by establishing a Youth Challenge Program in our Commonwealth we will be helping the youth of our state in ways the traditional education system is not able to do.

This program will use a military based education system, administered and led by our own citizens with the goal of building self-respect and living by strong military values.

This is the true meaning of the Guard, citizens helping citizens.

Supporting the Guardsmen

There are benefits for the Pennsylvania Guard as well. The program offers job opportunities for guardsmen and women as well as veterans and Pennsylvania educators.

Youth Challenge is a proven program in 17 states. Pennsylvania should become the 18th state and allow the Pennsylvania National Guard to help our Commonwealth take care of our future, the youth of our state.

Thank you for allowing me to address this committee and provide our support for this initiative.