



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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U.S. Army Medical Task Force Joins Battle Against COVID-19 in PA

Harrisburg, PA – The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the Department of State announced recently that a U.S. Army Reserve task force of 85 medical specialists has arrived in Pennsylvania to assist civilian health care professionals with the care of coronavirus patients. They will be deployed wherever they are needed.

"We are extremely grateful to have these highly skilled military medical professionals serving on the frontlines, side-by-side with our brave civilian health care practitioners, as we wage war against this highly contagious and life-threatening virus," Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar said.

The Army has mobilized 1,275 Reserve medical specialists into 15 "Urban Augmentation Medical Task Forces" to reinforce civilian health care in areas that are experiencing a surge in coronavirus cases.

Each medical task force consists of 14 physicians, including an infectious disease specialist and four respiratory specialists; 16 medics; 13 nurses; five physician assistants; two dentists; four pharmacists; two clinical psychologists; one psychiatrist; two occupational therapy specialists; four dietitians and other supporting staff that can perform low-triage care and test for COVID-19.

The first members of the unit arrived in Pennsylvania on April 16 to visit sites and coordinate with the commonwealth's departments of State, Health, Human Services, Military and Veterans Affairs, and the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency. This advance visit ensured the full unit could move swiftly into action once they arrived.

This task force will fall under the control of the dual status command recently established within the Pa. National Guard.

"This is a great example of how different areas of federal and state government can seamlessly combine during an emergency to aid our citizens," said Maj. Gen. Anthony

Carrelli, Pennsylvania's adjutant general and head of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. "The Urban Augmentation Medical Task Force will provide a tremendous capability to supplement the critical medical staff within our most affected areas of the commonwealth."

The Department of State (DOS) waived certain professional licensing requirements to ensure that these military medical professionals, who already hold a license in at least one state or a federal license from the United States Armed Forces, can lawfully provide medical and other health care services in Pennsylvania.

The military occupational specialties of most members of the unit fall under existing Pennsylvania statutes that exempt them from the state's licensure requirements. This includes physicians, dietitians, registered nurses, psychologists, physical therapists and occupational therapists.

For those specialists who did not immediately qualify under existing statutes and regulations - including practical nurses, dentists and pharmacists - DOS requested, and Governor Wolf granted, a waiver to allow them to practice in Pennsylvania as long as they are employed by the armed forces, the U.S. Public Health Service, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs or the federal government.

DOS also has waived any statutory or regulatory provisions that might prohibit a physician from delegating performance of medical services to medics and other technicians serving in the military. Such delegation will expand the pool of technicians available to work in hospitals, nursing homes, long-term care facilities and other facilities during the expected surge in COVID-19 cases in Pennsylvania.

Secretary Boockvar noted that this medical task force's deployment aligns with an important DOS initiative that was in development before the pandemic.

"Our professional licensing staff has been working with the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to develop an 'occupational crosswalk' for military veterans," she said. "This crosswalk will help Pennsylvania veterans translate their military education, training, skills and certifications into licensing credentials that will make it easier to transition from military to civilian employment."

The DOS website www.dos.pa.gov/Pages/COVID-19-Waivers.aspx will be updated regularly as additional waiver information becomes available. Licensees with questions should contact their profession's board www.dos.pa.gov/ProfessionalLicensing/Pages/Board-Contacts.aspx via the email addresses on the DOS website.