

Reserve Component Duty Statuses: Background and Issues for Congress

August 3, 2026

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R49056



R49056

August 3, 2026

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Reserve Component Duty Statuses: Background and Issues for Congress

The Reserve Components (RCs) of the Armed Forces (the Army National Guard, Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve, and Coast Guard Reserve) largely consist of personnel who hold full-time civilian positions and are called to duty on a periodic basis.

Reservists serve under a range of *duty statuses*. The status under which a reservist performs duty depends on the statute or regulation authorizing the duty, the type of duty performed, whether the service is voluntary or involuntary, the source of funding for pay and benefits, and other factors. A reservist's duty status may in turn affect the scope and duration of their service and the pay and benefits to which they are entitled. Congress has authorized approximately 29 separate duty statuses, in Titles 10, 32, and 14 of the *U.S. Code*. Provisions relating to pay and benefits tied to duty statuses exist in other chapters of the *U.S. Code*, the *Code of Federal Regulations* (C.F.R.), and in the regulations of the Department of Defense (DOD, which is "using a secondary Department of War designation," under Executive Order 14347 dated September 5, 2025), the individual services, the National Guard Bureau, and other agencies.

DOD, Members of Congress, think tanks, interest groups, and other stakeholders have expressed dissatisfaction with the current duty status system. Critics allege that the system's complexity inhibits the use of the reserve component as an operational force, complicates budgeting and appropriations efforts, and produces inequities in benefits and compensation. Numerous proposals to overhaul the system have been introduced. These proposals generally consolidate existing duty statuses into several categories. Models discussed in this report include those proposed by the 2008 Commission on the National Guard and Reserves (two duty statuses), the 2012 Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (six duty statuses), and a 2025 RAND Corporation study (four duty statuses).

RAND developed the latter proposal in collaboration with DOD, as directed by the 2016 and 2018 National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAAs). Legislation introduced in the House (H.R. 6976) and Senate (S. 4801) in the 119th Congress would consolidate duty statuses into four categories in a manner broadly analogous to the RAND proposal.

Congress may consider some of the following issues when evaluating the duty status system, for example,

- what changes, if any, for the duty status system;
- potential costs, tradeoffs, and policy changes that may result from a change to the duty status system; and
- whether Congress has sufficient information on the duty status system to weigh policy options.

Options Congress may consider include the following:

- Change the duty status system.
- Maintain the current system.
- Conduct oversight of the executive branch's plans to implement changes, if any, to the duty status system.

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Reserve Components

The term *Reserve Components* (RC) refers collectively to the seven individual reserve components of the Armed Forces, which include

- the Army National Guard of the United States,
- the Army Reserve,
- the Navy Reserve,
- the Marine Corps Reserve,
- the Air National Guard of the United States,
- the Air Force Reserve, and
- the Coast Guard Reserve.¹

The purpose of these seven reserve components, as codified in law, is

to provide trained units and qualified persons available for active duty in the armed forces, in time of war or national emergency, and at such other times as the national security may require, to fill the needs of the armed forces whenever more units and persons are needed than are in the regular components.²

Members of each reserve component generally serve in a part-time capacity. Reservists may hold full-time civilian jobs and are called to duty for periodic training, typically one weekend per month of training (commonly called *weekend drill*) and two weeks per year of annual training, though some reservists train under different arrangements.³ Reservists may also be called to full-time federal service to partake in military operations, support the administration of the active or reserve components, respond to disasters, or for other purposes.⁴

The Army and Air National Guard have a dual federal and state role. They may operate as part of the Army and Air Force respectively, much like the Army and Air Force Reserve. They may also operate under the authority of the governor of the state or territory in which the unit is located. Typical service on *state active duty* (SAD) includes responding to disasters and civil disorders.⁵ When performing SAD, National Guard personnel are state employees who receive state pay and benefits. State active duty is not covered in this report.

¹ 10 U.S.C. §10101. In accordance with 10 U.S.C. §20001, full- and part-time members of the Space Force are “managed through a single military personnel management system, without component.”

² 10 U.S.C. §10102.

³ Training requirements are outlined in 10 U.S.C. §10147 and 32 U.S.C. §502.

⁴ For a full list of utilization authorities, see **Table A-1**.

⁵ For an example of disaster response, see National Guard Bureau, “Maryland Guard tackles Lee storm floods,” press release, September 12, 2011, <https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article-View/Article/613013/maryland-guard-tackles-lee-storm-floods/>.

For an example of civil disorder response, see Office of the Governor of Minnesota, “Governor Walz Signs Executive Order Activating National Guard to Protect the People of Minnesota,” press release, May 28, 2020, <https://mn.gov/governor/newsroom/press-releases/?id=1055-433799>.

National Guard personnel may also perform *full time National Guard duty* (FTNGD), in which they remain under the control of state governors while receiving federal pay and benefits.⁶ Guard personnel typically perform domestic security and disaster response activities in this status.⁷

Duty Statuses of Reserve Components

When reservists perform duty, they do so under one of 27 provisions in Titles 10, 14, and 32 of the *United States Code*.⁸ A list of these authorities is in **Table A-1**. These provisions—commonly called *duty statuses* or *utilization authorities*⁹—vary in the following respects:

- **Number of personnel who may be activated.** Some statutes limit the number of reservists who may be activated under that provision at a given time.¹⁰
- **Duration of activation.** Some statutes limit the time reservists may be mobilized under that provision.¹¹
- **Authorization requirements.** Some statutes require congressional approval for the activation of reservists, while others allow unilateral activation by the executive branch.¹²
- **Purpose.** Some—but not all—statutes authorize duty for specific purposes. Others do not specify the duties that may be performed under those provisions.¹³

⁶ See 10 U.S.C. §101(d)(5), which defines full-time National Guard duty as “training or other duty, other than inactive duty, performed by a member of the Army National Guard of the United States or the Air National Guard of the United States in the member’s status as a member of the National Guard of a State or territory, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, or the District of Columbia ... for which the member is entitled to pay from the United States.”

⁷ For an example of disaster response in FTNGD, see National Guard Bureau, “Rescue squadrons provide support for Hurricane Gustav,” press release, September 4, 2008, <https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article/573525/rescue-squadrons-provide-support-for-hurricane-gustav/>.

For an example of civil disorder response in FTNGD, see “District of Columbia National Guard mobilized,” press release, June 1, 2020, <https://dc.ng.mil/Public-Affairs/Features/Article/2204415/district-of-columbia-national-guard-mobilized/>.

⁸ In the following document, DOD stated that it recognizes 29 utilization authorities: Department of Defense, *Duty Status Reform: Modernizing the Total Force of the Future*, <https://prhome.war.gov/M-RA/Inside-M-RA/RI/DSR/>.

CRS identified 27 sections of *U.S. Code* that authorize reserve component duty. However, 10 U.S.C. §12301(d) authorizes three categories of duty. The number of utilization authorities listed in **Table A-1** may therefore be 27 or 29, depending on how one counts the duty categories authorized in 10 U.S.C. §12301(d).

⁹ CRS has identified multiple definitions and usages of *duty status* in its review of statutes and regulations; 10 U.S.C. §101(d) provides several “definitions relating to duty status,” without defining the term “duty status” itself.

This report uses the term *utilization authority* to refer to a statute under which a reservist may be called to duty. *Utilization authority* is used in this manner in

Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Instruction 1215.06: Uniform Reserve, Training, and Retirement Categories for the Reserve Components*, DODI 1215.06, July 12, 2022, p. 22, <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/121506p.pdf>.

This report may also use the term *duty status* synonymously with *utilization authority*.

¹⁰ For example, Title 10 U.S.C. §12302 authorizes, in time of a presidentially declared national emergency, the Secretary concerned to call to duty up to 1 million reservists without their consent. Other statutes do not include such limits.

¹¹ For example, 10 U.S.C. §12302 limits reservists’ active duty service to no more than 24 consecutive months. Other statutes do not include such a limit.

¹² For instance, reservists may only be activated under 10 U.S.C. §12301 following a congressional declaration of war or national emergency. Other statutes authorize unilateral activations by the executive branch.

¹³ Some duty statuses cover a range of activities: 10 U.S.C. §12304b authorizes preplanned support to combatant (continued...)

- **Election.** Some statutes specify that the duty performed is involuntary, while others authorize voluntary duty.¹⁴

The statutory authority under which a reservist performs duty may affect certain aspects of that duty, including the following:

- **Pay and Benefits.** A reservist's duty status may affect their eligibility for pay and benefits. Duty status may affect the accrual of retirement and Veterans' Affairs (VA) benefits, access to TRICARE, access to certain allowances such as Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH), and other benefits.¹⁵ As a consequence, reservists' compensation may change as they move between duty statuses.
- **Funding.** Pay and benefits for service performed under a given duty status may be sourced from a specific appropriations account. For instance, reservists called to sustained active duty may be paid from active personnel appropriations, while reservists performing training may be paid from reserve personnel appropriations.¹⁶
- **End-Strength Authorization.** Depending on their duty status, individual reservists may count toward a range of congressionally mandated end-strength authorizations. These end-strength authorizations include active duty, selected reserve, Active Guard and Reserve, and active duty for operational support.¹⁷

Debate Over the Duty Status System

Arguments in Favor of Change

In statements, reports, and other publicly available materials, multiple stakeholders—including some DOD officials, Members of Congress, interest groups, and nongovernmental analysts—have claimed that the duty status system's complexity inhibits the use of the reserve as an

commands. Others define a specific mission: 10 U.S.C. §12402 authorizes voluntary service at the National Guard Bureau, while 10 U.S.C. §12503 authorizes funeral honors duty.

¹⁴ For instance, Title 10 U.S.C. §12302 authorizes involuntary activations, while 10 U.S.C. §12503 authorizes voluntary funeral honors duty.

¹⁵ Examples of variances in benefits between duty statuses include the following:

Retirement. Reservists accrue "retirement points" for days of federal service performed. However, service in some duty statuses (namely weekend drill) may accrue retirement points at a higher rate than does service performed in other duty statuses. See CRS Report RL30802, *Reserve Component Personnel Issues: Questions and Answers*.

TRICARE. TRICARE is the uniformed services health care program for military members, retirees, and their dependents. Reservists performing weekend drill and assignments lasting less than 30 days are generally ineligible for full TRICARE benefits. Reservists on sustained (i.e., 30 days or more) duty are generally eligible for the same TRICARE benefits as their active-component counterparts. For more on TRICARE for reservists, see CRS Report R45968, *Limits on TRICARE for Reservists: Frequently Asked Questions*, by Bryce H. P. Mendez, Barbara Salazar Torreon, and Nicholas M. Munves.

BAH. Reservists performing weekend drill are generally ineligible for BAH. Reservists performing annual training or called to active duty may be entitled to BAH at varying rates.

The list of pays and benefits affected by duty status is extensive. An exhaustive discussion of these benefits, and their relation to individual duty statuses, is therefore beyond the scope of this report.

¹⁶ Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Financial Management Regulation Volume 2A, Chapter 2: Military Personnel Appropriation*, DOD 7000-R, June 2017, pp. 2-8, 2-33, https://comptroller.war.gov/Portals/45/Documents/fmr/current/02a/02a_02.pdf.

¹⁷ 10 U.S.C. §115.

operational force, complicates budgeting and appropriations efforts, causes disruptions to reserve service, and produces inequities in benefits and compensation. Such observations, which appear to be prevalent in public commentary on the duty status system, raise issues that are discussed below.

Use of the Reserves as an Operational Force. Some stakeholders claim that the duty status system does not support the current needs of the military. During the Cold War, the reserves functioned largely as a *strategic* force, meant to be mobilized for low-probability, high-intensity operations such as a war with the Soviet Union. Utilization was limited during this period: in the five years prior to 1991, the reserve components contributed an annual average of roughly 3,000 person-years of active service.¹⁸ Much of the duty status system was enacted during this period.¹⁹

In the years following Operation Desert Storm, the reserve component assumed additional roles in routine military activities and became a source of additional personnel for contingency operations. From 1996 to 2001, the reserves served an annual average of 35,000 person-years. From 2002 to 2010 (during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with domestic and foreign counterterrorism actions), this increased to an annual average of 146,000 person-years.²⁰

Some stakeholders allege that the duty status system is ill-suited to the frequent activations and diverse employment of reservists in the 21st century. In the words of RAND authors

Multiple duty statuses produce complex rules and procedures that are highly inefficient, inhibit volunteerism, and increase the difficulty of accessing reservists to perform operational missions. The complexity affects both National Guard and Reserve members and operational commanders alike.²¹

Budgeting and Planning. Some stakeholders claim that the duty status system complicates budgeting and planning efforts. A reservist's duty status may affect the pay and benefits to which they are entitled, as well as the appropriations account from which those pay and benefits are funded. In addition, pay and benefits may depend on the duration of duty.²² Reservists mobilized under different duty statuses—with variable personnel costs—may serve together in the same unit. As a result, the cost of activating servicemembers could vary, even within the same unit. Some stakeholders claim that the multitude of duty statuses makes it difficult for senior leaders and comptrollers to anticipate and track the cost of using these forces.²³

According to the 11th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (QRMC)

¹⁸ Reserve Forces Policy Board, *Reserve Forces Policy Board Annual Report 2014*, July 20, 2014, pp. 99-100.

¹⁹ Reserve Forces Policy Board, *Reserve Forces Policy Board Annual Report 2014*, July 20, 2014, pp. 99-100, <https://rfpb.defense.gov/Portals/67/Documents/Reports/Annual%20Report/2015%20RFPB%20Annual%20Report%20Final.pdf#page=109>.

²⁰ Reserve Forces Policy Board, *Reserve Forces Policy Board Annual Report 2014*, July 20, 2014, pp. 99-100.

²¹ Agnes Gereben Schaefer, Lisa M. Harrington, Thomas Bush, et al., *Reserve Component Duty Status Reform: Analytical Contributions to a New Construct for Activating and Compensating Members of the National Guard and Reserves*, RAND, August 12, 2025, p. 5, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA959-1.html.

²² Reservists typically gain access to more generous pay and benefits on their 30th day of mobilization. CRS Report RL30802, *Reserve Component Personnel Issues: Questions and Answers*.

²³ Agnes Gereben Schaefer, Lisa M. Harrington, Thomas Bush, et al., *Reserve Component Duty Status Reform: Analytical Contributions to a New Construct for Activating and Compensating Members of the National Guard and Reserves*, p. 5.

See also statement of Jerilyn B. Busch, Director of Military Compensation Policy at DOD, in U.S. Congress, House Armed Services Committee, Military Personnel Subcommittee, Reserve Component Duty Status Reform, 116th Cong., 1st sess., March 27, 2019, HASC no. 116-20, p. 7, <https://www.congress.gov/116/chr/CHRG-116hhrg36881/CHRG-116hhrg36881.pdf>.

The budgeting process is based on artificial duty status distinctions that complicate the allocation of resources and obscure the understanding of the work and training actually being performed. It is difficult to track funding because duty statuses are not linked to how the budget is organized.²⁴

Interruptions to Service. Some stakeholders claim that the current duty status construct causes administrative delays and disruptions to pay and benefits. A reservist may need to move fluidly between duty statuses as the nature or purpose of their service changes. Some stakeholders claim that these changes in duty status may require new orders to be issued,²⁵ which may result in breaks in service and subsequent interruptions to pay and benefits.²⁶

Inequities in Pay and Benefits. Due to the multitude of duty statuses—and the differences in pay and benefits between them—reservists serving together, under different orders and statuses, may be entitled to different pay and benefits. There may also be differences in pay and benefits between reservists and active-component personnel serving together. As one stark example, some observers cite a 2015 helicopter crash in which seven active-duty Marines and four members of the National Guard were killed. Due to policies in place at the time, there were disparities in survivorship benefits awarded to the dependents of the Marines and the dependents of the Guard personnel.²⁷

Legislative Oversight of the Duty Status System

Section 515 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 (FY2016 NDAA; P.L. 114-92) directed the Secretary of Defense to evaluate the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission's (MCRMC's) proposal to consolidate existing duty statuses into six categories and report to Congress on the assessment.²⁸ This section further directed the Secretary to submit an alternative proposal, along with draft legislation, should he find the MCRMC model unsatisfactory.²⁹

Section 513 of the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2018 (P.L. 115-91) modified Section 515 of the FY2016 NDAA. The language directed the Secretary of Defense to propose a model that would consolidate the existing duty statuses into four categories containing no more than eight distinct authorities. These categories were to be (1) active duty for contingency operations or in support of a combatant command; (2) other types of active service such as training, administration, operational support, and full-time support to the reserve components; (3) inactive and partial-day

²⁴ Department of Defense, *Report of the Eleventh Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation*, p. 136.

²⁵ Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, *Report of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission: Final Report*, pp. 52-53. Per a presidential memorandum, the MCRMC served as the 12th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation.

²⁶ Statement of Major General Bradley S. James, Acting Commander, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, in U.S. Congress, House Armed Services Committee, Military Personnel Subcommittee, Reserve Component Duty Status Reform, 116th Cong., 1st sess., March 27, 2019, HASC no. 116-20, p. 54.

²⁷ Agnes Gereben Schaefer, Lisa M. Harrington, Thomas Bush, et al., *Reserve Component Duty Status Reform: Analytical Contributions to a New Construct for Activating and Compensating Members of the National Guard and Reserves*, p. 7. See also "Arlington National Cemetery denies burial for guardsman killed in Blackhawk helicopter training crash," *Florida Times-Union*, June 3, 2015; <https://www.jacksonville.com/story/news/military/2015/06/03/arlington-denies-burial-guardsman-killed-chopper-crash/15665456007/>.

²⁸ P.L. 114-92.

²⁹ The MCRMC proposed a six-category duty status system largely analogous to that proposed by the 2012 Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation. See Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, *Report of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission: Final Report*, January 29, 2015, p. 54, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA625626.pdf>.

training and service; and (4) remote duty assignments. This provision further specified that the Secretary's proposed changes did not alter the purposes for which the reserves may be used, or Congress' ability to oversee the use of the reserves. Finally, it stated that this proposal shall minimize disruptions to reservist pay and benefits.³⁰

RAND and DOD developed an alternative duty status system, as directed in the FY2016 and FY2018 NDAA's (see the "DOD and RAND: Four Duty Statuses" section).³¹ RAND released a report in August 2025 detailing the proposal.³² Legislation introduced in the 119th Congress to consolidate duty statuses into four categories broadly mirrored those outlined in the DOD/RAND proposal.³³

Proposed Duty Status Models: Overview

Several working groups have proposed alternate duty status models, which seek primarily to consolidate the existing duty statuses. Three such proposals are summarized in **Table 1** and discussed further in **Table 2**, **Table 3**, and **Table 4**.

Table 1. Selected Duty Status Reform Proposals

Commission on the National Guard and the Reserves	Eleventh Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation	RAND/DOD
Category 1: On (active) Duty	Category 1: Active Duty	Category 1: Contingency Duty
	Category 2: Inactive Reserve Service	Category 2: Training and Support
	Category 3: Federal Service	Category 3: Reserve Component Duty
Category 2: Off (active) Duty	Category 4: Full-Time National Guard Duty	Category 4: Remote Assignments
	Category 5: Inactive National Guard Service	
	Category 6: Coast Guard Active Duty	

Source: CRS analysis.

³⁰ P.L. 115-91.

³¹ Agnes Gereben Schaefer, Lisa M. Harrington, Thomas Bush, et al., *Reserve Component Duty Status Reform: Analytical Contributions to a New Construct for Activating and Compensating Members of the National Guard and Reserves*, pp. 4-5.

³² Agnes Gereben Schaefer, Lisa M. Harrington, Thomas Bush, et al., *Reserve Component Duty Status Reform: Analytical Contributions to a New Construct for Activating and Compensating Members of the National Guard and Reserves*.

³³ CRS analysis of H.R. 6976 and S. 4801, 119th Congress.

Commission on the National Guard and Reserves: Two Duty Statuses

Table 2. Commission on the National Guard and Reserves Proposal

Category	Description
Category 1: On (active) Duty	All time spent performing duty, regardless of purpose.
Category 2: Off (active) Duty	All time spent not performing duty.

Source: Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, *Transforming the National Guard and Reserves into a 21st-Century Operational Force*, January 31, 2008, p. 163, <https://policy.defense.gov/portals/11/Documents/hdasa/references/CNGR%20Final%20Report.pdf>.

In a 2008 report, the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves (CNGR) proposed a consolidation of all duty statuses into one “on duty” status, paired with an “off-duty” status for periods between reserve service (see **Table 2** above):

DOD should reduce the number of duty statuses from the current 29 to 2: on (active) duty and off (active) duty. All reserve duty will be considered active duty, with appropriate pay and other compensation. The 48 drills should be replaced with 24 days of active duty. A day’s pay should be provided for a day’s work without reducing compensation for current service members. The system should be sufficiently flexible to deal with service-specific training requirements.³⁴

The commission recommended this model as part of a “continuum of service” concept that it assessed would maximize flexibility in the use of the reserve components:

The future duty status system should simplify the process of bringing a reservist on active duty. Moreover, the operational reserve requires a structure that can engage reservists over a career in both an active duty and a reserve status, thereby promoting a continuum of service. A new duty status system should enable members and units to undertake duty periods varying from a few days per year up to a full year or more, in ways that meet the needs of DOD, the service member, and his or her family and employer. Finally, a new duty status system should take advantage of a reservist’s willingness to serve—building a more balanced force and providing a better value for the nation.³⁵

The CNGR proposal contained a duty status—“off-duty”—that encompasses time spent in civilian life. CRS has identified no analogue to the “off-duty” status in current statute or in the two proposals outlined below.

The House report accompanying the FY2009 NDAA discussed the duty status system in general and the CNGR proposal in particular. Regarding this proposal, it stated that “reducing the number of duty statuses brings numerous challenges that were not specifically addressed by the commission.”³⁶

³⁴ Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, *Transforming the National Guard and Reserves into a 21st-Century Operational Force*, January 31, 2008, p. 163, <https://policy.defense.gov/portals/11/Documents/hdasa/references/CNGR%20Final%20Report.pdf>.

³⁵ Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, *Transforming the National Guard and Reserves into a 21st-Century Operational Force*, p. 163.

³⁶ H.Rept. 110-652.

Eleventh Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (QRM): Six Duty Statuses

The Eleventh Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (QRM) proposed six categories of duty status (see **Table 3** below).

Table 3. Eleventh Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation Duty Status Proposal

Category	Description
Category 1: Active Duty	Activation of reserve and National Guard personnel for federal service under Title 10.
Category 2: Inactive Reserve Service	Activation of reserve personnel under Title 10 for partial-day assignments (such as weekend drill and funeral honors).
Category 3: Federal Service	Activation of reserve and National Guard personnel under Title 10 to “execute the laws of the union, suppress insurrections, and repel invasions.”
Category 4: Full-Time National Guard Duty	Activation of National Guard personnel to perform full-time duty under Title 32 (i.e., under state authority with federal pay and benefits).
Category 5: Inactive National Guard Service	Activation of National Guard personnel under Title 32 (i.e., state authority with federal pay and benefits) for partial-day assignments (such as weekend drill and funeral honors).
Category 6: Coast Guard Active Duty	Activation of Coast Guard reservists under Title 14.

Source: Adapted from Department of Defense, *Report of the Eleventh Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation*, p. 145.

The primary factors by which the QRM categorizes duty appear to be public law title and the nature of the duty authorized. (See **Table 4** for a visual representation of this proposal’s general organizing principles.)

Table 4. General Organizing Principles of the QRM Proposal

	Title 10	Title 32	Title 14
Full-Time	Category 1: Active Duty; Category 3: Federal Service	Category 4: Full-Time National Guard Duty	Category 6: Coast Guard Active Duty
Partial-Day	Category 2: Inactive Reserve Service	Category 5: Inactive National Guard Service	

Source: CRS analysis of Department of Defense, *Report of the Eleventh Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation*, p. 145.

The QRM authors state,

The new duty structure proposed by the QRM sets the conditions for a continuum of service. It reduces complexity by separating authorities from purpose, funding streams, and other characteristics that combine together to create the arduous or—as the CNGR called it—“byzantine” system that exists today. With simplicity come fewer and more seamless transitions between duty statuses. Of fundamental importance is that a simpler system greatly increases the accessibility of reserve component personnel in a total force

environment. It better enables operational commanders to acquire personnel resources when they are needed to support operational missions.

And, the system supports both training and operational missions based on a philosophy that duty is duty regardless of purpose. Although the trend is increased participation in operational roles, not all members of the reserves are extensively involved in operational support. Simplifying the system would allow flexibility to support the full range of reserve participation, essentially making the difference between training and support transparent, while recognizing the need for both.³⁷

The QRMC proposal also includes a unique category—Federal Service—not found in the CNGR or RAND/DOD proposals. This duty status would be used “when the president exercises his constitutional authority to call forth the militia to execute the laws of the union, suppress insurrections, and repel invasions.”³⁸

DOD and RAND: Four Duty Statuses

A proposal developed by RAND Corporation and DOD in accordance with Section 513 of the FY2018 NDAA would consolidate existing duty statuses into four categories (see **Table 5**). The RAND/DOD proposal categorizes duty by its broad purpose and its duration. It subdivides these categories into types based on public law title.

Table 5. DOD/RAND Duty Status Proposal

Category	Description
Category 1: Contingency Duty	Activation of reserve and National Guard personnel for federal service under Title 10 for contingency operations. This category would include military operations, disaster relief, preparations for and demobilization from those duties, preplanned support to combatant commands, time spent as a prisoner of war, and several other activities. It also would include response to insurrections and invasions, certain types of full-time National Guard Duty under Title 32 , and Coast Guard Reserve activations under Title 14 .
Category 2: Training and Support	Active and full-time service under Titles 10 and 32 for purposes other than contingency operations. This category would include sustained training activities, full-time support to the reserve components, administrative assignments, disciplinary proceedings, and several other activities.
Category 3: Reserve Component Duty	Partial-day activities under Titles 10 and 32 such as weekend drill, funeral honors, and administrative tasks.
Category 4: Remote Assignments	Tasks that may be done remotely and/or without direct military supervision under Titles 10 and 32 . These may include educational activities or certain work assignments.

Source: Adapted from Agnes Gereben Schaefer, Lisa M. Harrington, Thomas Bush, et al., *Reserve Component Duty Status Reform: Analytical Contributions to a New Construct for Activating and Compensating Members of the National Guard and Reserves*.

Note: This proposal subdivides each of these categories into duty types for each public law title. For instance, Category 1 contains three duty types for Titles 10, 32, and 14. Other categories contain two duty types, for Titles 10 and 32. There are nine duty types, by U.S. Code title, in total.

³⁷ Department of Defense, *Report of the Eleventh Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation*, p. 146.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

The authors state,

These four broad categories cover and consolidate several of the dimensions of the current duty statuses (type of duty, election, mission, and status) while preserving distinctions between Title 10 and Title 32 of the U.S. Code. In addition, the new construct retains active duty performed by Coast Guard Reserve members under Title 14. Taking these differences into consideration results in nine duty types.... This organization of duty types and their corresponding authorities provides a more rational and systematic way of organizing activities for National Guard and Reserve members.³⁹

Potential Issues for Congress

What Changes, If Any, Should Be Made to the Duty Status System?

Congress may evaluate to what extent to modify the duty status system, if at all. In its considerations, it may weigh the system's potential defects and attributes along with the potential challenges of implementing changes to the system.

Should Congress decide to modify the duty status system, it may consider its objectives in doing so. These may include reducing personnel costs, equalizing pay and benefits among servicemembers, increasing efficiency of activations, increasing congressional oversight of servicemembers' operational employment, and altering the role of the reserves in military operations. These objectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but a given proposal may cause unintended outcomes. For instance, a proposal to standardize pay and benefits may increase total personnel costs.

When deliberating proposals, Congress may consider the scope of recommended changes to the duty status system, in part to assess the feasibility of such changes. Proposed changes range from narrow (e.g., the addition of a new duty status for a specific purpose) to broad (such as the consolidation of 29 duty statuses into two, as proposed by the Commission on the National Guard and the Reserves).

A narrow change to the duty status system could be easier and/or simpler to implement and could carry a lower risk of unintended consequences but may not address the systemic issues raised by stakeholders (see the "Arguments in Favor of Change" section). A broader change may address these issues but may require the modification of many statutes and regulations may carry unforeseen aftereffects.

When evaluating a proposal, Congress may consider the degree to which it changes statutes and regulations. Since much of the duty status system is enacted in the *U.S. Code*, a change to the system may entail changes to statute. DOD and the services may need to alter their regulations in accordance with these changes.

³⁹ Agnes Gereben Schaefer, Lisa M. Harrington, Thomas Bush, et al., *Reserve Component Duty Status Reform: Analytical Contributions to a New Construct for Activating and Compensating Members of the National Guard and Reserves*, p. 9.

What Is the Appropriate Balance Between Executive Branch Operational Flexibility and Congressional Oversight of the Reserve Components?

When evaluating the current duty status system—and proposals to modify it—Congress may consider the balance of executive and legislative control over reserve forces. Congress may grant the services greater flexibility in their use of the reserve components. This could be done by loosening or repealing the statutes that limit the scope, duration, and purpose of reservist mobilizations, and the requirement for congressional approval in some circumstances.⁴⁰ Such a change may allow the services to activate reservists at will and thereby facilitate the use of the reserves as an operational force. It may also allow the services to more finely tailor the structure and function of the reserves to their needs.

However, such changes may diminish Congress's role in defense policy. The statutory limitations on activations—especially those requiring congressional approval for full mobilization—provide a check on the President's ability to tap military personnel resources. More broadly, Congress may find its ability to shape the structure and use of the reserve components reduced if it delegates additional utilization authority to the executive branch. This action may also limit Congress's ability to regulate the personnel and operational tempo of the reserves.⁴¹

Congress may weigh the relative importance of operational flexibility against congressional oversight when considering changes to the duty status system. It may further consider ways to minimize tradeoffs between these two objectives.

What Costs, Tradeoffs, and Policy Changes May Result from a Change to the Duty Status System?

Congress may consider costs, tradeoffs, and policy changes that may result from a change in the duty status system, including some that may be unintended.

Costs. The cost of changes to the duty status system may include the development of new IT systems, retraining staff or hiring additional staff, and changes in pay and benefits relative to the current system. Congress may also consider the long-term cost implications of alterations to retirement and VA benefit eligibility, among other factors.

Tradeoffs. Some changes to the duty status system might create real or perceived disadvantages for certain stakeholders. Potential impacts include the loss of pay and benefits to certain categories of reservists, reduction in state governors' control over National Guard forces, and greater use of the VA health care system.⁴²

Unintended Consequences. A proposed change to the duty status system could produce unintended and undesired outcomes. Broad changes may involve the modification of many laws and regulations governing the operation of several federal agencies. For instance, the DOD/RAND proposal "identified 275 provisions of law in 21 of the 54 titles of the U.S. Code,

⁴⁰ Namely 10 U.S.C. §12301(a), commonly referred to as "Full Mobilization." This statute authorizes the mobilization of an unlimited number of reservists, for the duration of a "war or national emergency" declared by Congress. As the name suggests, this is the broadest mobilization authority, but its use is regulated by Congress.

⁴¹ For more information, see CRS In Focus IF11007, *Defense Primer: Personnel Tempo (PERSTEMPO)*, by Kristy N. Kamarck.

⁴² For more information, see CRS In Focus IF10555, *Introduction to Veterans Health Care*, by Sidath Viranga Panangala and Jared S. Sussman.

and separate stand-alone acts passed by Congress that must be amended to ... align pay and benefits packages within each category.”⁴³ A similar DOD initiative, discussed at a March 2019 House Armed Services Committee hearing, “identified more than 450 separate provisions of law that would need to be changed across 21 titles of the U.S. Code and across other uncoded statutes.”⁴⁴

Given the scope of the changes and the diversity of affected stakeholders, the implementation of these proposals may trigger unintended administrative disruptions. It may also create incentives and disincentives that produce undesired outcomes. Congress may consider the extent to which a proposal may cause disruptions, whether and how Congress might prevent such disruptions, and should disruptions occur, whether and how Congress might monitor and mitigate them.

Policy Changes. Any given proposal could result in changes beyond the scope of Congress’s objectives. For instance, in a March 2019 House Armed Services Committee hearing, Members of Congress expressed concern that a DOD duty status proposal reduced state governors’ degree of control over their National Guards.⁴⁵

Does Congress Have Enough Information to Evaluate the Duty Status System?

Congress may consider whether the executive branch has provided sufficient information to weigh potential changes to the duty status system. The report (H.Rept. 119-698) accompanying the House-passed version of an FY2027 NDAA (H.R. 8800) contained a provision directing the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of Veterans’ Affairs to brief Congress, on

- (1) additional recommendations of consolidation to the current duty status system;
- (2) how changes recommended in the report will ensure servicemembers performing similar jobs receive equitable benefits and pay;
- (3) estimated cost-savings or cost-burden to the Department of Defense on implementing a duty status consolidation; and
- (4) current barriers to implementation.
- (5) any barriers to implementation in coordination with the Department of Veterans Affairs and;
- (6) estimated cost savings or cost burden to the Department of Veterans Affairs.⁴⁶

⁴³ Agnes Gereben Schaefer, Lisa M. Harrington, Thomas Bush, et al., *Reserve Component Duty Status Reform: Analytical Contributions to a New Construct for Activating and Compensating Members of the National Guard and Reserves*, p. 11.

⁴⁴ Jerilyn B. Busch, Director of Military Compensation Policy, Department of Defense, quoted in, U.S. Congress, House Armed Services Committee, Military Personnel Subcommittee, Reserve Component Duty Status Reform, 116th Cong., 1st sess., March 27, 2019, HASC no. 116-20, p. 11.

⁴⁵ Rep. Debra Haaland, quoted in, U.S. Congress, House Armed Services Committee, Military Personnel Subcommittee, Reserve Component Duty Status Reform, 116th Cong., 1st sess., March 27, 2019, HASC no. 116-20, p. 12.

⁴⁶ U.S. Congress, House Armed Services Committee, *Report of the Committee on Armed Service House of Representatives*, to Accompany H.R. 8800, 119th Cong., 2nd sess., June 15, 2026, H.Rept. 119-698 (Washington: GPO, 2026), p. 197.

Possible Options for Congress

Change the Duty Status System Along the Lines of an Established Proposal

Congress may change the duty status system along the lines of an already proposed model (for examples, see the “Proposed Duty Status Models” section). Congress may adopt these models as presented or modify them. Congress may also consider alternate proposals or maintain the current system.

Consider Alternative Proposals for the Duty Status System

Congress may consider other duty status models, such as those employed by other nations’ militaries or other services of the U.S. Armed Forces. Congress may examine the reserve component management systems of other countries, such as Canada, the United Kingdom, or Australia. When making international comparisons, Congress may focus on countries with all-volunteer militaries. Nations that practice conscription, such as Israel, South Korea, and Finland, tend to have reserve component policies that differ fundamentally from those of the United States.

The **Canadian Reserve Force** uses three duty statuses, each with a distinct pay and benefits package.

- **Class A**, which encompasses reservists training part-time while working full-time civilian jobs.
- **Class B**, which encompasses reservists working on fixed-term contracts of varied length. This class covers short-term activations for training or limited-duration assignments, and multi-year activations in which the reservist works full time.
- **Class C**, which encompasses reservists mobilized for operations.⁴⁷

The **Australian Defence Force (ADF)** maintains service options (SERVOP in ADF terminology) for reservists to perform full-time service for a year.⁴⁸

The **Reserve Forces of the United Kingdom** maintain a category of Sponsored Reservists. These are “civil servants or private sector employees whose employers have an agreement with MOD [Ministry of Defence], usually a contract, for the provision of support services.”⁴⁹ These personnel may be mobilized as reservists to support the armed forces under certain circumstances.

Congress may also consider the personnel management system of the **U.S. Space Force** and whether its policies are applicable to the other services. Full and part-time Space Force personnel are managed through a unified command structure. Current statute authorizes the Secretary of the

⁴⁷ See Canadian Army, *The Army Reserve in Canada: Soldier Information Handbook 2023*, R-PM-007-000/AF-001, April 2023, pp. 107-108, <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/army/lineofsight/articleimages/2023/08/R-PM-007-000-AF-001.pdf>; and Queen’s[sic] Regulations and Orders (QR&O[sic]) Volume I - Chapter 9 Section 3 <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/queens-regulations-orders/vol-1-administration/ch-9-reserve-service.html#cha-009-06>.

⁴⁸ Australian Government Defence, Strategic Review of the Australian Defence Force Reserves, 2024, p. 33, <https://www.defence.gov.au/about/reviews-inquiries/strategic-review-of-the-adf-reserves>.

⁴⁹ Ministry of Defence, Regulations for the Mobilisation of UK Reserve Forces Part 1: Directive, JSP 753 Pt 1, London, United Kingdom, March 2023, p. 14, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6477698d5f7bb7000c7fa2b3/JSP_753_Part_1_V5.0_Mar_2023.pdf.

Air Force to create regulations under which Space Force personnel serve in “active status” but not on “sustained duty,” and are required to drill and train periodically in a manner analogous to members of the reserve component.⁵⁰ Congress may consider whether this integrated personnel system could be applied to the other services and their reserve components. Such considerations may include the extent to which implementing this proposal may require changes to statute. Congress may also weigh the potential flexibility of the Space Force personnel system against the unique features of the Space Force (namely its relatively small size and its integration with civilian intelligence and DOD agencies).

Maintain the Current System

Congress may determine that the current duty status system is sufficient—or that the potential challenges of changing the system outweigh the potential benefits—and make no changes to it.

Conduct Oversight of Implementation Efforts

Congress may conduct oversight of the implementation of any changes to the laws or regulations governing the duty status system. Congress may consider whether the executive branch has an adequate plan to implement any changes to the duty status system, particularly given how many agencies could be involved across the federal government. Likewise, Congress may consider its own oversight plans, given that the affected agencies fall under the jurisdiction of several committees.⁵¹ Congress may enact reporting requirements and directives for the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and inspector-general evaluations to assist in oversight of policy implementation.

⁵⁰ 10 U.S.C. §20101.

⁵¹ The Duty Status Reform Act (H.R. 6976) was referred to 12 committees of jurisdiction.

Appendix. Utilization Authorities for Reserve Components

Table A-1. Utilization Authorities for Reserve Components

Statute	Status
10 U.S.C. §12301(a)	Full mobilization during war or national emergency declared by Congress.
10 U.S.C. §12302	Mobilization of up to 1 million ready reserve members for up to 24 months.
10 U.S.C. §12304	Mobilization of reservists for up to 365 days at President's discretion.
10 U.S.C. §12304a	Mobilization in response to a major disaster or emergency at the request of a state governor for up to 120 days.
10 U.S.C. §12304b	Activation for preplanned missions in support of Combatant Commands for up to 365 days.
10 U.S.C. §251	Mobilization to suppress insurrection in a state at request of state government.
10 U.S.C. §252	Mobilization to enforce federal law in event of insurrection.
10 U.S.C. §12406	Calling of National Guard into federal service.
10 U.S.C. §2301(g)	Reservist may be placed in active status if in captivity.
10 U.S.C. §802(d)	Reservist may be placed in active status for disciplinary proceedings.
10 U.S.C. §10147(a)	Requires at least 48 drill periods and up to 30 days ADT per year.
10 U.S.C. §12301(b)	Activation for up to 15 days per year.
10 U.S.C. §10148	Up to 45 days of additional training per year if training performance deemed unsatisfactory.
10 U.S.C. §12303	Recall to active duty for reservists whose performance deemed unsatisfactory.
10 U.S.C. §12319	Annual muster of ready reserve personnel.
10 U.S.C. §688	Recall of retired reserve personnel to active duty.
10 U.S.C. §12301(d)	Additional training; Operational Support; Active Guard and Reserve.
10 U.S.C. §12301(h)	Activation of reservist for health care purposes.
10 U.S.C. §12322	Activation of reservist for health care purposes.
10 U.S.C. §12323	Activation of reservist who alleges sexual assault in line of duty pending determination.
10 U.S.C. §12402	Voluntary activation of commissioned officers to serve at the National Guard Bureau.
10 U.S.C. §12503	Voluntary activation for funeral honors duty.
32 U.S.C. §502(a)	Requires at least 48 drill periods and up to 30 days ADT per year for National Guard personnel.

32 U.S.C. §502(f)(1)(A)	Involuntary Full-Time National Guard Duty.
32 U.S.C. §502(f)(1)(B)	Voluntary Full-Time National Guard Duty.
32 U.S.C. §115	Voluntary activation for funeral honors duty for National Guard personnel.
14 U.S.C. §3713	Activation of Coast Guard reservists.

Source: Adapted from Agnes Gereben Schaefer, Lisa M. Harrington, Thomas Bush, et al., *Reserve Component Duty Status Reform: Analytical Contributions to a New Construct for Activating and Compensating Members of the National Guard and Reserves*, p. 6.

Notes: CRS has identified 27 statutory provisions authorizing reserve component duty. However, 10 U.S.C. §12301(d) authorizes three categories of duty. The number of utilization authorities listed in this table may therefore be 27 or 29, depending on how one counts the duty categories in 10 U.S.C. §12301(d).

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