

OFFICE OF MILITARY AFFAIRS

Fiscal Year 2023-2024

At a Glance

ROBERT T. ROSS, Executive Director

OFFICE OF MILITARY AFFAIRS (OMA)

Established – July 2007

Statutory Authority - Connecticut General Statute 32-58b

Central Office – 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 5, Hartford, CT 06103

Recurring Operating Expenses - \$220,000.00

Organizational Structure – As an independent agency, OMA is staffed with a full-time Executive Director, designated as a department head in the executive branch, reporting directly to the Office of the Governor. The Executive Director is supported by Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) staff members who provide administrative services for OMA in various functions, including but not limited to, office administration, financial management, legal counsel, information technology, economic research, government, public and legislative affairs.

Mission

The OMA promotes and coordinates statewide activities that enhance the quality of life of all branches of military personnel and their families and to expand the military and homeland security presence in this state.

Statutory Responsibility

Under the provisions of Connecticut General Statute 32-58b, OMA coordinates policies and programs to enhance the quality of life of service members and their families from all branches stationed in or deploying from Connecticut. OMA develops and implements strategic initiatives to prevent the closure or downsizing of Naval Submarine Base New London. OMA advocates for Connecticut's defense industries with efforts to retain established industries and encourage the relocation of new manufacturing to the state. And OMA serves as liaison to the Connecticut congressional delegation on defense and military issues.

Connecticut's Enduring Role in National Security

Connecticut's prime defense contractors and their suppliers throughout the state had an outstanding year. And expectations for the years ahead are very high, due in large part to legislation passed by Congress projecting increased funding for *Virginia*-class and the new *Columbia*-class submarines designed and built at Electric Boat in Groton. Hartford-based Pratt & Whitney is the sole manufacturer of engines for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. This aircraft is used by all branches of the Department of Defense (DOD) and our allies around the world. Stratford-based Sikorsky continues to build rotary wing military aircraft including tactical and heavy lift variants. Sikorsky also manufactured the newest fleet of 23 presidential helicopters. The last batch of VH-92A *Patriot* presidential transport helicopters was delivered on August 14, 2024. Sikorsky has produced every presidential helicopter since President Dwight D. Eisenhower began using them in 1959.



Marine Helicopter Squadron One (HMX-1) runs test flights of the new VH-92A over the south lawn of the White House on Sept. 22, 2018, Washington D.C. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Hunter Helis)

The most recent *Defense Spending Summary by State*[®] published by the DOD Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation ranked Connecticut #7 among all states in total defense spending at **\$22.3B**. As a percentage of state GDP, Connecticut was ranked #3, at 6.9%. And on a per capita basis, defense spending in Connecticut equated to **\$6,150** per resident. Clearly, the relatively small state of Connecticut punches far above its weight in defense spending and military operations.

Creating Military Value in Submarine Base New London

Chief among the reasons to create OMA was the very real probability that the Submarine Base (SUBASE) in Groton would be closed. Twice it was targeted by the DOD for closure in the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. Twice, *Team Connecticut*, a group of public and private sector individuals, got organized and worked tirelessly to reverse the almost certain closure of the base. Today, the primary task of OMA is to do proactively what *Team Connecticut* had to do reactively in 1993 and 2005. We don't want to wage this battle again.

The predictable economic catastrophe associated with the potential closure of the SUBASE is obvious to anyone familiar with southeastern Connecticut. The loss of the positive effects we realize from the base -- its \$5 billion annual economic impact and over 15,000 jobs -- would be devastating. The ripple effect throughout the state would simply be the reverse of what we experience today. Hundreds of small businesses deriving their business and clientele from the base would go under. Without this economic anchor, the regional economy would be severely impacted.

Although DOD has not requested a BRAC in recent years, it is likely that another BRAC round will eventually be approved by Congress. OMA efforts will continue to focus on developing and executing strategic initiatives to enhance the *military value* of the base in preparation for the next BRAC round when it comes.

Today the SUBASE is undergoing a remarkable transformation as old infrastructure is demolished and replaced with modern capacity. People familiar with the SUBASE recognize its ongoing dramatic transformation into a modern campus of new buildings, specifically designed for unique operations, specialized training and high-tech support functions associated with producing and maintaining our nation's submarine force.

Working in a close partnership with Navy officials in Connecticut and at the Pentagon, OMA has established a legal framework through which the state can transfer funds to the Navy for carefully selected projects.

Previous state-funded projects have included construction of new buildings to support operations and maintenance, construction of training equipment, installation of more efficient and resilient utilities, and purchases of land for encroachment mitigation on the northern boundary in Ledyard, the southern perimeter in Groton, as well as across the Thames River in Waterford to protect and enhance maneuvering room for submarines. Collectively, these projects represent a wholly unique partnership with the Navy in diverse and creative areas of base improvements.

As important as these ongoing state-funded investments are, they represent only a small fraction of the military construction projects underway on the base. Since 2005, there have been over \$700 million worth of planning, demolition, and construction projects on the base, about \$23 million funded by the state. So, the state is an important but modest partner in a much larger effort to modernize the base.

OMA will continue to work closely with our congressional delegation, state and local officials, regional stakeholders, and Navy leadership to identify future projects as part of our ongoing strategy to enhance the *military value* of the base and protect it from closure in a future BRAC round.

Quality of Life and Military Service in Connecticut

Advocating for service members and their families has become one of the most important roles of OMA. Military families stationed here for duty assignments or training enjoy supportive local communities, excellent public schools, and the unique experience of living in New England. As families in transition, they occasionally need reasonable accommodations and OMA actively engages state agencies and local organizations on their behalf. Many examples of this advocacy can be read on the OMA website.

The OMA is a member of the national Association of Defense Communities (ADC), a Washington-based organization that represents states and communities nationwide that host military installations. The Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments was recently designated an ADC Great American Defense Community for their outstanding collective efforts to support military bases, service members and their families.

Conclusion

Connecticut's OMA demonstrates an efficient model for achieving tangible strategic outcomes. Since it was established, the office has produced a partnership with the Navy that was unprecedented in the United States. The SUBASE is now in a much better position to withstand another round of BRAC. The Connecticut National Guard and U.S. Coast Guard Academy are realizing and planning for expansions with new facilities to support their missions. The State of Connecticut and City of New London are looking forward to being the home of the National Coast Guard Museum opening within the next few years. The OMA helped coordinate consistent and sustained support for increases in defense and military economic impacts within the state. Most importantly, OMA has advanced the *quality of life* and *quality of service* for service members and their families stationed here and deploying to destinations around the world.

Connecticut's diversified defense industries continue to thrive due to the high quality and strategic relevance of the products designed and manufactured throughout the state. Our defense industries enjoy superb reputations for their highly skilled workforces, outstanding management, and efficient business practices.

Residents should be proud of Connecticut's long history as what George Washington called the *Provisions State*. It is an important part of our character, embedded in the economic fabric of our state and a legacy that should be carefully protected. The OMA will continue to seek opportunities to enhance the military and defense industry presence in Connecticut and advocate for the many organizations and people in our state - particularly military members and their families - who serve and support our nation's defense.

Information Reported as Required by State Statute

The OMA is required by statute to prepare and submit a report of activities, findings and recommendations annually to the Governor and the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to commerce and public safety, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes. The most recent annual report is available on the OMA website (www.ct.gov/oma).

