



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL
HARRISBURG, PA 17120-0018

BRAC Commission

AUG 08 2005

Received

THE AUDITOR GENERAL

August 4, 2005

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
Chairman
2005 DEFENSE BASE CLOSURE AND
REALIGNMENT COMMISSION
2521 S. Clark St., Ste. 600
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Chairman Principi:

As a U.S. Marine Corps veteran who served during the Vietnam War, I have dedicated my three decades of public service to issues affecting active and retired military personnel. I have written you previously to express my support for maintaining strategically vital military installations in Pennsylvania slated for closing by BRAC. I am deeply concerned about a quality of life issue for our service men and women and I strongly urge you to continue plans for construction of a new commissary at the Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base in Willow Grove.

About 45,000 military families live within a 25-mile radius of Willow Grove, according to an impact study to determine whether a commissary was needed at Willow Grove. This is a service that these hard-working patriotic families have earned.

Defense Commissary Agency approved construction of a new 20,000-square-foot commissary for Willow Grove in 2003. Construction was slated to begin next year, but now it has been halted by the proposal to close the air base. The closest commissary to Willow Grove is 50 miles away, at McGuire Air Force Base and Fort Dix, N.J.

At present, Willow Grove houses a small Naval Exchange (NEX) that sells dry goods, convenience items, snacks, alcohol, uniform items, appliances and other goods. About 186,000 people visited the NEX last year, totaling sales of more than \$4.5 million. A full service commissary is needed in this geographical location. Commissaries provide discounts of 10 to 40 percent on milk, meat, cereal, healthcare products and other daily staples.

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
Chairman
2005 DEFENSE BASE CLOSURE AND
REALIGNMENT COMMISSION
August 4, 2005
Page Two

Our active duty and retired military deserve this benefit to stretch their paychecks and pensions. We have a responsibility to make sure it is accessible to them, particularly to our older veterans and to those with physical disabilities

Willow Grove is the dominant military base in Eastern Pennsylvania. It has played a vital role in post 9/11 military mobilization. It houses reserves and National Guard units from all of the services, one of only three such bases in the country. Pennsylvania has one of the largest National Guard units in the country and the members use this base as headquarters or for training. On behalf of the men and women who bravely defend our freedom, I urge you to continue plans for a commissary to serve them.

Thank you for your consideration and please feel free to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



JACK WAGNER
Auditor General

JW/SH/kr