Technical College System of Georgia

Brian P. Kemp
Governor

Gregory C. Dozier
Commissioner

Georgia Joint Defense Commission Minutes
Synovus Corporate Headquarters
Riverfront Place, 33 West 14th Street
Columbus, GA
Thursday, April 23, 2026

Commission Members Present:
Senator Kay Kirkpatrick – Ran the meeting
Senator Ed Harbison
Dr. Henry Childs
Peter Jones (BG, retired)
Honorable John Lester Eunice, III
Representative Chas Cannon
Michael Gazarik
Robert Keown (for Commissioner Greg Dozier)
Maj Gen Konata Crumbly (for Major General Dwayne Wilson)

Commission Members (by Webex):
Dr. Thomas Clark
Rear Admiral Al Konetzni, USN (Ret.)

Commission Members Not Present:
Chairman William Ball
Representative Josh Bonner
Major General Dwayne Wilson
Chancellor Sonny Perdue
Greg Dozier
Senator John Albers
Senator Chuck Payne
Senator Drew Echols
Representative Al Williams
David Clark
Justin Strickland

The Georgia Joint Defense Commission meeting held at Synovus Corporate Headquarters, Riverfront Place in Columbus, GA on Thursday, April 23, 2026 was called to order at 8:35am.

Introduction
Senator Kay Kirkpatrick

Welcome and Opening Comments
Maj. Gen. Colin Tuley, Commanding General, Maneuver Center of Excellence,
Mayor Skip Henderson, City of Columbus,
Dr. Stuart Rayfield, President Columbus State University

Fort Benning Overview
Maj. Gen. Colin Tuley, Commanding General, Maneuver Center of Excellence

Army Spouse issues at Fort Benning
Debby Enslen

Security Concerns for Fort Benning, Disaster Resilience Across the Chattahoochee Valley
Kevin Clarke, Deputy Garrison Commander, Ft. Benning
Chance Corbett, City of Columbus

Intergovernmental Support Agreements
Col. Jerel Evans, Garrison Commander
Charles Coffey, Chattahoochee County Commissioner

Columbus Tech and Airframe and Power Plant Program
Martha Ann Todd, President Columbus Technical College

Military Construction in Georgia
Jill Ricotta, Office of Senator Jon Ossoff

INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME - SENATOR KAY KIRKPATRICK
Welcome to Columbus. We have some great presentations for you today. We will hear from our spouse representative, military partners, local and state officials and education partners.

MANEUVER CENTER OF EXCELLENCE - MAJ. GEN. COLIN TULEY, COMMANDING GENERAL,
(COL DANIEL C. ENSLEN, CHIEF OF STAFF FOR THE MANEUVER CENTER OF EXCELLENCE)
Our mission is to deliver leaders and soldiers ready to fight tonight. We train warfighters. We deliver combat-ready soldiers and leaders for mounted and dismounted combat operations. We design and integrate the tactics and capabilities of the Army's maneuver forces. We also serve as a hub for testing future military equipment, training methods, and energy initiatives. United States Army Infantry School trains infantry soldiers, airborne troops, and rangers. They also Train armored vehicle and tank crews. Field manuals and operational guidelines are key projects.

CITY OF COLUMBUS - MAYOR SKIP HENDERSON
Columbus is great place to live, do business, work and play. Columbus Consolidated Government is Georgia's first consolidated government. We are proud to serve as a model for other local governments across the nation. We are a streamlined system that provides a high level of citizen services at a very low per capita cost. Columbus is visitor and business friendly.

COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY - DR. STUART RAYFIELD, PRESIDENT
(Maj. Gen. (retired) Patrick Donahue, Chief Operating Officer (retired army)
Chattahoochee Valley community has deep ties and roots that include Fort Benning and many successful business partners. Columbus State is the driver of the region's workforce. We are poised to lead and partner with other entities to meet the demands of an ever-changing economy.

FORT BENNING OVERVIEW – ENSLEN - MAJ. GEN. COLIN TULEY, COMMANDING GENERAL, MANEUVER CENTER OF EXCELLENCE - (Presented by COL Daniel C. Enslen, Chief of Staff for the Maneuver Center of Excellence)
Physical fitness is an issue. 27-30% qualify. Army wide – Health and Holistic Program for Future Soldier program has been developed to help with this issue that need more attention. Young soldiers have bad habits that bring with them such as sleeping, grooming and nutrition have to be addressed. This is happening at Fort Jackson. One Station One Unit program. We are trying to eliminate early injuries and decrease them. (18 weeks instead of 22 weeks – reduced the timeframe)

ARMY SPOUSE ISSUES AT FORT BENNING: DEBBY ENSLEN
How to integrate into military life. You get to live in different places and learn new things.
Spousal employment is a concern. They want to work and they want to work in their field. Moving from place to place is difficult in their specific job. Childcare issues are occurring, especially children with special needs. Getting a special needs child into the school system is a difficult process. Speech and occupational therapists. Atlanta has more options. The waiting list for these services can take up to a year. The autistic students are supposed to have a one-on-one person, and this is not happening. 30% of military kids are more likely to be diagnosed with autism. My Army Post app is available and has been useful. 40% of Fort Benning personnel live off base. Day care services are difficult to find. Would a grant help in helping military spouses to start a daycare service for military families. Spouses want to start a daycare to help them open one. Service members have special hours that are not typical work hours. Some families have decided to home school since this issue was never addressed. This is a nationwide issue.

Discussion: The local school districts do have a lot of local control. The smaller communities throughout the state do struggle to provide these services. Suicide in National Guard is higher than any other area. Lawsuit against the State of Georgia for $3 million was awarded because the state did not process their licenses in their specific area such as nursing, teachers, etc. We want to form a military spouse working group to meet with state officials to work on the issues for military families. CASA – foster kids in Columbus, is also experiencing the same thing. Some folks must relocate to Atlanta to get off the waitlist for services.

BG (Ret.) Andy Hilmes – Assistant to Commanding General – MCOE – had an autistic child who is now grown. The process was intimidating and hired an advocate to help us with this. DBHHD said it would take up to five years to process. The waiver will assist him throughout his life. If you go from one state to another, you have to start over. If someone is transferred into Georgia, can that waiver come with them?

Resources: Patricia Ross has started a website with multiple areas of information for the military and family. One of the resources available is the website www.Gavets.org and this is being supported by Patricia Ross and Robert Keown.

SECURITY CONCERNS FOR FORT BENNING, DISASTER RESILIENCE ACROSS THE CHATTAHOOCHEE VALLEY: KEVIN CLARKE, DEPUTY GARRISON COMMANDER, FT. BENNING

Our mission is to sustain critical missions to withstand extended utility outage for a minimum of 14 days in the event of Natural or Manmade disaster. The purpose is to identify threats, mitigate vulnerabilities, and optimize recovery operations to ensure critical infrastructure can sustain regional essential missions for a minimum of 14 days during any natural or manmade disaster. Our areas of focus are for First Responders (Fire, Medical, Police), Emergency Management (Plans and Ops), Utilities (Gas, Water, Electric, Communications), Partnerships and Agreement and other projects. One of the other projects assigned included the natural disaster Hurricane Helene.

CHANCE CORBETT - HOMELAND SECURITY AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIRECTOR FOR COLUMBUS CONSOLIDATED GOVERNMENT (MAYOR'S OFFICE)

First responder communications system does not work off the typical system so if power is out, we can still work. We work with Alabama Lee County and Russell County with several of our military families living across the river. We are working on a conference. Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) is a requirement in GA. This will include Utility Partners (semi-annually), Conference In Progress reviews (monthly), Mutual Aid Agreements (pending update), Exercises and Training (ongoing annually) and pre-staging of equipment (pending agreements).

40,000 vehicles enter the gates every day. Everyone gets a background check. We run more background checks than anywhere in Georgia. If you lose power, every mode of communication is tied together. A test is done every morning.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT AGREEMENTS: COL. JEREL EVANS, GARRISON COMMANDER AND CHARLES COFFEY, CHATTAHOOCHEE COUNTY COMMISSIONER

Leaders from Fort Benning and the Maneuver Center of Excellence joins local, state, and regional leaders from across Georgia and Alabama to strengthen intergovernmental partnerships and enhance emergency preparedness across the Chattahoochee Valley. We partner with UGA, etc. on many services. Congress created the to go direct to state, county and city partners because of the open bid process. We have to show it saves money. Part of the ongoing maintenance projects include changing out the HVAC filters on Fort Benning, generator maintenance serviced and operational, facility maintenance, stray animal control, and water treatment.

COLUMBUS TECHNICAL COLLEGE – MARTHA ANN TODD, PRESIDENT

We are going to train workforce and the students to get the training they need to build a career for the Airframe and power plant program, We want them to be able to give back to the community. Aviation maintenance technician program is in partnership with Pratt and Whitney. It is a $2.2mm design and planning FY27 state budget. We have community wide support from Georgia Aerospace and Defense association. Target date is August 2029 or sooner. The new VECTR center will be called Col. Ralph Puckett Jr. workforce development center here in Columbus. We will be teaching high demand career needs at this facility. We will be doing our ribbon cutting ceremony on July 31, 2026. We want to support the military personnel who are retiring and help them transition to their next phase of their working life outside of military. 2,000 service members transition annually from Fort Benning. Columbus is veteran friendly with cost of living and quality of life support long term workforce retention. Many residents face barriers, such as limited access to adult education, short term residences, services for retirees. We are offering integrated education, credentialing, and employment pathways. This will give them skills and measure workforce outcomes. These skills will be recognized nationwide. The

purchase of extra equipment that is needed for programs such as scrubs for nurses or welding equipment for welding programs is a barrier. Grants are being researched to assist with these concerns.

CHOOSE COLUMBUS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – BG (RET.) ANDY HILMES, EXEC VP OF STRATEGY

I am former military and I am retired from the U.S. Army with over 27 years of service. Columbus major projects include data center, JS Link America, Pratt & Whitney, JM Smucker Co., Tremco, and BioTouch. Our infrastructure program DCIP (Defense Community Infrastructure Program) is a competitive grant program and supports military installation's readiness and lethality. This covers community programs that must support the state, local government, schools, hospitals or military installations.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES – SENATOR KAY KIRKPATRICK

SB430 amends laws concerning accommodations for excise taxes by expanding definitions so that qualifying military museums are recognized as destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and private-sector nonprofit organizations. This classification allows eligible military museums to qualify for specific tourism and lodging tax-related benefits or funding allocations traditionally reserved for DMOs.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION IN GEORGIA - JILL RICOTTA, OFFICE OF SENATOR JON OSSOFF

Was not able to attend

The Georgia Joint Defense Commission meeting held at Synovus Corporate Headquarters, Riverfront Place in Columbus, GA on Thursday, April 23, 2026 was adjourned at 11:30am.