



MASSACHUSETTS NATIONAL GUARD NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
April 18, 2023

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Air Force Selects Westfield's 104th Fighter Wing to Receive the F-35A

HANSCOM AIR FORCE BASE, Mass. — The Air Force has selected the Massachusetts Air National Guard's 104th Fighter Wing based in Westfield for transition to the F-35A Lightning II fighter beginning in 2026. The decision means the unit will retire its 18 aging F-15C and D-model aircraft in favor of stationing the Air Force's latest and most-capable fifth-generation fighter at Barnes Air National Guard Base.

The basing decision announced today becomes final when the Secretary of the Air Force signs a Record of Decision (ROD) upon favorable completion of an Environmental Impact Statement on the proposal now underway.

"I'm thrilled that Massachusetts 104th Fighter Wing was selected by the U.S. Department of Defense to receive the F-35A fighter jets. This is great news for Barnes and Massachusetts," said Gov. Maura Healey, Commonwealth of Massachusetts. "It will keep good jobs in Western Mass, create new jobs, and spur economic development. This is a testament to Massachusetts' strong support for our military, our economic competitiveness, our unmatched education system and our bright future. I'm grateful for the hard work of Senator Warren, Chairman Neal and the Massachusetts Congressional delegation as well as the Massachusetts National Guard to secure this result."

"This is a just a good fit," said Air Force Maj. Gen. Gary W. Keefe, adjutant general of Massachusetts. "The 104th has years of experience with the fighter mission at home and abroad, the community is used to fighter operations and provides tremendous support, and the base is perfectly located for defense of the homeland."

The F-35A guarantees the long-term viability of the 104th and continuation of its vital air dominance mission for many years to come.

"This decision validates the Wing's exceptional performance," said Air Force Col. David L. "Moon" Halasikun, 104th commander. "We've provided air defense for 40 million Americans in New England and New York, a population that produces roughly 30% of the nation's Gross Domestic Product, through the 24/7/365 no-fail Aerospace Control Alert mission, and our stellar performance was a big factor."



As part of the selection process, the Air Force looked at F-15C units located in the continental United States. The single-seat F-15C and two-seat F-15D models entered the inventory beginning in 1979. The service wants to replace the legacy fighters with state-of-the-art aircraft to better address future mission requirements and provide life-cycle cost savings when compared to continued operation of the F-15C/D, which it determined is not economically feasible to retain beyond 2026. The Air Force has already begun retiring older F-15s.

“The Air Force is looking out to 2040 and beyond as it builds its future fighter force,” said Air Force Brig. Gen. Virginia I. Gaglio, commander of the Massachusetts Air National Guard. “We’re very happy the 104th will figure prominently in that mix.”

The F-35A beddown includes 18 aircraft. The total number of personnel would increase by approximately 80 people including 15 officers and 65 enlisted military members.

In terms of new construction or remodeling of existing facilities, because the 104th has flown the F-15C, Barnes Air National Guard Base and Westfield-Barnes Regional Airport already offer much of the infrastructure needed to beddown the F-35A. Any construction would begin after the Secretary of the Air Force approves the ROD, expected in the summer of 2024.

Also announced today, Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base New Orleans and Fresno Air National Guard Base, California, will replace their F-15C/D Eagles with F-15EX Strike Eagles.

For information on the EIS, visit the project website at <https://www.angf15ex-f35a-eis.com>.

- 30 -

ABOUT THE 104TH FIGHTER WING: The 104th Fighter Wing is made up of highly-trained personnel ready to provide Air Superiority on-demand anywhere in the world with 21 assigned F-15C Eagle Aircraft. The 104th is trained to provide 24/7 Aerospace Control Alert, providing armed F-15 fighters ready to scramble in a moment’s notice to protect the Northeast United States from any airborne threat, security for one-quarter of the nation’s population and over one-third of the Gross Domestic Product. The Wing is always on call for emergency response to include security, logistics, communications, explosive ordnance disposal, firefighting, and medical support to the nation and Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

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