



# METROPOLITAN AIRPORTS COMMISSION

## Media Release

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## MAC receives Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award Military recognition honors support for National Guard and Reserve employees



The Metropolitan Airports Commission received the Defense Employer Support Freedom Award on Sept. 12, 2025. Pictured from left to right: Chad Sackett, State Chair, Minnesota Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR); Brig. Gen. Joseph Sharkey, Commanding General, 34th Infantry Division; Dustin Dodge, Driver/Operator, MSP Airport Fire Department; Brian Ryks, CEO, Metropolitan Airports Commission; Capt. Darren Bess, Executive Director, Headquarters ESGR; Jack Grams, Awards Director, Minnesota ESGR. Courtesy: Metropolitan Airports Commission

MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL, Minn. — The Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) has received state and national honors for its support of National Guard and Reserve employees, including the 2025 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award.

The MAC was one of only 15 recipients in the nation — and one of only five public sector organizations — to be recognized with the Employer Support Freedom Award, the highest U.S. government honor to employers for support of National Guard and Reserve employees. It also received the Pro Patria Award at the state level.

Both awards were presented at a ceremony earlier this month at the headquarters of the 34th “Red Bulls” Infantry Division of the Minnesota Army National Guard in Arden Hills, Minnesota.

“With a strong military presence in our workforce, we are humbled and honored to receive this prominent recognition,” said MAC Executive Director and CEO Brian Ryks. “We believe it’s critical to support our Guard and Reserve members, and their families, so they can fulfill their vital defense and security missions.”

Airport Fire Department Operator/Driver Dustin Dodge submitted the award nomination after retiring from the U.S. Air Force Reserve.

“My team has made many efforts to ease the burden of military service by making the process for taking time off work simple and stress free,” Dodge said in his nomination. “During that time the department kept in close contact and ensured that I would not lose seniority or promotion opportunities due to my absence.”

The MAC provides 15 days of paid leave for Guard and Reserve employees to train and supplements their military income while they are deployed for active duty. The MAC employs 91 active or retired service members, which is more than 10% of its total staff.

### **About The Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC)**

*The Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) owns and operates one of the nation’s largest airport systems, including [Minneapolis-St Paul International Airport \(MSP\)](#) and six general aviation airports. The MAC’s airports connect the region to the world and showcase Minnesota’s extraordinary culture to millions of passengers from around the globe who arrive or depart through MAC airports each year. Though a public corporation of the state of Minnesota, the organization is not funded by income or property taxes. Instead, the MAC’s operations are funded by rents and fees generated by users of its airports. For more information, visit [www.metroairports.org](http://www.metroairports.org).*