

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0531

Testimony for the Record by Congressman Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr. (CA-31)

U.S. House Committee on Appropriations

Defense Subcommittee

February 25, 2025 Subcommittee Hearing: "FY26 Defense Appropriations Member Day Hearing"

February 21, 2025

Thank you, Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member McCollum, and Members of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee for allowing me to testify today in support of vital defense appropriations programs on behalf of the residents of California's 31st Congressional District.

During my tenure as the Undersecretary for Personnel and Readiness, I was directly responsible for overseeing the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program. Preventing sexual assault should be a top priority for military leadership, which is why I am concerned that the Navy and Marine Corps temporarily paused this critical training program at the directive of this new Presidential Administration. I want to be clear: any interruption in this training undermines our military readiness in addressing and fighting sexual assault.

Women in the military are two to four times more likely to be sexually assaulted than the general civilian population. The SAPR training program directly addresses this issue and has proven to be effective. While at the Pentagon, I oversaw a decrease in reported sexual assaults among both men and women. As a result of our commitment to addressing these incidents, an estimated 7,000 fewer service members experienced sexual assault. Secretary Hegseth said in his Senate nomination hearing that there is "no place in our military for sexual assault or sexual harassment" and emphasized that "the Department must do better to train and ingrain the fact that sexual abuse and assault is not tolerated in the force."

This committee has also continued to direct that any funding cuts will not affect the civilian population that handles sexual assault prevention.

Therefore, I ask that the Committee continue to recommend support for SAPR programs and the implementation of the Independent Review Commission (IRC) recommendations.

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Another area of importance is on-base childcare center worker pay. The Department of Defense is the largest employee-sponsored childcare program in the United States with over 200,000 children of service members and civilians enrolled. It is a recruitment, retention, and readiness issue to not have childcare for active-duty members who simply cannot skip out on work when unable to have adequate care for their children. Last year's NDAA, which addressed quality of life issues, stated that staff are leaving childcare centers because of low pay.

I want to stress the importance of bipartisanship and collaboration in passing legislation that supports this essential workforce. The House-passed FY24 and FY25 NDAA increased funding levels for childcare and included provisions to ensure that pay for the childcare center staff at DoD facilities is competitive with the private sector.

Given that each branch has the authority to set pay levels and adjust entry-level compensation to compete with the local civilian labor market, it is imperative that we, as Congress, appropriate the necessary funds.

I am asking for the committee to competitively fund Military Child Care Programs by incorporating increased funding levels in the FY26 Defense Appropriations bill.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. I know you have a tough job ahead of you and I hope you will keep these priorities in mind as you craft the FY26 Defense Appropriations package for the benefit of our military communities and country.