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HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF
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SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE MARINE CORPS
HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS AND
RELATED AGENCIES
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Chairman Dent, Ranking Member Bishop, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to once again provide you with an update on the commitment of the Marine Corps to our Marines and their families.

The Marine Corps continues to maintain its operational readiness and commitment to the Nation remaining forward deployed and ready to respond to crisis around the world. We are the Nation's expeditionary force in readiness. The Marine Corps appreciates the leadership of the 114th Congress and the American people expect Marines to answer the call, to fight, and to win. With an ever-changing strategic landscape and pace of current and future demands our Nation's leaders requires a ready Marine Corps and options for our Nation's leaders. Without any hesitation or mental reservation, Congress and the American people expect Marines to answer the call, to fight, and to win battles.

In 2015, your Marines executed approximately 100 operations, 20 amphibious operations, 140 theater security cooperation events, and 160 major exercises. We have accomplished this requirement while sustaining the key tenet of a measured and responsible drawdown. We are keeping faith with your Marines by minimizing involuntary attrition, maximizing voluntary actions and maintaining the right number of Marines in every grade. Notably, The Marine Corps has not seen a significant issue with retention and continues to attract and recruit the very best qualified and eligible individuals. We are on target to reach our active duty end strength goal of 182K in FY16. As the Commandant of the Marine Corps has stated, success of the Marine Corps hinges on the quality of our Marines. We will continue to maintain a force of the highest quality people who are intelligent, physically fit, resilient, and disciplined enough to overcome difficulty. Quality of Life for Marines and their families will remain at the forefront of discussion by all Marine Corps leaders.

OUR MARINES

We clearly see the merit in reviewing our current manpower policies and processes and adjusting as required to meet the requirements of the Marine Corps in the future. We remain committed to recruiting and retaining the best our nation has to offer and will continue to retain the most qualified.

The Wounded Warrior Regiment (WWR) continued mission is an enduring commitment to care for WWII Marines in times of war and peace while supporting Marines through all phases of recovery as well as post-transition. The WWR support model also provides Marines and families assistance on a full spectrum of issues associated with transitioning from military service. WWR continues to provide services to both the combat and non-combat injured and ill, as directed by Congress in Public Law 110-181. While there are now fewer combat casualties, non-combat injuries and illnesses across the Marine Corps are expected to remain stable.

The Commandant's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Campaign Plan continues to guide the implementation of large-scale efforts, and has resulted in several best practices, including a SAPR training continuum that grows along with our Marines, an Ethical Discussion Group curriculum that extends beyond annual training requirements, and the monthly SAPR "Snapshot" newsletter. The Marine Corps has shaped its SAPR prevention programs to reflect its unique demographics and we see positive trends in reporting. Annual training is being updated for all Marines, including Noncommissioned Officers (NCOs), Staff NCOs, and junior officers, to include more information on preventing retaliation as well as policies and procedures for filing a related complaint. Additionally, Family Advocacy Program clinical counselors provide support services to dependent children who have been sexually abused.

We continue to utilize an integrated, community based model to improve behavioral health outcomes. The public health approach to prevention allows for the simultaneous and coordinated targeting of multiple behavioral risk factors that are common across Family Advocacy, Substance Abuse, Community Counseling and Operational Stress, and Suicide Prevention programs. Each of our behavioral health programs provide evidenced-based client screening tools and non-medical counseling, clinical care coordination, and outreach services. Of note, the integrated suicide prevention efforts of the Marine Corps are showing promise. We are expanding our reach by offering family focused suicide prevention workshops, Conquering Stress with Strength (CSWS), and a targeted Social Media Suicide Prevention Awareness Campaign. Moreover, our comprehensive and integrated substance abuse prevention efforts continue to reduce the number of positive drug testing results. The Commandant of the Marine Corps and I are engaged with a "Protect What You've Earned" campaign to promote and inculcate a culture of making responsible decisions to ensure our Marines and Sailors avoid the destructive behaviors that place them at personal and professional risk. The focus of the campaign's educational message emphasizes the success of the majority of Marines and Sailors who make responsible decisions versus the small percentage who make irresponsible choices. Your continued support in all areas relative to behavioral health allows us to address this complex issue and sustain our progress.

As in FY15, the Marine Corps incorporated a Marine For Life Cycle approach to transition readiness. We are focusing on ensuring Marines are exposed to transition readiness throughout the Marine For Life (M4L) Cycle, from recruitment through separation or retirement, and as Veteran Marines. This approach allows Marines to meet Career Readiness Standards requirements prior to attending the 5 day Transition Readiness Seminar (TRS) and to gain

awareness of career readiness preparations throughout their military career. There are two primary action points where Marines will be asked to devote significant time and energy to their transition readiness:

- **Personal Readiness Seminar (PRS).** Four-hour USMC seminar designed for Marines to attend upon arrival at their first permanent duty station. Curriculum provides an overview of Personal and Professional Development services (Library Services, Family Member Employment, Voluntary Education, Personal Financial Management, Transition Readiness, and Information and Referral), as well as financial topics such as banking and financial services, savings and investments, living expenses, understanding debt, and service members' rights.
- **Transition Readiness Seminar (TRS).** This week long program in FY15 was attended by 35,000 Marines.

The Marine Corps introduced Marine Corps Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL) on 1 Oct 2014. COOL is a website providing an information resource capability that assists Marines in learning about civilian certifications and licenses related to their Military Occupational Specialist (MOSs). As of July 2015, the Marine Corps is paying for examination fees and annual maintenance for all enlisted active duty Marines to earn certifications that are closely aligned with their MOS. It is also an awareness capability for spouses and those potential employers seeking information about the occupational field experience and professional skills of transitioning Marines. The Spouses Transition and Readiness Seminar (STARS) was created specifically to orient spouses to the USMC transition process and to address transitional challenges and opportunities.

The USMC continues to focus on Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) compliance, with emphasis upon the Reserve Component. Initial efforts of the VOW Act implementation was on the Active Component for the greatest and swiftest impact for USMC total forces. The emphasis will now shift towards our Reserve Component Marines, many of whom are Individual Augments or Reserve Marines on Active Duty. Our focus is to train civilians and make them Marines, in turn it is equally important that when our Marines are ready to leave the Corps that they are ready to move into the civilian sector - whether that is to find a job, pursue educational and technical opportunities, or start their own business.

The Marine Corps Voluntary Education Program provides high quality advising along with exposure and access to opportunities for education services, to assist Marines in achieving their personal goals as Marines and citizens. Tuition Assistance (TA) is one component of the program and in FY15, according to Navy College Management Information 17,475 Marines enrolled in Tuition Assistant funded courses. Most Marines utilizing TA are E-5 and below (56%).

QUALITY OF LIFE FOR OUR FAMILIES

To ensure that our Marines are operationally ready and able to focus on the mission, they must first be assured that their families are being cared for. Family Readiness Programs are the backbone in supporting Marines and their families by providing quality of life resources and trainings that enhance their personal life skills and ability to thrive in the military. That is why we place a high priority on family readiness – because it is a critical component of operational readiness. Whether through exceptional day care, or programs that ensure quality and continuity of their children’s education across multiple changes in duty station, or resources to assist with children and

dependents with special needs, we ensure that when Marines deploy, they do so knowing that their families have a wide network of support.

The Marine Corps Family Care programs provide dedicated services that care for and strengthen the military family unit. Our Child and Youth Program provides high quality, accessible, and affordable programs and services for eligible families with children 6 weeks to 18 years of age. Operations have been enhanced by consolidating underutilized facilities to maximize capacity, staffing to enrollment, and combining age appropriate classrooms during low utilization hours.

The primary mission of the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) is to improve the quality of life for families that support a member with special needs. EFMP ensures that Marines are assigned to duty stations where the required medical services and educational supports are available. This allows the Marine to focus on the mission; benefiting both personal and unit readiness. EFMP is currently sponsoring a study to analyze the impact of EFMP enrollment on individual Marine career progression and promotion. Results will inform whether any changes to the EFMP assignment review process are needed to ensure EFMP-enrolled Marines are not negatively impacted when compared to their non-enrolled peers.

The Marine Corps School Liaison Program (SLP) continues to operate as a support program intended to reduce the impact of the mobile lifestyle on military school-age children and families. The program addresses the unique education challenges faced by the 58,172 Marine Corps school-age dependents as they relocate 6-9 times during their K-12 academic years. The program is executed as a military-wide program, and supports all military-connected families, regardless of service. The SLP supports state and federal initiatives to implement a military-student identifier, a recommendation from the Military Compensation and Retirement

Modernization Commission Report. Fourteen states have adopted the data element in some form, and the recently signed into law, Every Student Succeeds Act, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, has a provision that supports a national military child identifier. Currently, there are 20 Marine Corps School Liaisons (SL) that support 15 installations as the primary point of contact for educational matters of school-age children for the commander and families.

The Semper Fit and Recreation program strengthens resilience and contributes to military effectiveness by promoting and maintaining the mental and physical well-being of Marines and their families through physical activities, prevention through healthy alternative recreational activities, and safe environments. Semper Fit and Recreation facilities and programs receive more than 14 million patron visits annually, providing 115 total programs and utilize 610 facilities/recreational areas across the Marine Corps.

The Single Marine Program (SMP) provides an infrastructure that enhances the single Marine and Sailor's ability to affect change and directly or indirectly influence their morale, living environment, off-duty opportunities, personal growth, and leadership development. Key components of this program include advocacy, recreation, and community involvement, which had 15,724 volunteers and 93,033 logged volunteer hours in Fiscal Year 2015.

The Marine Corps Exchange is part of a consolidated Marine Corps Community Service construct that also includes MWR, Child Development, and Warfighter and Family Services programs. The military resale system is one of the largest employers of military family members, with dependents representing approximately 40% of the commissary workforce and nearly 30% of the Marine Corps Exchange workforce. Military families save \$5.6 billion dollars a year by shopping in the military resale system. Exchange proceeds are used to fund MWR

activities that support Marine and family readiness and resiliency. The Marine Corps participates in DoD's Defense Resale Business Optimization Board (DRBOB), a newly formed board aimed at finding efficiencies while preserving the quality of life benefits provided by the commissaries and exchanges.

FISCAL CLIMATE

In order to maintain the Marine Corps's near-term unit readiness, such as funding minimally adequate levels for facilities services and base operations, we have placed/accepted risk in long-term warfighting modernization and facilities sustainment.

Our operation and maintenance accounts fund critical support to deployed and next-to-deploy forces as well as maintenance, training, and installation readiness throughout the Marine Corps. The FY 2017 budget request reflects a 3.5 % reduction in operation and maintenance funding from FY 2015 executed levels. Though a relatively modest reduction, we anticipate hard choices ahead. Our FY 2015 funding level posed significant challenges and resulted in reduced scope and scale of joint, bilateral, and multilateral exercises, theater security cooperation, and training, as well as deferred infrastructure and range sustainment. If trends continue, we will be forced to employ additional prioritization to our operational readiness and infrastructure and equipment readiness.

Our Facilities Sustainment, Restoration, and Modernization (FSRM) funding is the single most important investment in facilities readiness, supporting both operations and training as well as quality of life for our Marines. Over the past six years the Marine Corps has spent over \$9B in facilities investments to repair or recapitalize barracks, child development centers, and various operational, training, and support facilities. Due to current fiscal constraints,

the Marine Corps is now assuming risk in this area to support near-term operational readiness and service-level training to maintain a ready force.

WHERE WE LIVE AND TRAIN

Marine Corps bases and stations remain integral to combat readiness, particularly the pre-deployment training, deployment, sustainment and reconstitution of Marine Operating Forces. They are also critical to the maintenance of the quality of life of Marines, Sailors, and their families through the provision of an array of support facilities and related infrastructure.

The Marine Corps has infrastructure and facilities worldwide valued at more than \$58 billion that are used to train, house, and provide quality of life for Marines, Sailors and their families. These facilities must be appropriately maintained to prevent degradation of our capability to support mission-essential tasks.

Though the Marine Corps has made significant progress over the last 8 years in replacing old and unsatisfactory infrastructure, our fiscal planning based on reduced funding availability will have long term impacts on our future operating budget, force posture, and the overall health, welfare, and safety of our Marines.

Reduced levels of facilities sustainment funding below requirements will result in the gradual degradation of our infrastructure and create a bow wave of increased long-term costs to return these assets to an acceptable level. At this funding level for the military construction and restoration and modernization accounts, we risk being able to provide adequate infrastructure to support training, housing, quality of life, operations, communications, logistics, and maintenance facilities critical to the Marine Corps mission. Facilities restoration and modernization is currently funded only to meet the most urgent life, safety, and health issues. The demolition of

facilities, no longer required to support Marine Corps requirements, would be deferred due to higher funding priorities. If the means to rid ourselves of unnecessary facilities through demolition, which includes the associated cost of maintenance for unused buildings, the Marine Corps would significantly reduce our facilities footprint as well as our sustainment and operating costs.

Reductions to the infrastructure accounts put us at risk of reversing hard-earned gains in our infrastructure status as our new construction ages prematurely for lack of maintenance. Left unchecked, our inability to fully sustain these projects would impact not only on quality of life, but also on our support to training, operations, logistics, and ultimately readiness. In closing, we are a proud Corps. We take care of our own -- including our families. I appreciate the Congress' support to Marines around the world and look forward to working with you to ensure the Marine Corps remains the Nation's force in readiness.