

NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
UNTIL RELEASED BY THE HOUSE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION  
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

**STATEMENT OF**  
**MICHAEL D. STEVENS**  
**MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE NAVY**  
**(AVIATION WARFARE/NAVAL AIRCREW WARFARE)**  
**BEFORE THE**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION,**  
**VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES**  
**OF THE**  
**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS**  
**ON**  
**QUALITY OF LIFE**  
**FEBRUARY 26, 2016**

NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
UNTIL RELEASED BY THE HOUSE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION  
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Chairman Dent, Ranking Member Bishop and distinguished members of this subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Quality of Life of our Sailors and their families. It is my privilege to address you in my fourth year as your Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy. My wife Theresa and I have continued to engage and spend time with thousands of our Sailors and their families in the United States and overseas, we cannot begin to express how grateful we are for their total commitment to our Nation and Navy.

Your Navy Sailors continue to amaze me with their can-do spirit, determined initiative and many achievements. They are a never-ending source of inspiration and comfort. We owe it to our Sailors and their families to ensure they are trained, educated, healthy and fairly compensated. We owe it to them to “Hold the Line” when budget pressures put their quality of life and quality of service at risk. This statement will serve as a summary of my observations concerning the total well-being of our Sailors and their families.

### **Overall Quality of Life**

There are currently more than 600,000 active and reserve Sailors and civilians serving in the Navy, without them our operational readiness could not exist. Over the past three decades, there have been significant improvements in pay raises, housing allowance, health care, and veteran’s benefits, resulting in a quality of life commensurate with their service and sacrifices. Many of you have worked very hard to get us where we are today and it is my hope that your hard work will not be in vain. We ask for your support in holding the line to maintain these improvements for the future of our Force.

In over 33 years of naval service, I have watched the Department of Defense and Congress reform policies, regulations, and laws concerning pay and compensation, healthcare, education benefits, and personnel programs that sustain our Sailors and their families, ensuring personnel readiness. When we, as a government, implement major changes such as these, it generally takes about a decade to determine if we got it right or wrong; when we get it wrong it takes another decade to un-ring the bell. This is why it is of great importance to ensure we have taken cautious and calculated steps as we pursue reform, particularly with respect to military pay and compensation. If we fail in our approach, the negative impacts can affect the force for many years, leaving the mess for others to clean up. Through the years, military and civilian leadership has worked very hard to establish and maintain vital trust with our Sailors. We have to continue to preserve and nurture that trust.

I recognize that budget pressures require all of us to make tough decisions while striking the right balance. Your support in holding the line against further reductions in the areas I previously mentioned will help safeguard the future of our Navy and our country.

### **Quality of Service**

Quality of service is composed of quality of work and quality of life, components that are vital to operational readiness. In order to maintain top readiness within our Force, the President's 2017 budget request invests in quality of service initiatives for barracks, training enhancements, and schools. Quality of service also empowers the "eSailor" initiative, advancing training through smart technology devices and applications, improving communication and Sailor career management, both afloat and ashore.

## **Readiness**

Our Navy is at its optimal potential when members of the team are fully focused. Our Sailors, Navy civilians, and their families, collectively comprise our most critical weapon system, which operates most effectively when individual and unit morale is high. If this weapon system is not operating at peak proficiency, our Navy becomes far less capable.

Our Sailors face the inherent stresses of long deployments, overseas duty and assignments that place them in harm's way. To the extent possible, we must prevent any additional unnecessary stress on them and their families, stress that can affect our Sailor's morale and ultimately affect their quality of life. With your support, we will ensure the morale of our Force is maintained, thus preventing any negative impact on our Navy's readiness.

Fleet manning remains healthy and continues to improve, with manning above 98% for all deployers and 92% of billets occupied by Sailors whose skills and experience levels match the billet requirements. In 2016, we are working hard to further reduce manning gaps at sea, having reduced gaps from 5,500 to just over 2,000, in calendar year 2015. Through implementation of Billet Based Distribution and an enhanced training process, we will ensure we have the right Sailor at the right place at the right time.

Constrained budgets have compelled the Navy to reduce investment in shore readiness to preserve the operational readiness of our fleet. The Navy has taken risk in preventative maintenance causing many shore facilities, such as barracks, to require more extensive maintenance moving forward. We continue to sustain mission-critical facilities, piers, runways and hangar repairs, while working to address our full facilities repair and sustainment requirement. As we prioritize Military Construction projects to enable operational readiness, we have difficulty meeting the requirements for infrastructure – such as barracks, administrative

buildings, and research and development facilities. The level of investment in shore infrastructure remains challenging and takes a toll on our Sailors who rely on shore installations to provide a platform for readiness, operational support, training and preparedness, quality of life, and support for their families.

### **Recruiting & Retention**

It is paramount that we maintain Navy readiness to fully meet the mission. Recruiting and retaining the best possible Sailors who possess the right values and skill sets is the first priority in achieving this requirement. As of today, recruiting and retention remains high. Career incentives and special pays continue to play a vital role in retaining Sailors who possess critical skills. The extraordinary demands we place on our Sailors and their families, coupled with an improving economy that offers increased job opportunities, will inevitably make our efforts to recruit and retain highly talented Sailors increasingly challenging.

### **Housing**

Military housing is a high priority for our Sailors and their families and is an important element in their quality of life. Providing suitable, affordable and safe housing is at the top of our list. We appreciate your support and for continuing to hold the line in this area. The issue I previously mentioned regarding increases in out of pocket expenses for Sailor housing is consistently raised at my town hall meetings. I have reassured our Sailors that, as their advocate, I would communicate their concerns to leadership. As we continue to work together to avoid having Navy families further bear the burden of necessary budgetary tradeoffs between

maintaining readiness, preserving quality of life, and future, unplanned BAH reductions, our Sailors will continue to have the quality of life they deserve.

Budgetary challenges continue to place pressure on construction and recapitalization of Single Sailor Housing. Although we monitor barracks safety and prioritize funds for facilities most in need, we are not recapitalizing unaccompanied housing at the rate at which it is degrading. If we start planning to invest now in improvements in this area, the less costly it will be in the long run. It is my hope that Congress continues to provide the needed relief without needing to move money out of operational readiness accounts in the future.

### **Family Support Programs**

Family support programs continue to be a critical component in enhancing mission readiness and in taking care of Sailors and their families. As I have mentioned during testimony each year, these critical programs assist commanding officers, Sailors, and Navy families in managing the unique demands of the military lifestyle, balancing military commitment with family life. Navy Fleet and Family Support Centers around the world ensure military families are informed, healthy, and resilient, through a robust array of programs which include: non-medical and family counseling, personal and family life education, personal financial management services, support to surviving families of the fallen, information and referral services, family member employment, deployment assistance, domestic violence prevention and response services, new parent support, exceptional family member liaison, emergency family assistance, and transition assistance.

Navy Child and Youth Programs provide accessible, affordable, and high-quality child and youth development programs through child development centers, youth centers, child

development homes, and contract child care spaces. All Navy child development centers are Department of Defense certified and nationally accredited and provide consistent, high-quality care at affordable rates based on total family income. As part of SECDEF's Force of the Future and SECNAV's Talent Management initiatives, Navy Child and Youth Programs have started an initiative that will expand service at all child development centers from 12 to 14 hours per day. The initiative will be expanded to 13 installations by the end of March 2016 and available at all Navy sites by December 2016.

The Navy Ombudsmen Program and Family Readiness Groups offer tremendous support in preparing Sailors and their families prior to, during, and following return from deployments and other demanding missions worldwide. The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program provides Reserve Sailors and their families with information, services, referral, and proactive outreach opportunities necessary for enhancing their overall state of wellness and readiness.

### **Health Care**

Health care is an important part in the lives of our Sailors and their families. It is crucial to mission-readiness and often is a very influential factor in recruiting and retention decisions. Our Sailors must be medically ready and when deployed, they must be confident their families have access to the care they need.

Navy's Medical Home Port (MHP) program transforms the delivery of primary care to an integrated team-based approach. This program offers same day access, proactive preventive services, improved coordination of care, and 24/7 access to clinical advice via interactive secure messaging, and Nurse Advice Line (NAL) services, which promotes responsible use of the emergency room (ER).

I would like to emphasize that our CONUS and OCONUS military treatment facilities (MTFs) are essential to ensuring that our Sailors and their families have access to comprehensive high quality health care services. These facilities continue to play a key role sustaining the readiness of our Force serving worldwide.

### **Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR)**

Sexual Assault Prevention and Response continues to be a top priority throughout the Navy. Sailors have increasingly embraced prevention and response by contributing innovative ways to deliver training and intervention initiatives to their shipmates. Our Sailors are acutely aware of the destructive effects sexual assault can create in the Navy and are resolute in their personal and collective commitment to eliminate it.

The Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) recently announced five ways the Navy will drive sexual assaults to zero:

- (1) Through our training approaches, terminology and communications instill in our Sailors that a shipmate is not a “bystander”;
- (2) Establishing counselors within the Fleet and Family Support Centers as a resource for victim support;
- (3) Improve our personnel management practices and procedures following a sexual assault experience;
- (4) Continue our efforts to educate our Sailors and reduce alcohol abuse in the Navy; and
- (5) Better utilize technology to remove cultural barriers and the stigma associated with reporting a sexual assault or seeking advice and counsel.

I am confident our Sailors will own these initiatives and produce positive results.

Operational readiness, unit cohesion, and individuals are directly impacted when a sexual assault occurs to a shipmate or Navy family member. Every time I speak with senior enlisted leaders, I tenaciously reiterate and challenge them to inspire our Sailors to “treat one another with dignity and respect” at work, at home and at all times.

The key to keeping our Sailors safe and preventing them from making destructive decision lies in helping them develop their foresight in order to recognize perilous situations, while honing their instincts and improving their decision making skills. In so doing, we empower Sailors with the tools to effectively intervene and eradicate sexual assault from the Navy.

We are aware retaliation is of concern to our Sailors. Retaliation against alleged victims or other service members who report a criminal offense is prohibited, and is subject to prosecution under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Any form of retaliation against victims or reporters of sexual assault is wrong and will not be tolerated. Navy’s Whistleblower Protection policy has been updated to address retaliation, which includes reprisal, ostracism, and maltreatment. We continue to work to understand and prevent retaliation, especially peer-to-peer retaliation that sexual assault victims often experience. We are designing strategies to address and eradicate retaliation, conduct training, increase awareness and provide legal recourse. Our Sailors will continue to be queried in survey instruments about their knowledge of the existence of retaliation within our ranks.

Deployment Resilience Counselors (DRC’s) are assigned to aircraft carriers (CVN) and large-deck amphibious assault ships (LHAs and LHDs). This program is uniquely designed for licensed clinical counselors to provide crises intervention and support services to victims of sexual assault and intimate partner violence. It increases accessibility to support services

traditionally provided at the Fleet and Family Support Centers. The DRC's serve as a liaison to the Homeport SARC and the Family Advocacy Program ensuring continuity of care to victims. The DRC's have the ability to receive restricted and unrestricted reports, provide immediate sexual assault response coordination, support the victim while deployed, provide clinical counseling services and provide training on resiliency including suicide prevention, sexual assault, and stress management.

Although we have made substantial progress, our efforts to eradicate sexual assaults from our Navy continue unabated. This is one of the greatest challenges of our time and we must meet it head on and never yield.

### **Suicide Prevention & Resilience**

Suicide is complex, and as such it is difficult to draw conclusions from numbers alone. We continue to monitor the health of the Force and investigate every suicide and suicide attempt with a particular focus on the underlying causes. In September, CNO's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Sailor Office introduced a new fleet-wide message to its ongoing *Every Sailor Every Day* campaign. Based on the Ask, Care Treat (ACT) intervention model, and complementary with DOD's *Power of 1 Campaign*, the *1 Small ACT*, encourages simple actions by which Sailors can make a difference and, perhaps, save a shipmate's life. We also released an improved interactive suicide prevention training curricula to generate dialogue about stress navigation, suicide prevention, intervention, and crisis response. Suicide prevention is about taking care of our Sailors and ensuring they know and believe that seeking help is a sign of strength. Our Navy is committed to providing our Sailors and their families with the tools and resources they need to thrive during and beyond their Navy careers.

## **Transition Assistance Program (TAP)/Transition Goals, Plans and Success (GPS)**

Navy's Transition Assistance Program prepares Sailors for eventual separation or retirement following their service in the Navy. All active and reserve Sailors separating from the service after continuously serving 180 days or more are required to participate in TAP/GPS. It arms Sailors with education, training, and certifications throughout the continuum of their military careers, which document their Navy experience and enhance their marketability through:

(1) Incorporating aspects of transition assistance into the Military Life Cycle (MLC) using the existing enlisted career development process and officer semi-annual performance reviews;

(2) Required pre-separation counseling;

(3) Required five-day Transition (GPS) fundamental curriculum;

(4) Two-day career-specific educational, technical, and entrepreneurship tracks; and

(5) Required capstone event that validates a viable transitioning plan.

Through the capstone event, we verify Sailors received all information and services needed to meet the required Career Readiness Standards. Sailors who do not meet those standards, or require additional help in transitioning will be referred to the appropriate government agency.

## **Conclusion**

Today's Sailors are the best "we have ever put to on the field." As a whole, they are more educated and well-rounded than at any other time in our 240-year history. Like Sailors who have gone before them, they have a strong sense of service and commitment to mission.

Our Sailors are the most important component of our Navy. As the technology gap closes across the global spectrum our asymmetric advantage is, and will be, our people. Their passion, diversity, and creativity, coupled with their ability to learn and apply results faster than anyone else in the world, is what will ensure the continued success and security of our Nation. For this reason, I truly believe, our Sailors' and their morale comprise the most vital weapon system we own. We need to continue to preserve it and protect it.

I faithfully believe Congress will continue holding the line in order to protect our Sailors' earned benefits. On behalf of our Sailors and their families I sincerely thank you for your time and continued support in giving our Sailors the quality of life they truly deserve.