

NOT FOR PUBLICATION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

**STATEMENT OF
JAMES HONEA
MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE NAVY
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION,
VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES OF THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS QUALITY OF LIFE
APRIL 8, 2025**

NOT FOR PUBLICATION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

Introduction

Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, it is my privilege to speak with you once more on behalf of our Sailors and their families. Security and prosperity continue to be preserved as a result of the strength, grit, and professionalism of every Sailor, civilian, and family that makes up our Navy team.

Our Navy is at its best when Sailors are focused on warfighting. They do that with a clear mind – knowing their families are being supported and well taken care of. Over the last year Congress has continued to invest in the quality of life of our Sailors and their families and we thank you all for your hard work to remove barriers to their service.

As we strive to maintain the Navy the Nation needs, delayed appropriations continue to loom, stunting our ability to grow. Since 2013, our servicemembers have not seen timely defense appropriations, leaving servicemembers with an uncertain and less dependable quality of life. The actions we take today as a nation to grow our Navy will require a sizable investment to develop the competency and character of our Sailors, support their families, and create a culture where Sailors want to serve and continue to serve.

When a sizeable investment is made, our Navy is unmatched. History has proven this time and time again – from the creation of the Great White Fleet to the Cold War. I ask Congress to continue investing in our Navy and work to support our Budget Request with a timely appropriation so that we can strengthen our lethality, maintain our platforms, and take care of our warfighters.

We must remain focused on improving the conditions of military service and the quality of military life for our Sailors and their families as outlined in the Gates Commission of 1970. To do that, we must focus on four critical quality of life areas: (1) increasing access to

medical care, (2) continuing to support our families with spouse employment and childcare, (3) investing in housing projects, and (4) ensuring our Sailors continue professional and academic development.

Increasing Access to Medical Care

Access to quality medical care is one of the five pillars in maintaining an all-volunteer force and is a key focus of mine. By removing referral processes for mental health appointments and expanding the portability of clinician licensing, our Sailors well-being has improved, directly enhancing our combat readiness. However, our Military Health System (MHS) and Defense Health Agency (DHA) continue to experience shortages in necessary funding.

DHA, since its inception, has been wholly committed to caring for our beneficiaries. However, flat-lined budgets, growing civilian personnel shortages, and significant decreases in military end strength have resulted in mounting declines in direct care delivered at Medical Treatment Facilities (MTFs), affecting each of our fleet concentrated areas differently. When we are unable to provide care within our MTFs, we rely on civilian health care networks. For the past decade, this lack of resources has negatively impacted our ability to provide care, recruit and retain providers, and be an insurance network of choice in the civilian community when we refer patients outside of our fence line.

TRICARE should be an insurance network of choice. However, TRICARE's reimbursement agreements are paid based on the CHAMPUS Maximum Allowable Charge (CMAC) that is closely tied to Medicare's fee schedule and depending on the geographic region, can be lower than the Medicare rates. This is further complicated by provider limited negotiation power. Furthermore, our civilian partners have experienced delayed processing claims,

degrading trust that they will be paid on time. The DHA is aware of these problems and is working closely with the TriWest and Humana on solving the claim processing problems

The Navy is committed to supporting DHA. Our leaders have been working on improvements to civilian hiring actions including robust recruiting efforts and improving salary competitiveness and special pays. I ask for your assistance to ensure that full funding of the military health system remains a priority while developing innovative ways to support and fund DHA in consideration of competing warfighting capabilities.

Supporting our Families

Our military families are the key to our service members' success. We recruit the Sailor, but we retain the family. My wife may not have come in my seabag, but she has certainly carried the weight of it throughout my military career.

We must continue to support our military families as they support us. Most families in America, and especially our service members, require dual income in order to fully enjoy financial stability in today's economy. With your help, we can make strides to help them find their balance. Continued support across the federal enterprise to expand employment opportunities for military spouses will help provide continued career growth and maintain financial stability that Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves otherwise disrupt.

Another essential resource to retain our families is the accessibility of quality childcare. Investment from this committee in the past few years has made significant impacts for our child and youth programs and I thank you all. The increased appropriations in military infrastructure for our Child Development Program (CDP) facilities has reduced the Child Development Center (CDC) waitlist to its lowest in 21 years. The support in expanding fee assistance has given our

families the ability to choose quality commercial childcare programs when CDCs are not a viable option. However, we still remain challenged in providing full capacity to meet our needs, and shortages of facilities and staffing continues to be our biggest barriers.

I believe a combination of evaluating area needs to build CDCs and fee assistance will be the answer to meet childcare requirements and mitigate shortfalls.

Investing in Family and Unaccompanied Housing

I would like to thank Congress for their continued support in paying Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) to junior enlisted members assigned to sea duty. Throughout my tenure as MCPON, this has been a primary focus that I am committed to seeing through completion.

The enhancement of the Military Housing Privatization Initiative to expand Public Private Venture (PPV) projects for both the Hampton Roads and San Diego region will provide an additional 11,513 beds. I believe expanding PPV across the Unaccompanied Housing portfolio will rapidly increase our Sailors quality of life. I know Congress is invested in improving not only unaccompanied, but also our family housing, and I look forward to working with this committee to accomplish this goal.

Ensuring Professional and Academic Enlisted Education

Technical competency is just one part of being an exceptional warfighter; professional development and continuing education are just as important. Maintaining an empowered force relies on education and is key to our warfighting advantage. Continual focus on education gives our Sailors the ability to outthink problems and make quick, decisive decisions during combat.

Enlisted Leadership Development (ELD) is on a steady course of forging better, more competent, and capable enlisted leaders. It is a learning continuum that starts early in a Sailor's career and continues to the most senior levels of leadership. The key to developing warfighting competency begins with ELD and is sustained by additional academic options.

I implore you to continue to support our enlisted education and development. Investments in ELD, in addition to the United States Naval Community College (USNCC), will strengthen operational readiness and make a more agile, innovative, and lethal Sailor.

Conclusion

I am proud to be part of an organization of warfighters that are ready to defeat and destroy those who threaten our homeland, our partners and allies, and our American way of life. As we continue to face difficult budgetary decisions, we must ensure our warfighters are appropriately equipped, trained, and postured to fight and win. We must also keep in mind how quality of life is instrumental to warfighting readiness. Increasing access to medical care, supporting family readiness, and giving each Sailor the necessary separation of work and home life are critical in making our Sailors smarter, stronger, and valued.

I thank you and I look forward to your questions.