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SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

**STATEMENT OF  
CARLOS RUIZ  
SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE MARINE CORPS  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION,  
VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES OF THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS QUALITY OF LIFE  
MARCH 25, 2026**

Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of your United States Marines. I am honored to represent them. Our Marines are prepared, capable, and poised to face any adversary, and accomplish any mission assigned to them.

The Marine Corps remains focused on readiness and lethality. The Commandant of the Marine Corps has entrusted me with making quality of life a top priority. To that end, I have identified four key areas that will drive meaningful improvement: housing, sustaining a clean audit, Marine Corps Total Fitness, and individual combat equipment. Each of these areas directly impacts recruiting and retention by reinforcing trust in leadership, demonstrating institutional accountability, and ensuring Marines are equipped, housed, and supported to meet the demands of service.

### **Recruiting**

The Marine Corps' greatest asset is the individual Marine, and we continue to screen, select and send our best Marines to recruiting duty.

In Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25), the Marine Corps met its recruiting mission with more than 33,500 individuals earning their place in our ranks. This achievement reflects the unwavering dedication of our Marine recruiters and the enduring appeal of service in our Corps to those seeking challenge, purpose, and honor.

As we look ahead to the rest of FY26, we are on track to increase our end strength by accessing more than 33,853 recruits. We will continue our momentum in strengthening the

delayed entry pool, stabilizing the entry level training pipeline, and growing both our Active and Reserve formations with high-quality Marines.

## **Retention**

However, recruiting success is just the first step. We are committed to keeping our most talented Marines in the fight. Our ability to retain experienced, combat-ready professionals is what ensures the Marine Corps remains the world's premier warfighting force. Thanks to continuous refinement of the selection process, we surpassed our retention goals in FY25. Four months into FY26, we have achieved 98% for first term and 106% for subsequent term retention.

The message is clear: Marines love being Marines. We will continue to demand the best *of* them and *for* them. It is essential that we provide each of these Marines the necessary compensation, training, and materiel. Anything less would be a disservice to our mission, our nation, and our legacy of excellence.

In support of these Marines and their Quality of Service, these are my priorities for the near future:

### **1. Housing**

While Barracks 2030 has made progress, it is a long-term commitment, and the Marine Corps is committed to seeing it through. The Marine Corps is known for demonstrating ingenuity, resourcefulness, and a relentless pursuit of mission success. We are taking deliberate steps to maximize efficiency and enhance our readiness. We are actively renovating, repairing, and repurposing our facilities and materials to eliminate waste.

In 2025, we repaired or renovated 12 barracks that provide housing for approximately 4,160 Marines. In FY26, we have identified 13 additional barracks for repair.

In alignment with the GAO report on quality of life, as well as requirements set forth in the FY24 National Defense Authorization Act, Section 2836, we are continually pursuing ways to improve barracks conditions for Marines. Recent efforts include ways to enable Marines to electronically report and track urgent facility needs more quickly and efficiently at the lowest levels. We are also transitioning barracks management to civilian professionals to ensure consistent oversight, maintenance, and accountability. Looking ahead through FY26, we will continue this professionalization effort by filling nearly 350 civilian positions.

Family Housing remains a key focus for the Marine Corps. Through tenant satisfaction surveys, incentive awards, and safety inspections, we uphold the terms of our agreements with our public-private venture (PPV) partners and ensure housing meets the needs of our Marines and their families. The Marine Corps requested and has been funded over \$142M in family housing construction and operations in FY26, which includes not only materials and equipment, but also the housing management professionals who provide the necessary oversight of over 23,000 PPV homes.

Marines do not seek luxury; they seek the opportunity to win. That opportunity begins with a fighting force that is well-housed, well-trained, and well-equipped. With your continued advocacy and support, we fulfill our commitment and honor the commitment Marines have shown us.

## **2. Audit**

For three consecutive years, the Marine Corps became the first and only military service to obtain and sustain an unmodified or “clean” audit opinion. These accomplishments were not easy to attain but are testament to the importance that the Commandant, along with all Marines, places on accountability every day.

The Marine Corps units are re-purposing, re-tasking, and maximizing existing programs and facilities, stretching every resource to its full potential. We have a lot more work to do before clean audits become routine: we welcome the opportunity to continue proving our fiscal responsibility and resource management.

### **3. Marine Corps Total Fitness**

The foundation of our combat effectiveness has always been the individual Marine. That is why we have made Marine Corps Total Fitness (MCTF) our core framework for optimizing warfighter performance, readiness, and resilience. More than a new building or piece of equipment, MCTF is a comprehensive approach to Marines' physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional well-being.

This proactive approach is built on a simple premise: A Marine does not wait for a weapon to break before maintaining it, and the same applies to the mind and body of a Marine. To do this, MCTF combines modern human performance science with our timeless warrior ethos. We are embedding experts in cognitive performance, strength and conditioning, and nutrition within our units to provide personalized, targeted support. This is not a one-size-fits-all system; we meet our Marines where they are and give them the tools they need to succeed.

By integrating total fitness into our culture, we also eliminate the stigma around proactive care. It becomes a smart step to stay in the fight. This framework is the central pillar for every major prevention initiative we have. With your continued support, we can deploy this proven model to every Marine, ensuring the continued lethality and resilience of your force.

### **4. Individual Combat Equipment**

Marines operate where others cannot. Individual Combat Equipment—the personal protective equipment Marines wear into combat—must be as effective and adaptable as the

Marine wearing it. Our commitment to readiness includes a responsibility to continually improve. The gear that Marines use must evolve to address future threats. On tomorrow's battlefield, an electronic signal can be just as lethal as a bullet.

Recent advancements in manufacturing have led to the development of materials that are lighter, stronger, more durable, and capable of providing multidimensional protection from kinetic, electronic, and environmental threats.

Moreover, progress in exercise science and human performance, along with decades of combat experience, highlights the importance of offering expanded and customizable sizing options for a precise fit.

The Marine Corps is currently conducting an anthropometric study to create an up-to-date and comprehensive database for designing and procuring individual combat equipment across the Force. Marines train like they fight. We cannot wait for operations to begin for Marines to have access to the most advanced equipment.

## **Conclusion**

We have one goal: ensuring our Marines are ready to fight and win. They are the weapon. They are the difference.

The Marine Corps is not just a warfighting force—it is the enabler of the Joint Force. For the Marine Corps to continue providing the unique capabilities that give Combatant Commanders real-world options, Marine quality of life must be properly supported.

The Marine Corps has always been, and will continue to be, resourceful, innovative, and efficient. At the core of every capability, success, and victory is one fundamental element: our people. It is not about programs, policies, or equipment alone. It is about Marines—the “Nation’s force in readiness.”