

**Statement of Congressman Robert C. “Bobby” Scott**  
**Member Day Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act**  
**Before the Committee on Armed Services**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Thursday, April 11, 2024**

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and Members of the Committee, as you begin to draft the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025, I ask that you consider a number of priorities that would benefit not just my congressional district and the Commonwealth of Virginia, but the entire nation.

Military installation resiliency is one of the most pressing priorities that the Department of Defense (DoD) must address moving forward. Virginia’s third congressional district is home to Naval Station Norfolk, Joint Base Langley Eustis, Norfolk Naval Shipyard and the Portsmouth Naval Hospital. Each of these critical military installations are on or near the water and are at risk to persistent and recurring flooding, as well as to the long-term threats of sea level rise driven by both subsidence and climate change. That is why I was proud to sponsor the *Enhancing Military Base Resilience and Conserving Ecosystems through Stormwater Management Act* (or *EMBRACE Stormwater Management Act*), which was ultimately included the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022.

The *EMBRACE Act* authorized DoD to implement various stormwater projects on or near military installations to improve resiliency and limit the impacts of flooding. This was a critical step towards requiring DoD to prioritize stormwater projects at military installations in flood prone and climate change vulnerable communities to protect these installations. Unfortunately, two years since its enactment, DoD has not implemented the *EMBRACE Act* in line with congressional intent. I respectfully request strong stormwater provisions in this year’s NDAA, including language that clarifies allowable use for prioritized projects dealing with runoff minimization, installation and defense access road protection, and aquifers. I also support the establishment of a Military Installation Resilience Project Acceleration Program that can be used to assist in the planning and implementation of critical installation resilience projects.

I was pleased that the pilot program for Interagency Regional Coordinators for Resilience (IRCR) was enacted through Fiscal Year 2023 NDAA. While the law requires four sites for the coordinators to be located, to date, only one has been appointed. I encourage the committee to consider language to move the appointment of the additional three coordinators along.

I have been encouraged to see strong suicide prevention measures included in recent NDAAs, and I ask that this continue for FY25. My congressional district is home to Newport News Shipbuilding and Naval Station Norfolk where there has been a wave of service-connected suicides. Ensuring that our servicemembers, veterans and their families have the tools and support required to combat suicidality, depression, and mental illness should be one of our highest priorities. In the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2023 I was proud to sponsor an adopted

amendment that requires the Inspector General to compile a report regarding instances of suicide, suicide attempts, and suicidal ideation among Navy servicemembers, including an assessment of Navy mental health teams, commander responses, and challenges that stand in the way of sailors receiving the care and treatment they deserve. According to a provision in last year's NDAA, that report is due on September 30 of this year, and I await its publication and encourage the Committee to ensure that the Department meets its deadlines. I would also like to take this opportunity to draw attention to good work being done in this vein in my district. The Virginia General Assembly included in the state biennial budget the Commonwealth's \$40 million cost-share to support the Navy's effort to build housing that is desperately needed near Newport News Shipbuilding. Lack of off-ship housing has been identified as a risk factor for suicide among enlisted sailors onboard the *USS George Washington* during its midlife refueling and overhaul at Newport News. I applaud any effort by the Committee to further support and supplement the Navy's efforts to increase housing availability to address these quality of life issues for our servicemembers in the forthcoming NDAA.

With regard to shipbuilding, I was disheartened to see the Navy request advance procurement funds for only one Virginia class submarine in FY25. I sent a letter to President Biden prior to the release of his budget requesting that DoD change course and support the standard two-year-per procurement schedule that our national security requires and that our shipbuilding industrial base have come to expect to maintain adequate workloads and production schedules. My congressional district in Hampton Roads is a proud shipbuilding community, and our shipbuilding and ship-repair workforce relies on consistent government policy and funding in these matters. While I am grateful that the budget still requested robust funding for the Ford class aircraft carrier and Columbia class submarine programs, I ask the Committee to maintain the two Virginia class submarine buy that has been consistent for years in the FY25 NDAA.

Finally, I wanted to bring to the committee's attention the service and sacrifice of a sailor from my district. I recently learned of David Walker, a nineteen-year-old sailor from Norfolk, Virginia who volunteered to serve and tragically lost his life aboard the *USS California* during the attack on Pearl Harbor of December 7, 1941. Mr. Walker's remains were identified just a few weeks ago by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. I commend DoD's efforts to identify the remains of servicemembers missing in action and it is a testament to their commitment that no servicemember be left behind that they continue to work to identify the remains of those missing in action at the dawn of America entering World War II. My office is in the early stages of exploring how we can best recognize and honor this brave Virginian's service and sacrifice, and I would appreciate any support that the Committee can provide in this effort.

I thank the Committee again for its consideration of my views and priorities as you begin the difficult and critical work of preparing this year's National Defense Authorization Act.