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HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT
OF
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UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL
OF THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
CONCERNING
MILITARY PERSONNEL POSTURE
ON
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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Coffman, Ranking Member Speier, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, it is my privilege to appear before you today to provide an overview on Marine Corps personnel.

Since our founding in 1775, Marines have answered our Nation's call, faithfully serving the American people and maintaining a standard of military excellence. Your Marine Corps is, and will continue to be, our Nation's expeditionary force in readiness. We are warfighters who are ready to rapidly respond to crises around the Globe to ensure the continued security of the American people and to protect the interests that underpin our Nation. Marines will be *always faithful* to the trust which the American people have vested in them.

OUR PEOPLE

Mission first, people always. Marines are the foundation of the Marine Corps. They are the Corps' most critical resource, and always have been. Your Marines are recruited, trained, educated, and retained to win our Nation's battles. They are smart, resilient, fit, disciplined, and able to overcome adversity. Recruiting high quality youth and retaining those whose past service and future potential continues to make the Corps stronger are our highest priorities; they ensure we remain no better friend and no worse enemy.

End Strength

We thank you for the increased end strength authorization to 186,000 in the FY18 National Defense Authorization Act. This increase is allowing us to strengthen our capabilities to meet warfighting requirements. Nevertheless, the Marine Corps operating forces continue to average a deployment-to-dwell ratio of 1:2. This tempo is not sustainable over the long term; our optimal deployment-to-dwell is 1:3. Our Marines want to deploy, serve our Nation, and protect our country

from threats overseas, but we owe our Marines and their families the appropriate time to reconnect with family, refocus, learn from their most recent deployment, and train for the next deployment or contingency. In the near-term, we have made the decision to fund modernization and recover our readiness to continue to ensure our Marines are fully equipped for today's conflict. However, we must not accept a 1:2 deployment-to-dwell as the new normal.

Recruiting

Unique to all services, all recruiting efforts across the Marine Corps - officer, enlisted, regular, reserve, and prior-service - fall under the purview of a single entity, the Marine Corps Recruiting Command. Operationally, this provides us with tremendous flexibility and unity of command, facilitating efforts to meet accession requirements.

Last fiscal year, we successfully achieved all enlisted and officer recruiting goals for both the active and reserve components, and we expect to do the same again this year. We also will exceed all quality goals. The Department of Defense requires 90 percent of enlistees to have a high school diploma or equivalent (Education Tier 1), and 60 percent of enlistees to belong to Mental Groups I-III A (mental aptitude). Last year, the Marine Corps achieved 99.9 percent of Tier 1, 72 percent mental group I-III A, and expects to be at or near these levels for FY18.

While only eight percent of new Marine Corps recruits receive an enlistment bonus, these incentives are critical to enable us to ship new recruits at the right times to balance recruit loads at the recruit depots and meet school seat requirements. We appreciate Congress' support for these priority programs that assist our contracting high quality Marine recruits.

To meet future challenges in the current recruiting environment, it is imperative that we maintain our high standards both for our recruiters and those who volunteer to serve in our Corps. Recruiting quality young individuals translates into higher performance, reduced attrition, and

improved readiness for the operating forces. Our actions, commitment, and investments in recruiting today ensure a high state of readiness in our Corps tomorrow.

Retention

As the Marine Corps manages its 186,000 force, we work to retain the very best available Marines capable of fulfilling our leadership and operational needs. This is accomplished through a competitive career designation process for officers and a thorough evaluation process for enlisted Marines, both of which are designed to measure, analyze, and compare our Marines' performance and accomplishments. However, there is a continuous challenge to keep high-quality Marines in the service, especially in a competitive civilian job market.

Marine Corps retention models, systems, policies, and processes emphasize consistency of leadership, personnel stability, and sustained readiness across the force. Officer career designation incorporates a board system that enables leaders to examine officer records and accomplishments. After designation, the promotion process continues the evaluation of Marine officers. It is a primary tool by which we retain only the best and most qualified Marines.

For enlisted Marines, a tiered rating system takes into account a number of quantifiable performance factors and includes inputs from both immediate and more senior leaders. It helps to set achievable goals for Marines as they compete for retention. After initial reenlistment, the evaluation and continued retention of high quality enlisted Marines is supported by a detailed and continual performance evaluation system which is fully integrated with the promotion process. Those Marines with the best proven performance are retained and promoted.

Incentive pays remain critical to our retention effort, allowing the Marine Corps to fill hard to retain positions, such as cyber security technicians, special operators, and counter intelligence specialists. Similarly, Selective Reenlistment Bonuses (SRBs) allow us to shape our career force by targeting critical military occupational specialties (MOSs) and supporting lateral movement of

Marines to these MOSs. Continuing resolutions have delayed payments of promised SRBs, and can negatively impact re-enlistments. We appreciate the committee's continued support to ensure we have the resources required to meet our retention goals. We are open to, and always assessing, new ways to recognize and reward excellence in the Corps to ensure quality remains high and retention strong.

Reserves

Your Marine Corps Selected Reserve is fully manned at its authorized end strength of 38,500, and our reserve unit personnel readiness stands at its highest level in a generation. Unit reserve personnel readiness continues to increase from 71 percent in 2013 to over 86 percent today, with significant improvement in both enlisted and officer force management.

While these are welcome and positive trends, we continue to assess ways to further improve personnel readiness. We have implemented a comprehensive manpower management plan to provide full service support to our Reserve officers and Staff NCOs for their career management. We have expanded this plan to provide full-service manpower management support for the entire Selected Reserve. This is a talent management initiative that will help our NCOs, Staff NCOs, and officers move between commands to enhance their development and military career goals.

The increase in our officer manning has been driven in part by bonuses and incentives to attract more Marines from the active component. In addition, our Reserve Officer Commissioning Program has produced 1,199 lieutenants for the Marine Corps reserves since its creation in 2006. As a result, our ground company grade officer manning has increased from 21 percent in 2007, to 89 percent today.

Your Marine Corps Reserves has increased the number of reserve Marines activating under the 12304b mobilization authority for pre-planned training missions supporting Combatant Commander requirements. Approximately 1,100 Reserve Marines are scheduled to deploy during

the remainder of this fiscal year. The FY18 NDAA extended pre- and post-deployment health care to Marines who deploy under 12304b, and the Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 provided them with post 9/11 G.I. Bill benefits. We appreciate this subcommittee's work to implement these changes.

Blended Retirement System

The new Blended Retirement System (BRS) went into effect on January 1, 2018. The BRS is a significant change from the legacy retirement system and, while it confers a monetary benefit on the large majority of Marines who do not reach retirement eligibility, we remain concerned on the potential impact on retention behavior of the force. With over 184,000 Marines – both active and reserve - having to make an “opt-in” decision this year, we will be closely monitoring BRS execution progress for any of these and other impacts.

During 2017, the Marine Corps focused on training those current Marines who may elect to enroll in the BRS this year. Headquarters Marine Corps subject matter experts visited major bases and installations, briefing over 2,000 officer and enlisted leaders on the tools available to educate their Marines. The Marine Corps implemented an integrated communications plan employing administrative messages and a website with training links, videos, and robust reference material. We utilized the Marine Corps' social media platforms to increase awareness and knowledge regarding the BRS and the associated training requirements. We are closely tracking BRS execution progress and will continue to do so throughout 2018.

Marine Corps Integration

Executing our successful gender integration plan is key to sustaining readiness, as well as ensuring we afford all Marines the opportunity to succeed as valued members of the Corps. The Marine Corps is fully committed to sustaining the most combat effective force by capitalizing on the knowledge, skills, abilities, demonstrated performance, and potential of every Marine.

To date, our plan is progressing very well. Female Marines are now represented in all previously-restricted occupational fields. Performance standards are working to ensure both male and female Marines possess the requisite ability to successfully perform the critical skills of their chosen military occupational specialty. We continue to collect data and assess all aspects of our plan through the lenses of 1) Combat Effectiveness; 2) Unit Readiness; and 3) Talent Management.

Civilian Marines

Our Civilian Marines support the mission and daily functions of the Marine Corps and are an integral part of our Total Force. They exemplify our core values; they embrace esprit de corps, teamwork, and pride in belonging to our Nation's Corps of Marines. Serving alongside our Marines throughout the world, in every occupation and at every level, our civilian appropriated-funded workforce remains by far the leanest of all services, with a ratio of one civilian to every ten active duty Marines.

Approximately 95 percent of our appropriated funded civilians work outside the Washington, DC, beltway at fifty-seven bases, stations, depots, and installations around the world. Sixty-nine percent are veterans who have chosen to continue to serve our Nation; of those, eighteen percent are disabled veterans. Our civilian non-appropriated funded workforce steadfastly continues to provide vital support to our Marines, reserve Marines, their families, and our wounded, ill and injured.

The last few years have not been easy on our Civilian Marines. Attracting and retaining top civilian talent when faced with personnel reductions, limited pay raises, and furloughs is challenging. Continued continuing resolutions also create an environment of uncertainty and threat of furlough. Nevertheless, our civilians have truly shown themselves as Semper Fidelis, keeping our Marines and their families in the forefront. For that, they have my personal admiration.

TAKING CARE OF MARINES AND THEIR FAMILIES

Taking care of Marines and their families is a key element of overall readiness and combat effectiveness. The adage “we recruit Marines, we retain families” remains as true today as ever. Our comprehensive package of services seeks the holistic fitness and readiness of our Marines and families – body, mind, spirit, and social.

Behavioral Health

The Marine Corps Behavioral Health Program is an integrated community-based service model that includes community counseling, family advocacy, suicide prevention, substance abuse, and combat operational stress. We provide world-class prevention and counseling services at each installation, and all of our behavioral health programs provide free confidential services offered by licensed counselors. These services are available to individuals, couples, families, and children. During FY17, we provided nearly 15,000 assessments and more than 100,000 counseling hours to Marines and their families.

Suicide Prevention

Suicide prevention is one of the Marine Corp’s highest priorities; one death is too many. Preventing suicide has proven to be a very challenging task given the complex nature of the problem, but we are steadfast in our commitment to eliminating it.

Our Marine Intercept Program (MIP) is targeted intervention for Marines who have had a suicidal ideation or attempt. MIP combines efforts from fellow Marines, commanders, installation counselors, and Marine Corps headquarters elements. It assists Marines with a suicide ideation or attempt through care coordination, regular telephone outreach by care managers, development of safety plans, and suicide assessments for Marines with a reported suicidal ideation or attempt. MIP is a very effective program that results in Marines receiving assistance faster, keeping their appointments, and, ultimately, saving lives.

The Marine Corps DSTRESS Line is a 24/7/365, Marine-specific call center providing phone, chat, and video-telephone capability for anonymous counseling for circumstances across the stress continuum. DSTRESS calls can discuss stress and anger management, grief and loss, deployment cycles, parent-child relationships, couples communication, marital issues, relationships, relocations, and suicidal crisis. To date, the DSTRESS Line has had approximately 45,000 sessions with Marines, attached Sailors, and their families. Since its inception in 2010, DSTRESS has helped save 39 Marines who were in imminent danger situations.

Our current social media campaign - “#BeThere_Marine” - is a call to action that motivates Marines to take steps and pay attention to individuals experiencing emotional distress or expressing suicidal thoughts. To date, nearly 800,000 individuals have viewed and shared these social media posts and public service announcements worldwide.

Sexual Assault Prevention & Response

Protecting our Marines and eradicating sexual assault from our ranks are top priorities for me and our Corps. We are committed to eliminating incidents of sexual assault by increasing awareness through prevention and education, victim centered support, intimidation free reporting, thorough investigation, and accountability for those who commit sexual crimes. Any Marine who comes forward to report a sexual assault will receive support, even when the sexual assault occurred prior to service.

Based on results from the 2016 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey for Active Duty Service members, sexual assault prevalence has decreased by 30 percent since 2014. Conversely, reporting levels have increased. We believe that reduced prevalence with increased reporting means we are reducing the number of unreported incidents, ensuring that Marines who experience sexual assault get the support they need.

In an effort to better reach junior enlisted Marines and officers, the Marine Corps has developed “Join the Conversation,” a professional military education campaign that helps guide Marines in identifying five destructive behaviors—hazing, sexual assault, sexual harassment, retaliation, and alcohol misuse. Marines are educated on the importance of understanding destructive behaviors, the negative impact of those behaviors to the unit and the Corps at large, and what Marines can do to combat them. This initiative is now formal instruction at The Basic School.

Male Marines are less likely to report a sexual assault than females. Since so few studies focus on males, the Marine Corps conducted interviews with its Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs) and SAPR Victim Advocates (VAs) to learn about their interactions with male Marines who experienced a sexual assault. We learned valuable information regarding barriers to reporting, reasons why male Marines report, and techniques to build rapport with this population. This information is part of current SAPR training for SARCs and VAs.

Personal and Professional Development

Our Marine For Life Cycle is a career-long process that helps Marines prepare for transition to civilian life. We provide a continuum of tangible learning or experienced-based opportunities at nine different action points with specific emphasis at the Marine’s first permanent duty station, promotion to Corporal, and the Transition Readiness Seminar.

At their first permanent duty station, Marines complete the Personal Readiness Seminar within 90 days of arrival to the installation. This seminar provides an overview of Personal and Professional Development services to include Voluntary Education, Career Technical/Credentialing, Personal Financial Management, Family Member Employment Assistance, and Information and Referral; the seminar also emphasizes financial readiness awareness.

At time of promotion to Corporal, all Marines must complete “Your Readiness” training. This online, MarineNet training provides an overview of Personal and Professional Development services, the reenlistment process, transition readiness, developing the Individual Transition Plan, and an introduction to available resources and support provided at our installations.

Approximately 12-14 months prior to separation, or 24 months prior to retirement, Marines complete the Transition Readiness Seminar. The week-long program seminar includes a mandatory standardized core curriculum followed by three two-day track options to align with their future goals and aspirations - Accessing Higher Education, Career and Technical Training, or Entrepreneurship.

No later than 90 days prior separation, Marines meet with their commanding officer for Capstone. During Capstone, the commanding officer will validate whether the Marine has met their career readiness standards. If a Marine does not meet their career readiness standards or have a viable transition plan, a warm handover will be provided to Department of Labor or Veterans Affairs partner agencies for additional post-transition assistance.

The mission of Marine Corps Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL) is to help Marines receive transferable credit for their military skills and work experience. COOL links Marines with civilian certifications related to their military occupational specialties. It is a public website accessible to all current Marines, as well as veterans, spouses, potential employers, enterprises, credentialing agencies, and associations. A credential translates Marine Corps technical skills into marketable language recognized by employers. The Marine Corps will pay for examination fees and annual maintenance for enlisted Marines to earn civilian/industry credentials closely aligned with their occupational specialty.

The Marine Corps continually collaborates with the other services, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Veterans Affairs to improve our transition programs. We recently

participated in a Transition Assistance Program hearing and follow-up roundtable with these partners and the House Committee on Veterans Affairs. The Marine Corps plans to meet throughout the year with the Committee to continuously improve the metrics relating to successful transition from military to civilian employment.

Wounded Warrior Care

The Marine Corps' Wounded Warrior Regiment (WWR) continues to execute our Recovery Coordination Program in support of wounded, ill, or injured (WII) Marines and their families, in a manner that greatly facilitates their recovery and upholds our enduring commitment to "keep faith" with those who have incurred life changing impairments in service to our Nation. Regardless of the origin of affliction, our Marines require and genuinely deserve access to the comprehensive recovery care available through the WWR.

WWR Recovery Care Coordinators, in coordination with medical providers and unit leaders, help WII Marines develop and execute their individual Comprehensive Recovery Plans, which provide the road map for a successful transition. WII Marines with complex care coordination needs are assessed for post-separation support requirements. When appropriate, those Marines are transferred to a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) designated Lead Coordinator prior to their medical discharge to ensure seamless support.

WWR maintains faith with our Marines through our District Injured Support Coordinators, who are geographically dispersed around the country and provide one-on-one support as needed, and the Sergeant Merlin German Call Center, which conducts outreach calls to Marines and receives and responds to calls for assistance 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Since our WWR was established in 2007, thousands of WII Marines and family members transitioning from active service have benefitted from a full spectrum of support services that begins with physical recovery needs and increasingly focuses on post-service employment and

education opportunities as they heal. Marines and their families, members of Congress, and the public at large can be assured that the Marine Corps, through the WWR, will continue to expertly provide recovery care coordination support at all times.

Marine Corps Business and Support Services

The Marine Corps delivers many of its quality of life programs via an integrated Marine Corps Community Services (MCCS) construct that combines Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR); Marine Corps Exchange (MCX); Warfighter and Family Services; and Child Development Programs. This integrated model is unique within DoD and provides many operating efficiencies, including consolidated non-appropriated fund back-office support, e.g., human resources, finance and accounting, procurement, construction, and information technology. Our focus on efficiency continues today with transformation and innovation pursuits, such as a shared services center for all MCCS NAF transactional accounting functions; we are expecting a significant cumulative NAF benefit over a 10 year period.

The MCX is an integral self-sustaining business component of MCCS, delivering products and services in garrison and expeditionary environments, while producing an invaluable NAF dividend to our MWR and family programs. Marines and their families can count on real savings when they shop at the MCX. The 2017 market basket survey showed an average savings of approximately 26 percent. Further, the MCX is proud to employ military family members who represent approximately 33 percent of our workforce.

Transformation and innovation are the fabric of MCCS as we continue to assess and implement new delivery models by leveraging technology, partnerships, and sponsorships. The Marine Corps is also an active participant in DoD Business Reforms that encompass many of the programs and services within the MCCS portfolio. We are committed to seeking efficiencies across

the Department while preserving our highly effective MCCA organization that is best attuned to meeting Marine Corps operational requirements.

CONCLUSION

The Marines of our Corps represent the individuals of our Nation who have stepped forward and sworn to defend and protect it. Through recruiting, training, education, and retention of men and women of character who take up our challenge to become one of “the Few and the Proud,” we will enhance the quality of our Corps and our overall combat effectiveness. By ensuring that we take care of all Marines and their families, we fulfill our responsibility to keep faith with the honor, courage, and commitment they have so freely given.

Our individual Marines are our most precious asset. They are proud of what they do. They are proud of the “Eagle, Globe, and Anchor” and what it represents to our Nation. With your support, a vibrant Marine Corps will continue to meet our Nation’s call.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present this testimony.