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HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT
OF
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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
OF THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
CONCERNING
EXCEPTIONAL FAMILY MEMBER PROGRAM
ON
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Introduction

Chairwomen Speier, Ranking Member Kelly, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of your Marine Corps, I would like to thank you for inviting me here today to discuss our Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP). We are grateful for your continued, active engagement in making lasting improvements to the overall health, well-being, and quality of life for Marines and their families.

I want to thank you for holding this hearing, and for conducting the EFMP roundtable back in October and the more informal briefing last month. These events have put vital focus on the EFMP – both the things we do well, and ways we can improve.

The Marine Corps' EFMP began in 1990 as an assignment coordination program. Following a comprehensive evaluation in 2007, substantive changes and enhancements were implemented. These included: (1) transformation of the enrollment and assignment processes to facilitate more efficient and effective outcomes; (2) development of a staffing model to ensure sufficient numbers of dedicated family support staff; (3) implementation of a respite care program for enrolled families; (4) creation of two dedicated legal assistance attorney positions, specializing in disability law; and (5) deployment of a case management system, cohesively integrating the three components of EFMP, supported by a single Headquarters Marine Corps office for policy, budget and oversight.

Today, the program continues to deliver these enhancements, but also remains agile and responsive to customer and stakeholder needs, as well as statutory and DoD-directed requirements. Recent initiatives resulting from customer feedback include: (1) reimbursement to families when they are charged a fee by their TRICARE–authorized provider for completion of the EFMP enrollment form; (2) an agreement between EFMP and Marine Corps housing offices

to accept an EFMP letter in lieu of PCS orders, allowing EFMP-enrolled Marines, awaiting EFMP review of their orders, to apply for base housing at the same time as their non-enrolled peers; and (3) the development and implementation of standard enterprise-wide family training focused on disability-related topics, such as special education, permanent incapacitation, and Medicaid.

In addition, as a result of staff and stakeholder input, we have developed and are continuously updating a comprehensive staff training program with associated job aids; a standardized and codified PCS family support protocol; supervisory audit tools to facilitate appropriate oversight and promote quality coaching in support of effective family support service delivery; and a comprehensive functionality upgrade of the case management system.

Ongoing internal review and analysis of the program has led to the development of a logic model with associated measures of performance and effectiveness, the creation of additional Headquarters EFMP assignment staff to reduce the cycle time for PCS orders review, and more flexible work options to maximize assignment output to better serve our customers. These enhancements to the program support a wrap-around continuum of care model, allowing Marines to focus on the mission, improving individual, family and unit readiness.

Following the 2007 program enhancements, EFMP enrollment doubled from 4,200 Marines to 8,400 Marines by FY13, and continues to increase each year. In FY19, there were 8,921 Marines enrolled in EFMP with 11,264 family members with a special medical and/or educational need. Approximately 70 percent of enrollees are dependent children and 30 percent are dependent adults. The most prevalent diagnosis within the enrolled population are: Asthma and Allergies (13 percent); Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (13 percent); Pervasive Developmental Disorders, including Autism (13 percent); Anxiety Disorders (9 percent) and

Delayed Milestones in Childhood (7 percent). Of the 7,784 enrolled children, 2,939 (38 percent) are receiving special education and/or related services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and 350 (4 percent) are receiving Early Intervention Services through an Individual Family Services Plan.

Your Marine Corps EFMP is focused on providing critical services which include the effective enrollment and assignment of Marines to support the continuum of care, individualized family case management, including Needs Assessments and Service Plans, and training to help families be effective EFMP advocates.

Individualized case management includes special education support. In FY19, EFMP staff attended 381 IEP meetings on behalf of our families. In some circumstances, we also refer families to our legal assistance attorneys who are experts in special education and the state and federal laws and regulations benefitting individuals with disabilities. Attorney support most often includes review of school files, consultation with parents, IEP meeting attendance, negotiation with school attorneys, drafting settlement agreements, and representing parents at hearings. In addition to special education support, our attorneys also provide legal services associated with special needs trusts, conservatorship, Social Security Insurance claims, and other disability related legal issues. In FY19, our attorneys assisted 266 new clients.

To help guide our program results, we collect and evaluate a variety of performance and effectiveness measures. In 2017, the Operations Analysis Directorate (OAD) - the Marine Corps' focal point for operations research, analytic support and studies management - completed a study analyzing the impact of EFMP enrollment on the individual career progression and promotion of Marines. The comprehensive study analyzed the career progression of more than 20,000 EFMP-enrolled Marines compared to their non-enrolled peers over the course of twenty-

five years. It found that EFMP enrollment does not negatively impact career progression in the aggregate; Marines enrolled in EFMP remain in service slightly longer than, and achieve same rank as, their non-EFMP Marine counterparts. EFMP-enrolled Marines actually achieved their highest grade in the same or shorter amount of time than the average of their non-EFMP peers.

Nevertheless, we know that some individual Marines and families enrolled in our EFMP continue to have challenges and stresses beyond their peers. They may find themselves having to play the role of case manager, advocate, health care expert, appointment scheduler, as well as the primary source of emotional support and respite for one another, all while trying to meet the demands of career and family. These stressors can exacerbate when families PCS - leaving behind the resources and services they have worked so hard to acquire and having to re-establish them in a new location.

While we will never be able to remove all the challenges and stresses, we must continue to strive to do what we can to alleviate them as, ultimately, they may impact retention decisions. As such, we are continually looking to improve the EFMP and the services we provide to our Marines and their families. Current initiatives include continued staff training to elevate core competency and service delivery to our customers; robust data collection and analysis of assignment decisions in support of our ongoing efforts to identify and communicate TRICARE network capacity issues to the Defense Health Agency; case management system enhancements to support internal and DoD reporting requirements as well as end user experience and service delivery; and collaboration with our key stakeholders and partners to promote inclusion and remove barriers to participation where EFMP families live, work and play. We are also looking forward to the results of a comprehensive program evaluation of EFMP, expected in spring 2020.

Conclusion

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 EFMP program is an important part of our comprehensive package of services seeks the holistic fitness and readiness of our Marines and families.

Our EFMP has come a long way since its inception in 1990. We have dedicated and professional family support staff whose mission is to deliver comprehensive quality case management services. We realize that with our success stories are other stories of continued challenge and stress. We must continue to work hard to help those who need it. We must continue to reach out, engage, listen, and help. By ensuring that we take care of EFMP-enrolled Marines and their families, we fulfill our responsibility to keep faith with the honor, courage, and commitment they have so freely given.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.