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THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

STATEMENT

OF

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BEFORE THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SEAPOWER AND PROJECTION FORCES

ON

LITTORAL COMBAT SHIPS AND THE TRANSITION TO FRIGATE CLASS

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Chairman Wittman, Ranking Member Courtney, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and discuss the current status of the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) and Frigate programs.

As you know, the Navy's 2016 Force Structure Assessment revalidated the warfighting requirement for a total of 52 small surface combatants (SSCs). These ships fill critical warfighting gaps for our Navy in Surface Warfare (SUW), Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), and Mine Countermeasures (MCM) – littoral anti-access missions that are key elements of Sea Control.

Fleet demand for these platforms is strong. To meet this demand, the LCS shipyards have upgraded their yard facilities and have a qualified work force and industry team in place for full serial production, delivering two ships per year at an affordable cost that is well below the congressionally mandated cost cap. The LCS program is delivering combat capability to our sailors today, and is on track to deliver in support of future deployments.

As we gain operational experience with LCS, the Navy continues to improve the effectiveness of these ships. Lessons learned from construction, post-delivery test and trials, and fleet operations have informed changes that have been incorporated into the ship design and manufacturing process to improve reliability and operational availability. The Navy also continues to refine LCS crewing models, training, and maintenance concept of operations for greater stability, simplicity, and ownership, further contributing to improved reliability and combat capability being delivered to the Fleet.

As maritime threats have evolved, the Navy is placing greater emphasis on distributed operations, highlighting the need for a full complement of SSCs and increasing the need for a Frigate with improved lethality and survivability. The Navy is defining the requirements for the Frigate to improve its ability to operate in a more contested environment than LCS, enhancing its role in distributed maritime operations. In this role, both LCS and Frigate will free up our large surface combatants to focus on their primary missions including area air defense, land strike, and ballistic missile defense. The Navy is also seeking to leverage Fleet-wide commonality of combat system elements wherever possible to deliver capability and flexibility in the most cost effective manner.

To accomplish this, the Navy has established a Frigate Requirement Evaluation Team to update the previous Frigate analysis performed in 2014 and investigate the feasibility of

incorporating additional capabilities and enhanced survivability features into the current Frigate designs, as well as explore other hull forms. The results of this analysis will inform the top level Frigate requirements based on cost and capability trades involved. The Navy's revised acquisition strategy is under development and will ensure designs are mature prior to entering into a detail design and construction (DD&C) contract. The Navy will engage with industry in order to support an aggressive conceptual design effort, leading to a Request for Proposals to award the DD&C contract in FY 2020.

As we work through the requirements and acquisition processes for the Frigate, we will endeavor to transition from LCS to Frigate in a manner that maximizes the competitive field for our shipbuilding industrial base. We understand the potential implications of future acquisition strategies to our shipyards and their workforces, and these are considerations we do not take lightly. We are committed to delivering increased capability to our sailors at the best value for the American taxpayer, and that includes maintaining a competitive and healthy industrial base.

The Navy's role in providing for our national security includes ensuring freedom of navigation for all maritime traffic, providing reassurance to our partner nations, and deterring maritime rivals. As more LCS – and the Frigates that follow them – arrive in the fleets, they will deliver the combat capability our nation's security demands and the persistent presence our allies and partners desire.

We appreciate the opportunity to discuss these critically important shipbuilding programs. We thank you for your past support and urge your continued support. We welcome your oversight, and we look forward to answering your questions.