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THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
STRATEGIC FORCES SUBCOMMITTEE

STATEMENT

OF

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BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES

OF THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

ON

STATUS OF THE B61-12 LIFE EXTENSION

AND

W88 ALTERATION 370 PROGRAMS

25 SEPTEMBER 2019

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Chairman Cooper, Ranking Member Turner, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss a vital refurbishment effort of our sea-based leg of the triad. It is an honor to testify before you representing the Navy's Strategic Systems Programs (SSP).

Nuclear deterrence is the Department of Defense's number one priority mission. The Nation's nuclear triad of intercontinental ballistic missiles, strategic bombers, and ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) equipped with submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) is the bedrock of our ability to deter aggression, assure our allies and partners, achieve U.S. objectives should deterrence fail, and hedge against an uncertain future. Each leg provides unique attributes and, together, provides critical diversity and flexibility. Today's OHIO-Class submarine and the Trident II (D5) Strategic Weapon System together compose the sea-based leg of the deterrent. The SSBN provides an assured second strike capability and persistent at-sea presence; it is reliable, credible, and undetectable. The Trident II (D5) Strategic Weapon System provides 70 percent of the Nation's deployed deterrent; it is reliable, credible, and highly accurate.

The Trident II (D5) missile is capable of carrying and required to carry two different types of warheads—the W76 and the W88, deployed in the late 1970s and 1980s, respectively. Over the last 20 years, the Navy and our partners at the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) have executed efforts to refurbish these warheads to address aging and obsolescence and to ensure their continued availability to the Nation.

The challenges that the Navy and NNSA faced during the Navy's first Life Extension Program (LEP)—the W76-1 LEP—underpinned the efforts to plan the W88 Alteration 370 program and encouraged careful risk identification and mitigation efforts. This major alteration effort, begun in 2008, focused on procuring additional Arming, Fuzing, and Firing units and replacing the system's high explosives, in conjunction with a routine replacement of discrete system components. The W88 Alteration 370 will be executed as a stockpile turnaround, meaning that the units will be delivered from the Navy to NNSA as W88-0 warheads, and NNSA will return the refurbished units to the

Navy as W88 Alteration 370 units. Historical challenges delayed the initial program production until December 2019, removing schedule margin for this refurbishment effort. The Navy and NNSA have carefully orchestrated the turnaround of assets for the least disruption to the operational fleet while ensuring the Navy meets USSTRATCOM's warheads-at-sea requirements.

Recently during testing, NNSA identified an issue with capacitor components that did not meet reliability requirements and will not be available to this program or the concurrent B61-12 bomb LEP in order to meet required production dates. The Navy and NNSA are planning for an approximately 18-month delay to the W88 Alteration 370 program and are working to understand associated costs and the follow-on implications to our entire Trident II (D5) Strategic Weapon System Program of Record. Concurrently, the Navy is working with USSTRATCOM to understand the near-term impacts to deployments and to ensure that the Navy can continue to meet USSTRATCOM requirements as the schedule shifts. I am confident that the Navy, NNSA, and Nuclear Weapons Council (NWC) will work together to manage the delay, as we have historically addressed refurbishment challenges with a mission-focused attitude and rigor. The Navy will prioritize meeting our warfighters' requirements and minimizing disruption to the operational fleet to ensure that the sea-based leg of the triad continues to fulfill its deterrence mission.

Delays to warhead refurbishment programs are unfortunate, but they are a potential reality for which the Navy prepares contingency plans in close coordination with our partners and stakeholders. Issues associated with the W88 Alteration 370 program highlight the critical importance of a robust, nuclear enterprise-wide suite of skilled workforce professionals, rigorous processes, and a healthy manufacturing and industrial base. Now, more than ever, the Navy needs the continued support of Congress and the Nation as the Navy, NNSA, and the NWC work together to manage this delay.