

Prepared Statement

of

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Before the

House Committee on Oversight and Reform

Subcommittee on National Security

November 16, 2022

Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Grothman, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today to discuss the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) program.

There is no place and no justification for the incidents of sexual assault or sexual harassment that have been reported within the JROTC program. These incidents are directly opposed to our core values and in no way reflect the military training, education, or experiences the perpetrators received while serving in the military. The Department of Defense has an unwavering commitment to the safety and well-being of all JROTC participants and to holding people accountable for misconduct. In this effort, we work closely our partner schools, the Military Departments, and the Department of Education. To that end, my office has been coordinating closely with the Military Departments to conduct a complete review of JROTC governing policies. We have found areas where we can improve and standardize policy and procedures across the Services in order to prevent sexual harassment and assault and hold people accountable when there is misconduct. For example, the standardization of pre-screening procedures for JROTC instructor applicants, a review of Military Service staffing requirements needed to oversee JROTC programs, and updated agreements with host schools that uniformly define roles and responsibilities will inform this effort to improve JROTC oversight policy. While this review will be ongoing, we expect to implement updated policies by the end of this year. We are also working closely with the Department of Education, which promulgates regulations and enforces Title IX sexual harassment and sexual assault response requirements for school districts. We must never allow anyone who represents the Department of Defense, either directly or indirectly, to break faith with our communities.

JROTC Overview

JROTC is a youth development program that emphasizes self-esteem, teamwork, and self-discipline in our secondary schools and communities nationwide. Over 3,400 schools across all 50 states and US territories have a JROTC program. These schools employ 7,500 military retirees to teach this high school elective to over 500,000 students annually. The JROTC curriculum provides equitable, motivating, and challenging academic content. Students collaborate, reflect, and develop critical thinking skills while learning and applying competencies in real life. JROTC bridges civil-military relations and improves knowledge and perceptions of the Department of Defense (DoD).

JROTC is not specifically a military recruiting program. Its mandate is to instill in students at secondary schools the values of citizenship, service to the Nation, personal responsibility, and a sense of accomplishment. JROTC plays a key role in increasing high school graduation rates and generating positive public service awareness. JROTC students and instructors contribute nearly 10 million hours of service in their communities annually. There is a positive correlation between JROTC participation and student outcomes, including school attendance and graduation rates.

JROTC continues to have strong participation from schools with demographically diverse populations and public high schools with high minority populations. JROTC is also well represented in schools serving economically disadvantaged populations, whether measured by Title I eligibility or free and reduced-price lunch program participation. Three of four JROTC schools are economically disadvantaged, and approximately 60% of students are of diverse backgrounds.

Conclusion

To say that any case of instructor misconduct is unacceptable is in an understatement. JROTC should be the shining example of duty, honor, and country within the schools we serve. This issue has the attention of the highest levels of Department leadership. Our full review of governing policies and regulations is just the first step to ensuring we have effective oversight of the JROTC program. The Department of Defense has a sacred obligation to protect those in our charge and maintain high standards for the military retirees who are privileged to continue to wear the Nation's uniform while working for school districts as JROTC instructors. We remain profoundly committed to doing right by our students and our school partners by providing the support and resources necessary to for JROTC to develop future citizens and leaders of our Nation.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.