

U. S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



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**TESTIMONY OF
ADMIRAL FAGAN
COMMANDANT, U.S. COAST GUARD**

**ON
“ENHANCING PERSONNEL RESOURCES
TO SUPPORT A STRONGER MORE RESILIENT COAST GUARD”**

**BEFORE THE
HOUSE COAST GUARD & MARITIME TRANSPORTATION (H.CG&MT) SUBCOMMITTEE**

JULY 27, 2022

Introduction

Chairman Carbajal, Ranking Member Gibbs, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today and thank you for your enduring support of the United States Coast Guard. I am humbled and grateful for the confidence and trust of President Biden, Secretary Mayorkas, and Congress.

I welcome this opportunity to share with you my vision for the Service, which is responsive to the changing world and includes three tenets: Transform our Total Workforce, Sharpen Our Competitive Edge, and Advance Our Mission Excellence.

The Coast Guard workforce is my highest priority. Without our workforce, we cannot operate or maintain our cutters, boats, and aircraft, or uphold standards for commercial vessel safety and pollution prevention. I am committed to providing our people innovative tools, inclusive policies, trustworthy technology, modernized training, and exceptional support to meet the demands of today and tomorrow.

Challenges

Talent management is critically important for the Coast Guard today, as it is for all organizations. Our current personnel system has not changed significantly in 75 years. People serving in the military today have different expectations for their professional lives, and we must adjust the way we recruit, train, and retain our people to continue to be an employer of choice.

The Coast Guard, like the other armed services, is facing a recruiting challenge. Today, fewer young people are qualified and interested in military service than in the past. Additionally, COVID-19 affected the Coast Guard's ability to conduct in-person recruiting, weakening historical community partnerships. Our Service is now competing for talent in a post-pandemic job market with historically low unemployment rates, where even entry-level jobs offer benefits similar to the military, including signing bonuses, referral bonuses, 401K retirement plans, and medical benefits.

In response, we must transform our personnel processes, policies, and practices to recruit and retain the Coast Guard workforce that our Nation requires. Our Ready Workforce 2030 (RW30) strategic outlook focuses on creating a system with the ability to generate the force we need, when and where we need it. The RW30 initiatives are more than aspirational; we are taking action.

Transform Talent Management

The world's most capable and talented Coast Guard has over 57,000 active duty, reserve, and civilian personnel, supported by 21,000 Auxiliary volunteers. To grow and retain our workforce, we are transforming our talent management to create opportunities for flexible assignments, advancements, workplaces, and careers. These policy changes will enable our people to serve our Nation to their best potential.

The Coast Guard is committed to representing the best of our Nation's diverse talent, and providing an inclusive environment for all who serve. The Coast Guard's Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP), published in June 2020, is a call to action for our entire workforce. It helps our people identify and mitigate biases, work together to nurture a sense of shared belonging, and continue to improve the culture of our Service. Since the release of the DIAP, the Coast Guard developed a cadre of trained Change Agents; formed the Commandant's Inclusive Leadership, Excellence, and Diversity Council (ILEAD); created a senior leader position for a Strategic Advisor for Diversity and Inclusion; and strengthened our ties to affinity groups to bring employees together and foster cohesion in the workplace.

We have enlisted the assistance of experts from outside our organization to look at the challenges faced by women and other minority groups and develop strong solutions. Acting on those recommendations, we have implemented several workforce initiatives to improve equitable outcomes for women and underrepresented minorities, including revised uniform, tattoo, and grooming standards; flexible assignment policies to better facilitate co-location of dual military families; and a revised body composition program.

Those improvements are already paying dividends for our workforce and mission execution. More women are remaining in our Service. Today there are 28% more women serving at the critically important mid-grade leadership ranks than there were in 2017. Furthermore, I am proud to share that the Coast Guard Academy class of 2026 is 43% female and 37% underrepresented minorities.

We are working to improve outcomes for all who serve. To help our enlisted workforce best plan and navigate their career paths, we recently launched an Enlisted Career Management Branch to provide personalized support as they develop their assignment, training, and education plans. Service members who can clearly see how their careers will progress to positions of greater responsibility are more engaged in their work and more likely to continue to serve. A similar team of advisors for our civilian workforce is also up and running, as we continue to imbue our civilian employees with broad and diverse skillsets to achieve mission success.

Our diverse workforce is the heartbeat of our Service, and we must ensure they are valued, respected, and rewarded for their hard work. Our people and their diverse talents, skills, and interests facilitate success across all missions.

Human Resource Analytics and Modernized Training Systems

A robust and flexible talent management system requires improved human resource analytics. In today's data-driven world, the Coast Guard requires better personnel data to support decisions at all levels. We are working to deploy well-governed systems and processes that integrate data to enable senior leaders to make well-informed strategic human resources decisions.

We will soon stand up the Office of Data and Analytics (OD&A) to provide secure and timely data integration to leverage data's full potential as a strategic asset. We are deploying platforms to enable easier access to data, including the new Coast Guard Official Military Personnel File, which will contain health records and pay documents for all Coast Guard military personnel. This work will provide us a better understanding of our workforce, and allow us to better plan for the future, efficiently deploy resources, and optimize mission management.

Coast Guard mission excellence depends on a technically skilled workforce and experienced leadership. Our system of performance-based training is effective, but to maintain our competitive edge, the Coast Guard must modernize our training delivery to be more agile. Rapid changes in technology and new mission demands require even experienced operators to receive regular skill upgrades. We are deploying training programs tailored to the skills, experience, and needs of each individual to enable our workforce to rapidly reskill and keep pace with a fast-changing operational landscape.

We have already revised initial technical training for our enlisted workforce to offer each student a customized curriculum based on skills and experience they already have. We also implemented a mentoring program that utilizes state of the art software to match mentors and mentees, providing our entire workforce the ability to connect with more experienced people who may guide their development. Strong mentoring relationships contribute to mission excellence and improved retention.

A better-informed talent management system with efficient training will provide our workforce exactly what they need to accomplish their missions in a changing world.

Provide World Class Member Support

As one of the six Armed Forces of the United States, the Nation's lead maritime enforcement agency, and a maritime safety regulatory agency, our dedicated Coast Guard workforce is on the front lines every day protecting our Nation's maritime domain from constantly evolving threats. We must provide housing, healthcare, and childcare to ensure they can focus fully their demanding missions.

The Coast Guard has enhanced our workforce's quality of life through improved support programs. We have modified assignment policies to better facilitate the co-location of dual military families, expanded our parental leave policy, and created a program to enable Coast Guard Reservists to backfill for active duty members on prenatal, maternity, convalescent, and primary caregiver leave. All of these programs make service easier for those who want to serve the Nation, but also serve their families.

We continue to improve healthcare service and access to care for our workforce and their families. We are currently expanding access to telehealth services, online appointment scheduling, and electronic health records, and improving access to key health services such as dental care, physical therapy, and behavioral health services.

We are prioritizing family support by expanding access to childcare options, expanding professional development opportunities to include free LinkedIn subscriptions and assistance to spouses desiring to participate in fellowships with civilian employers. We offer expanded Work-Life services to our families and our global network of ombudsmen - who serve as the critical communications link between commands and families - as part of our robust support system for families. The Coast Guard is grateful that since 2019, Congress has provided additional funding for our childcare subsidy program, expanding the program to more of our workforce, and providing targeted financial relief to those living in high-cost childcare areas. This support allows the Coast Guard's active duty workforce to overcome the challenge of balancing military service and their family life. I want to emphasize my commitment to the entirety of 'Team Coast Guard.' Our families are essential to mission success.

Programs that help our workforce pursue off duty education are more important than ever before. We recently increased the amount of tuition assistance available to uniformed members, and we are looking for ways to expand educational benefits to our civilian employees for the first time in 10 years. Reflecting the increased permeability of modern careers, the Coast Guard's Credentialing Opportunities Online (CG COOL) program helps our workforce earn professional credentials based on their Coast Guard experience. As members prepare to transition, they can now spend their last six months training with a civilian business while remaining on active duty. The Skillbridge program's on-the-job training and internships often lead to full-time positions, and help our members translate their military skills to success in the civilian workforce. The ability to translate Coast Guard experience to the civilian workforce makes service more attractive to potential recruits.

The Service remains steadfast in providing and expanding key support, advocacy, and recovery services for victims of military sexual trauma and incidents of hate or harassment. We recently expanded access to Sexual Assault Prevention Response and Recovery (SAPRR) services to family members and former employees. Furthermore, the Coast Guard's Special Victims Counsel program provides legal representation to eligible individuals to help victims understand their rights and options through the military justice process. The Coast Guard is reforming its approach to prosecuting sexual assault, domestic violence, and related crimes under the Uniform Code of Military Justice in accordance with the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2022. Finally, the Service's Anti-Hate and Harassment Incident (AHHI) policy includes a process for investigations and helps commands to promote an environment free of bullying and harassment through transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

As we look to the future, we unite around a cohesive purpose: to lead our workforce to contribute to their greatest potential, and therefore achieve mission excellence in the service of this great Nation. The key support we provide to our people allows them to remain dedicated to their primary duties to protect the Homeland from all corners of the world, save those in peril, enhance our economic prosperity, protect our national resources, enhance resilience to severe weather, and strengthen the international rules-based order.

I look forward to working with Congress to establish ways for the Coast Guard to be more adaptive, connected, and supportive. With the continued support of the Administration and Congress, your Coast Guard will continue to live up to our motto – *Semper Paratus* – Always Ready.