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HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
DEFENSE

STATEMENT OF
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SUPERINTENDENT OF THE UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY
BEFORE THE
HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON
DEFENSE
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Overview

Chairwoman McCollum, ranking member Calvert, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the United States Naval Academy (USNA). The Naval Academy's mission is to develop midshipmen morally, mentally, and physically and to imbue them with the highest ideals of duty, honor, and loyalty in order to graduate leaders who are dedicated to a career of naval service. It is imperative that we accomplish this mission with midshipmen in residence, in person. In my professional opinion, you cannot develop leaders online.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented incredible obstacles to achieving that mission over the last 12 months. We had to rapidly adapt our organization to meet the threat of COVID and continue to execute our mission safely and effectively. However, despite these challenges and obstacles presented by the novel coronavirus pandemic, I am pleased to report to you today that USNA is succeeding in its mission of graduating leaders to serve our country.

Despite unprecedented challenges to achieving our mission due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, USNA continued to educate, develop and commission our next generation of leaders for the Navy and Marine Corps on time. This past summer, we successfully commissioned the Class of 2020 with an overall graduation rate of 87.1%, well above the DoD requirement of 75%. Additionally, in 2020, *US News and World Report* ranked USNA the #1 Top Public School of National Liberal Arts Colleges for the second year in a row. And, the Class of 2020 boasted one Marshall and one Churchill scholarship recipient, a further testament to our high-caliber academic program here in Annapolis.

This past summer, we also brought aboard the Class of 2024 for an in-person Plebe Summer experience. They are a talented and enthusiastic cadre of midshipmen from across our nation. They have the third highest SAT/ACT average score and the third highest percentage of students in the top 10% of their high school class in USNA's history. The Class of 2024 also has a record-breaking 30.5% women. With induction of the Class of 2024, USNA is the most diverse it has been in its history and has the highest percentage of women at any time before. We are proud of the resilience and dedication displayed by our newest Naval Academy class, who were inducted in the midst of a pandemic.

COVID-19 Impacts

In March 2020, as the rapid spread of COVID-19 nationwide became a reality, the Naval Academy directed the entire Brigade of Midshipmen to not return to Annapolis from their spring break holiday while we continued to learn more about the nature of this threat. In only two weeks, we shifted our entire academic curriculum to fully-online learning for the first time in Naval Academy history. This was only possible due to the ingenuity and teamwork of our entire academic faculty, Information Technology support staff, and the Brigade. We successfully completed the last month and a half of spring semester fully online in order to meet our goal to graduate and commission the Class of 2020 on time to begin their service in the Fleet. In place of our traditional Commissioning Week activities, the members of the Class of 2020 participated in five small socially-distanced “swearing in” ceremonies in Tecumseh Court at USNA, in the same location they took their Oath of Office on Induction Day. We are proud of the resilience shown by the Class of 2020 as they continued to lead the Brigade from locations spread around the country and of the selflessness and humility they demonstrated in foregoing a traditional commissioning week celebration in Annapolis.

After commissioning the Class of 2020, our next pressing challenge was to safely induct the Class of 2024 in order to ensure we continued to meet our critical accessions requirements for the Navy and Marine Corps. Naval Academy leadership, our medical team, and the leaders of the Classes of 2021 and 2022 worked as one cohesive team to develop and execute a safe and effective in-person Plebe Summer for the Class of 2024. The staff could not rely on decades old protocols and procedures for conducting plebe summer due to the risk of rapid transmission of COVID in how we traditionally executed training for the Plebe Regiment. Instead, the Naval Academy conducted Plebe Summer in small self-contained “pods” of 40-48 plebes and their detailers to accomplish necessary Plebe Summer training while minimizing contact between “pods.” This method of organizing training activities successfully mitigated the spread of COVID-19 between the “pods” when cases arose. Despite the drastic changes to the organizational structure of Plebe Summer, the Classes of 2021 and 2022 detailers provided a challenging and sufficient program for the newest class of Naval Academy midshipmen.

Due to the cancellation of all Fleet supported summer training activities, we elected to conduct a robust and unparalleled online summer school curriculum to help offset the number of credits students would have to take during an unpredictable Fall semester. Over 300 faculty

members instructed courses over the summer to allow 5,900 summer school “seats” to be filled; a normal summer curriculum would serve 750 seats. Many midshipmen were able to reduce their fall course load by one to two classes and move closer to completing their graduation requirements in lieu of the cancelled traditional summer training opportunities.

Our final goal during 2020 was to return the entire Brigade to Annapolis to conduct Fall semester in-person. As stated up front, it is our firm belief at the Naval Academy that you cannot develop leaders online. By the start of fall semester, many of our midshipmen had been away from the Naval Academy for over six months. While we are proud of our success in providing a comprehensive online academic curriculum to students during the spring and summer, we did not feel as though we could translate the leadership and physical development aspects of our mission effectively online.

So, once again, the Naval Academy recalibrated how our most basic operations are conducted in order to keep the entire Brigade safe on the Yard in close proximity during the Fall semester. At the advice of our medical staff, we dedicated the Second Wing of Bancroft Hall, our 4,500-person dormitory, entirely to quarantine and isolation space for midshipmen diagnosed with COVID and “close contacts.” To make up for the lost dormitory space, and in order to further reduce the population density in our communal living spaces, the Naval Academy leased eight dormitories from neighboring St. John’s College in Annapolis, MD to house approximately 375 midshipmen for fall semester. We also shifted all of our meal services to takeaway food service only. And, we outfitted our classrooms with technology to enable hybrid in-person and remote learning simultaneously to reduce in-person class sizes and allow for proper social-distancing.

During the fall semester, based on the advice and close collaboration with the Air Force Academy’s pandemic math team, the Naval Academy instituted a robust COVID-19 surveillance testing protocol, Sentinel Suppression Testing (SST), in order to quickly isolate emerging COVID outbreaks on the Yard. The Naval Academy tested 15% of our faculty, staff, and midshipmen weekly beginning the week of August 30th, 2020. Due to our testing protocols, and the rigorous adherence to social distancing and health protocols, our COVID-19 positivity rates remained extremely low during the Fall semester, and consistently lower than rates in Anne Arundel County and the State of Maryland. Through regular surveillance testing of a random population sample, we were able to see that when our positivity rates did increase on the Yard, it

was tied to periods in which we saw influxes of individuals from outside our protected bubble such as Induction Day and the fall and spring reform of the Brigade. Additionally, our numbers tended to rise in conjunction with prevailing rates in the local community when we permitted midshipmen off-Yard liberty. Accordingly, we determined parameters for off-Yard liberty based upon local community COVID-19 data and our on Yard COVID rates. Additionally, and despite our faculty and staff living in the local community and transiting to and from the Yard each day, we experienced no known transmission of COVID in the classroom environment, a testament to the effectiveness of our social-distancing, cleaning protocols and masking guidelines in our classroom.

In order to enable our physical mission to continue safely, our Naval Academy Athletic Association worked in close collaboration with our medical staff as well as our varsity athletic conferences and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to develop a comprehensive “resocialization of sport” plan to reintroduce physical activity and team sports in the COVID environment. During the fall semester, we safely conducted our fall Physical Readiness Test, individual physical training, as well as 53 intercollegiate athletic events across 17 different sports to include our annual matchup against Army in football. While we wish the score had ended in our favor, we are proud of the teamwork with our fellow service academy, Army West Point, that facilitated the 121st playing of the Army Navy game under unprecedented circumstances at the U.S. Military Academy’s Michie Stadium. We believe our physical mission, particularly intercollegiate athletic competition, instills priceless stamina, grit, resilience and a competitive mindset in our future navy and marine corps officers.

Due to our proven success at controlling COVID-19 spread within our Naval Academy community throughout the Fall semester, we felt safe to reform the Brigade for spring semester in Annapolis after an extended period of winter holiday leave despite high COVID positivity rates around the nation. We have resumed SST as well as commenced vaccinating our faculty and staff in accordance with DoD guidelines as vaccine supplies permit. We hope to commence midshipmen vaccinations in the near future in order to allow for midshipmen to safely participate in summer training without risking the health of our operational Fleet units. We will follow our proven health protocols from the fall semester in order to keep all members of our Naval Academy community safe.

COVID-19 and Mental Health

While demonstrating incredible resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Brigade of Midshipmen is not immune to the mental health struggles the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated in many of their peers at colleges across the nation. Our team at the Midshipmen Development Center (MDC), our main provider of mental health counseling for midshipmen, has closely monitored emerging data to assess national trends related to mental health amongst college students throughout the pandemic. In order to continue care for existing clients, and intake new clients during the Brigade's prolonged absence from Annapolis last spring, MDC rapidly transitioned to offering all services, including individual and group counseling, sports psychology, trauma and eating disorders specialty services, and nutritional counseling online. This included navigating the legal and privacy requirements for mental health work across state lines, training all staff in the ethics and best practices of telehealth delivery, and completing telework protocols with HR.

Last spring, the MDC conducted a mental health and resilience survey of the Brigade using validated measures of anxiety, depression, resilience, and a questionnaire to gauge the impact of COVID-19 on various aspects of functioning. With approximately 600 respondents, this information was used to tailor MDC services, coordinate with other activities on the Yard (Chaplains, Midshipmen Affairs Team) and to inform leadership at all levels about midshipmen demands and needs. When the Brigade returned to the Yard for Fall Semester, the MDC conducted a follow up survey. With approximately 700 respondents, the survey indicated increased stress, including feelings of anxiety and depression, but the majority of respondents were coping without significant negative impact. This is likely due to the high rate of self-reported resilience among respondents – over 90% reported normal or high resilience during the first survey, and the number was over 80% at the second survey.

While there were clear indicators of increased distress within the Brigade during this period, our data shows that the majority are coping without significant negative impact. Also, while some did experience increased distress with increased symptoms of anxiety, depression, and difficulty related to maintaining connections and adjusting to online education, we did not see evidence of an increase in mental health *disorders*. Our mental health team is also closely monitoring trends regarding suicidal ideations and hospitalizations during this challenging time and has identified no significant trend upwards in these categories due to the pandemic. The

MDC, our active duty Chaplains, Brigade Medical, and our entire senior leadership team are closely monitoring the mental health of the Brigade and will continue to prioritize their physical *and mental* well-being during this difficult period.

Physics Exam Investigation

The unusual circumstances posed by COVID-19, from our midshipmen's extended time away from the Naval Academy environment to our shift to online and hybrid-learning has posed challenges in maintaining the highest standards of adherence to our moral mission and professional expectations of midshipmen. At this time, we are actively investigating potential irregularities in the administration of the in-person, proctored, computer-based final exam for Physics 1 (SP211), a sophomore-level course. We treat academic integrity very seriously here at the Naval Academy and will ensure we are upholding the highest standards of professionalism and honor regardless of the unusual circumstances posed by COVID-19 to our academic curriculum this year.

Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program

We must continue this fight and eliminate sexual assault from our institution. Our midshipmen are our future, and they must hold themselves and each other to the high standards we expect. That means eradicating the scourge of sexual assault. We cannot fail.

The Naval Academy must be a visible cornerstone of a values-based naval culture of dignity and mutual respect in which sexual assault is eliminated and never tolerated, where sexual assault survivors receive compassionate support, and where offenders are held accountable. My team and I are fully committed to these important issues, and this program remains at the forefront of my priorities. We continue to build upon our past efforts, improving prevention efforts and strengthening response support for victims of sexual assault and sexual harassment.

To better address challenges with student culture, we established the Midshipmen Affairs Team. This multi-disciplinary organization comprised of leaders from all programs addressing destructive behaviors (including sexual assault, sexual harassment, discrimination, suicide, alcohol misuse and intimate partner violence), has significantly increased collaboration across

the institution and developed a comprehensive prevention plan across all programs for the Brigade.

While we have dedicated significant effort at the senior leadership level to these issues, we realize that this is a midshipmen problem that requires midshipmen solutions. Several seniors in our Computer Science and Information Technology fields of study are working to develop a SAPR App that aims to encourage help seeking, reporting and bystander intervention. Functionality of the application will include links to resources and intervention strategies, as well as a tracking program where friends can discreetly reach out to one another.

We have also strengthened efforts to prepare peer-helping groups to better support the Brigade based on past survey and focus group results. Our midshipmen peer helping groups, consisting of Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention Education (SHAPE) Peer Educators and Guidance, Understanding, Information, Direction and Education - GUIDEs, received updated training to addresses concerns and counter inaccurate narratives.

Success in these programs depends on the Brigade trusting their peer leaders. To promote responsibility and accountability among midshipmen leaders, we have partnered with the RAND Corporation to conduct a Pilot Climate Assessment that will allow these young leaders to better identify challenges within their units and give them the opportunity to address climate issues under their leadership. Our partnership with RAND has also resulted in the creation of a new anonymous sexual harassment reporting mechanism. This form is readily available online and affords members anonymity, if desired. This option augments the traditional reporting mechanisms already in place and we believe will encourage increased reporting of incidents of sexual harassment from active bystanders and from those who prefer not to be identified.

Our Response staff has made a concerted effort to publicize the Catch a Serial Offender (CATCH) Program, and we have noted increased program use as a result. Additionally, the Naval Academy has implemented a Safe to Report policy, which aims to eliminate collateral misconduct as a barrier to reporting incidents of sexual assault.

In close coordination with the U.S. Air Force Academy, we successfully executed the first transfer of a survivor of sexual assault to another Military Service Academy. These groundbreaking efforts will help shape the enduring policy currently being developed by a cross-service working group.

While the Naval Academy has made significant progress within the SAPR Program, we know there is room for continued growth. Accordingly, we are currently engaged in a two-year partnership with the National Opinion Research Center to create and implement an outcome evaluation of our education program's effectiveness. We feel more responsible than ever not only to ensure that every member of the Brigade of Midshipmen can flourish in an environment of dignity and respect, but also to prepare them to better lead Sailors and Marines in the fleet that come directly from that society we are entrusted to protect.

Diversity & Inclusion

The racial justice movement in America during summer of 2020 impacted many members of our Naval Academy community and the events of this past summer have provoked important conversations regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus. While we are proud of our diversity and inclusion efforts, these conversations revealed there is continued work to be done at the Naval Academy in these areas so that we can attract, retain, and develop a diverse cadre of future Navy and Marine Corps officers who are resilient, innovative, and equipped to lead in a highly diverse, social complex, multi-generational workforce.

Our efforts on campus are in line with Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral Gilday's Culture of Excellence and Task Force One Navy (TF1N) initiatives which strives to identify and root out systemic biases in our force's policies and practices. As part of this Navy-wide program, the Naval Academy stood up Task Force USNA (TFUSNA) to identify and address any instances of systemic bias to include hiring and admissions practices; midshipmen, faculty, and staff performance evaluations; conduct and honor adjudication results; faculty, staff, and midshipmen leadership position distribution; recognition; and healthcare access. This initiative is being led by our Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI) in partnership with our Stockdale Center for Ethical Leadership.

In addition to these top down efforts led by CNO Gilday, many members of our Naval Academy community stepped up to initiate movements from within our organization. Our 2030 U.S. Naval Academy Strategic Plan, formulated by stakeholders from across the institution, emphasizes the long-term importance of diversity and inclusion to our mission at the Naval Academy from recruiting and retaining diverse midshipmen, faculty, and staff to identifying and addressing systemic biases.

Our midshipmen have also taken the lead on many diversity and inclusion initiatives, demonstrating ownership in the culture of the Brigade. For the first time, USNA appointed a midshipman Brigade Dignity and Respect Officer whose role includes fostering an inclusive campus that treats midshipmen with dignity, honor and respect. The midshipmen also stood up a cadre of Diversity Peer Educators (DPE) this year who will serve as diversity and inclusion practitioners and subject matter experts for information and support on topics surrounding race, ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation. DPEs undergo initial training as well as monthly follow-on training which they can use to continue to educate their companies, teams, and organizations on the Yard and serve as a trusted peer advisor and mediator within Bancroft Hall.

Our athletic department organized the Naval Academy Athletic Association (NAAA) Council on Racial Equity (CRE) to facilitate efforts for varsity athletes, coaches, administrators, and staff to promote racial equity and inclusion in the NAAA programs and teams within the USNA environment. This council includes athletic administrators, coaches, a sports psychologist, and athletes and encourages midshipmen actions that promote social consciousness within the locker room and the Brigade of Midshipmen. Our football team has leveraged their role as visible campus leaders to host roundtable discussions with local and state law enforcement personnel, open forums with faculty and alumni.

Sea Level Rise

While our attention has been inevitably focused on the near-term threat of COVID-19 to the health and safety of our organization, we have not lost sight of the long-term existential threat that climate change and sea level rise pose to our continued operations here in Annapolis in the centuries ahead. Located at the confluence of the Severn River and Chesapeake Bay, the Naval Academy is vulnerable to storm surge associated with major weather events and localized, high-tide flooding that is exacerbated by sustained easterly or southerly winds. Since 1929, the relative sea level in Annapolis has risen slightly more than one foot, which has significantly increased the occurrences of nuisance flooding from 2-3 times per year to 30-40 times per year and left USNA more vulnerable to major storms such as Hurricane Isabel in 2003. Recovery following that destructive hurricane took well over a year and cost over \$120M. Impacts from storm surges and high-tide flooding affect daily operations through closures of roads, sidewalks

and building entry points. With greater frequency and increased amounts of water, the negative impacts are being increasingly felt throughout Naval Academy operations. Long-term, without future action, many of USNA's buildings and historic infrastructure as well as the effective execution of the Academy's mission are at risk.

Generated primarily by glacier and ice sheet loss and thermal expansion of the ocean due to warming from the sun and the atmosphere, and exacerbated by the subsidence of land mass in the mid-Atlantic region, local or relative sea level rise in the Annapolis area is expected to continue well into the future. The Naval Academy established its Sea Level Rise Advisory Council (SLRAC) in 2015 to provide analysis, guidance and recommendations on issues surrounding sea level rise, with specific focus on the impacts to operational requirements of the Academy. The SLRAC focused on recent interagency, peer-reviewed studies and consulted with several subject matter experts. The studies are generally consistent in terms of the range of 21st century sea level rise values associated with stabilized and growing greenhouse gas emissions scenarios, with the differences between the stabilized and growing emissions scenarios not pronounced until the latter half of this century.

Based on the recommendations of the SLRAC, which worked in coordination with the City of Annapolis, I believe it is prudent to plan for Mean Sea Level (MSL) rise values associated with a growing emissions scenario (the interagency "Intermediated scenario from the 2017 National Climate Assessment) for projects with a relatively low risk tolerance. For this scenario, the 50% probability elevations above the currently defined mean sea level in Annapolis are approximately 1.8 ft in 2050, 3 ft in 2075, and 4.4 ft in 2100. Under this Intermediate scenario, an average high tide (Mean High Water) would reach the threshold for flooding of low-lying roads daily at the Naval Academy by 2050. In planning for flood protection measures, periodic storms should be considered in addition to MSL rise. The Naval Academy has adopted the following estimates for extreme water levels associated with storms: 1-year storm (2.4 ft), 10-year storm (3.7 ft), 50-year storm (5.2 ft), and 100-year storm (5.8 ft). These storm tide values are relative to MSL, so they must be added to future sea level rise projections. As an example, the water level of an annual flooding event (i.e., associated with a 1-year storm) would reach 4.2 ft above the currently defined MSL (1.8 ft sea level rise plus 2.4 ft storm tide) by 2050, sufficient to flood the parking lots in the center of the campus, and 6.8 ft above the current MSL by 2100, which would produce flooding similar to Hurricane Isabel. These recommended sea level rise

and storm tide projections are consistent with those contained in the recently released DoD Regional Sea Level Rise database.

Since Hurricane Isabel in 2003, the Naval Academy, in partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers, has developed and implemented several mitigation strategies to address major storms and stormwater surge. These have included flood resistant design and construction of two recent major infrastructure projects (Hopper Hall and Wesley Brown Field House), installation of temporary door and window dams during flooding threats, and stormwater repairs to control recurring storm and tidal flooding at various locations on the campus.

The challenges associated with rising tidal conditions, land subsidence and storm water management have my full attention and the Academy is working on a plan to address the associated infrastructure and operational risks. As directed by the FY19 NDAA, the installation is currently undertaking a major, long-term planning effort to develop a Military Installation Resilience Plan. Serving as a Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) Headquarters Pilot, the plan is being developed through a joint effort between Commander, Naval Installations Command, NAVFAC, Naval Support Activity Annapolis, USNA and the City of Annapolis. By the end of 2021, the full plan will be complete, providing a course of action and a year-by-year execution strategy to cohesively address and mitigate the combined effects of land subsidence, sea level rise, ground water change, coastal flooding/storm surge and inadequate stormwater management at USNA. Courses of action will likely include a mix of approaches: structural (seawalls, stormwater retrofits); natural (earthen berms/levees, living shorelines); non-structural (change land use); and temporary solutions to issues where long-term permanent projection may take years to implement. The development of this plan is a significant step forward for us as we look to the future of the Naval Academy and our ability to effectively execute our mission.

Conclusion

For 175 years, the Naval Academy has met its mission as the premier accession source for Navy and Marine Corps officers in the nation. Our four-year immersion program is designed to produce leaders of character and consequence for our Fleet. We believe that this character development process can only occur fully and effectively here in Annapolis, in-person, when our midshipmen are leading or being led by their peers, and developed and influenced by our world class faculty and staff. This is why, despite the challenges and risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, we returned the full Brigade of Midshipmen to Annapolis as soon as was safely

possible. We are proud of our ability to accomplish our academic mission remotely this spring, but we are most proud of the efforts of our entire faculty and staff that created the conditions to safely return the Brigade to campus and execute our mission in-person during the 2020-2021 Academic Year.

The Naval Academy still has great challenges ahead from continuing to combat COVID-19, to creating a more diverse and inclusive campus environment, to preparing our physical infrastructure for the imminent threat posed by sea level rise. I believe that our top-notch team of senior leaders, faculty, and staff are prepared to meet those challenges using the same ingenuity, flexibility, and adaptability that has allowed us to continue our mission in the face of a global pandemic. We are proud of our legacy at the Naval Academy and are prepared to continue to develop leaders our nation can be proud of for another 175 years here in Annapolis.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the United States Naval Academy. I would also like to thank the members of this subcommittee for their support of our Military Service Academies; both in terms of the funding we receive to execute our vital missions, but also for your personal efforts in nominating quality candidates from your respective districts as prospective cadets and midshipmen. We would be honored to support you or your staff for a tour of the Naval Academy and visit with midshipmen, as your schedules permit. I look forward to your questions.