

**MEMBER DAY TESTIMONY**  
**House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security**

Thank you, Madame Chairwoman, Ranking Member Fleischmann and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee.

I appreciate your invitation to appear before the Subcommittee today. It's an honor to be here in person to advocate for my district's priorities in this year's Homeland Security Appropriations bill.

Last week, I had the privilege of hosting the Commandant of the Coast Guard, Admiral Karl Schultz, in the Lowcountry for his annual State of the Coast Guard address. In his remarks, he announced that the service will be substantially increasing its presence in the Charleston area, potentially growing into the largest concentration of Coast Guard assets and personnel in the country.

The brave men and women of the Coast Guard have the courage and conviction to live a life of service, and I am excited to have the opportunity to welcome more of them to their new homes in the Lowcountry in the coming years.

And, as their Representative in Congress, I am responsible for ensuring that they have the resources they need to do their job; a responsibility that I do not take lightly.

One of my very first official visits as a United States Congressman was to a local Coast Guard station in Charleston, in the midst of the longest government shutdown in American history.

These heroic young Americans hadn't been paid in weeks and were struggling to make ends meet. I had to look them in the eye and promise them I would do everything I could to end the shutdown and get them backpay as soon as possible.

Their government let them down. Ensuring all of our servicemembers are paid on time is one of our most basic responsibilities as their representatives. Anything less is irreconcilable with our oaths to support and defend the constitution and an insult to our men and women in uniform.

We must also make sure Coast Guard servicemembers, and their families, have access to the benefits and support equal to those available to their counterparts in the other military services. Last year, we took an important step in the right direction in the FY20 NDAA, which contained my amendment expanding access to the DoD's My Career Advancement Accounts scholarship program if the Coast Guard reimburses DoD.

The MyCAA program assists military spouses to pursue licenses, certifications, or associate degrees necessary to start a new career. This program is critical because, not only does it improve employment outcomes for participating spouses, it also serves as an important tool to boost retention. A 2018 study conducted by RAND found that servicemembers who used the program were up to eight percent more likely to stay in the military.

To ensure Coast Guard spouses, and the Coast Guard as a whole, are able to benefit from this vital program, I ask that the committee provide the service with the funding necessary to participate.

This year's NDAA also included my amendment authorizing the Coast Guard to establish and maintain their own Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps program. As you know, prior to the enactment of the FY20 NDAA, the USCG did not have the authority to create new JROTC programs without an explicit authorization by law, depriving students across the country of the opportunity to learn valuable life skills.

An expanded Coast Guard JROTC program will serve as a valuable recruiting tool and instill the service's core values of Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty in thousands of our nation's young men and women, regardless of their plans after graduation. Accordingly, I urge the committee to ensure they have the resources and funding necessary to implement this program.

I also want to offer my support for funding included in the President's Budget towards personnel increases and infrastructure improvements at Base Charleston to homeport a fifth National Security Cutter. The Lowcountry is slated to become a center of gravity in the Coast Guard's homeland security and national defense missions. So, it is imperative we provide them the funding they need to renovate and enhance existing facilities to expedite their planned expansions in Charleston.

Finally, I want to thank each of you again for your important work as Members of this Subcommittee. I look forward to working with you to ensure our homeland security agencies have the resources they need to keep us safe.