STATEMENT OF

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HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

BEFORE THE

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS AND

RELATED AGENCIES

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OPENING

Chairman Dent, Ranking Member Bishop, and distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide you with an update on the commitment of the Marine Corps to our Marines and their families. Chairman Dent, congratulations on your appointment as Chairman of this important Subcommittee that provides for our Service Members, their families, and veterans.

It is a privilege to sit in front of you today as the eighteenth Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps. It is an honor that the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Dunford, chose me to serve as his highest ranking senior enlisted advisor. My focus will be on mission accomplishment and taking care of Marines and their families. I look forward to working with such a great leader in the coming years, leading our Marines through any endeavor that Congress and the American people ask of us.

UPDATE ON MARINE CORPS AROUND THE WORLD

As we continue to drawdown and reduce end strength, the Marine Corps continues to deploy across the world to support those in need, assist in training, and participate in exercises to support our partners and allies in times of need, build partner capacity, and assure access to the global commons. In Calendar Year 2014, the Marine Corps conducted over 30 amphibious operations, 300 theater security cooperation events, and participated in over 130 exercises. Your Marines in Afghanistan concluded six years of sustained combat operations while building the Afghan National Security Force’s capabilities under Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Your Marines supported Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) by reinforcing the U.S. Embassy in Iraq, enhancing the Iraqi Security Forces’ combat capabilities, and conducting humanitarian assistance missions. Additionally, your Marines also conducted numerous kinetic strikes in Syria and Iraq.
to degrade, disrupt, and defeat ISIL and the Khorasan Group. The 13th, 22nd, 11th and 31st Marine Expeditionary Units deployed in Fiscal Year 2014 providing operational flexibility and responsiveness to the geographic combatant commanders for crisis response operations while support numerous bi-lateral and multi-national exercises globally. Other Marine Corps operations included, but are not limited to:

- Operation Onward Liberty, which continued the maturation and professional development of the Armed Forces of Liberia.

- Georgia Deployment Program, which assisted in organizing, training, equipping, deploying and redeploying three Georgian Infantry Battalions to conduct force protection and Quick Reaction Force missions in support of the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan.

- Sixteen embassy reinforcement missions were executed by the Marine Security Guard Augmentation Unit to nine countries around the world. The Marine Security Guard Augmentation Unit also supported thirteen VIP Presidential/Vice Presidential/Secretary of State security missions in twelve countries.

- Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Crisis Response-Africa (SPMAGTF-CR-AF) forward deployed to the USAFRICOM Area of Responsibility (AOR) in response to a broad range of military operations on the continent of Africa. SPMAGTF-CR-AF provided an infantry Company as a crisis response capability to Monrovia, Liberia to support the U.S. military’s response to the Ebola crisis in West Africa as part of Operation United Assistance.
• Additionally, SPMAGTF-CR provided support to Operation OAKEN SONNET contingency operations in the South Sudan and executed Operation OAKEN LOTUS – the military assisted departure of U.S. personnel from the U.S. U.S. Embassy and Annex in Tripoli, Libya.

• The Marine Corps stood up Marine Air-Ground Task Force-Crisis Response-Central Command (SPMAGTF-CR-CC) on 1 October 2014 as part of the “new normal” in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. SPMAGTF-CR-CC was recently identified to support Task Force Al Asad as part of Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) Build Partner Capacity (BPC) mission.

The Marine Corps continues to maintain its operational readiness and commitment to the nation. While remaining fully engaged globally, the Marine Corps continues to execute its end strength drawdown. We have accomplished this requirement while sustaining the key tenet of a measured and responsible drawdown—keeping faith with our Marines by minimizing involuntary attrition, maximizing voluntary actions, while maintaining the right number of Marines in every grade.

To meet the necessary end strength requirements, during Fiscal Year 2014, the Marine Corps implemented a Staff Sergeant Retention Board to consider for separation Staff Sergeants between 15 and 18 years of service who were twice passed for promotion. Following the Fiscal Year 2014 Gunny Sergeant Selection Board, approximately 230 Staff Sergeants were selected for separation by the Staff Sergeant Retention Board and all were eligible for early retirement. The Marine Corps will continue to use available force management authorities, maximizing voluntary separation programs (i.e., Temporary Early Retirement Authority, Voluntary Separation Pay, Early Release) while using targeted involuntary measures only for individuals
who can retire. At this time, the Marine Corps is not seeking any additional force shaping authorities.

MAINTAINING QUALITY OF LIFE IN CURRENT FISCAL ENVIRONMENT

First and foremost, quality of life for Marines starts with their mission. The 2016 President’s Budget supports the Marine Corps’ steady state operations around the world, forward presence, and rapid crisis response. For individual Marines, this means ensuring that the right training and equipment are provided on time to be ready and accomplish their mission. It also includes providing the right leadership. The Marine Corps continues to shape its permanent end strength and continue to drawdown from 202,000 Marines. In this year’s budget, our end strength will be 184,000, which will allow for an assessment of the drawdown on our small unit leaders in the face of continued high operational tempo before continuing our drawdown to 182,000 in Fiscal Year 2017.

As we ensure our force mix of NCOs is right sized, we also must be cognizant of the fiscal challenges ahead while we maintain our readiness to respond at a moment’s notice to crises around the world. Readiness includes our investment in our facilities and our families. Our Military Construction and infrastructure sustainment programs support our home station readiness and support future operational needs in the Pacific and new Aviation platforms. Our Marine and Family Programs exist to support the health and wellness of individuals as well as the mission readiness requirements of the Corps.

QUALITY FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The Marine Corps continues to strive for a prolonged commitment to facilities and infrastructure that supports both operations and quality of life for our Marines and their families.
The Marine Corps’ Military Construction budget for 2016 totals $719 million for 22 projects. The Marine Corps is investing in a variety of projects, including the Live-Fire Training Range Complex in Guam and two Bachelor Enlisted Quarters projects, one at Marine Corps Air Station Kanehoe Bay and one for the Marine Corps Embassy Security Guard program at Quantico, VA to house additional students as part of the congressionally directed expansion of the program. Since 2008, the Marine Corps has invested $2.67 billion in Bachelor Enlisted Quarters (BEQ) that will provide over 26,000 bed spaces to house single Marines. These facilities will also include state of the art Wi-Fi service in all facilities worldwide by the end of 2015. We are striving to have all Marines in the 2+0 standard to include use of existing facilities that can be upgraded to the new standard and by replacing facilities that have reached the end of their useful life with new, modern facilities. The Marine Corps has invested almost $4 billion in quality of life projects to include BEQs since 2008. Marines have new fitness facilities, Wounded Warrior care facilities, and other community support facilities, which greatly improve their readiness and the readiness of their families.

To keep these new buildings in top shape requires investment in our facilities sustainment programs. The 2016 President’s Budget funds 81% of the OSD facilities sustainment requirement for the Marine Corps. This is an increase above previous years but short of the OSD goal is to fund 90% of the requirement. We remain aware that taking risk in facilities sustainment increases the rate of degradation of Marine Corps infrastructure, which could lead to more costly repair, restoration and new construction in the future. We are taking strategic risk in infrastructure sustainment to support operational readiness for deployed forces.

Our world-wide family housing inventory is 96% privatized, which has improved the homes in which our families live and providing community support facilities such as community
centers, playgrounds, and “green spaces” that help create neighborhoods and a sense of community for our Marines and their families. Combined with traditional military construction, privatized housing will continue to build and improve the homes necessary to supplement local community housing.

\textit{PRESERVING STRONG FAMILIES}

To ensure that our Marines are operationally ready and able to focus on the mission, they must first be assured that their families are being cared for. That is why we place the highest priority on our family readiness programs – because family readiness is a critical component of operational readiness. Whether through exceptional day care, or programs that ensure quality and continuity of their children’s education across multiple changes in duty station, or resources to assist with children and dependents with special needs, we ensure that when Marines deploy, they do so knowing that their families have a wide network of support. The Marine Corps Family Care programs provide dedicated services that care for and strengthen the military family unit.

- Our \textit{Children, Youth, and Teen Programs} offer access to safe and quality childcare and youth recreational activities, serving over 28 thousand children and youths in 2014.

- The \textit{Exceptional Family Member Program} ensures that Marines who care for family members with special needs are assigned to locations with ready access to medical care and educational services. It also provides case management services, training and education, and access to legal services. As of January of this year, over eight thousand Marines are enrolled in this program, and over ten thousand family members with special needs are being served. Furthermore, our Semper Fit Certified Inclusion Fitness Trainer
and Kids Included Together initiatives ensure access to recreational activities for individuals with disabilities.

- **Our School Liaisons** reduce the impact of the military family’s mobile lifestyle on school-age children, acting as the single point of contact on their educational matters and performing outreach to local education agencies to create awareness of their unique needs. The School Liaison Program thus ensures the uniform treatment of military children transferring between school districts and states in areas such as graduation requirements and transfer of course credits.

Our Family Readiness programs prepare Marines and their families for the challenging realities associated with life in the Marine Corps. The Family Readiness Officers staffing our bases provide Marines and their families with valuable information about events and programs.

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**STRENGTHENING WARRIORS AND FAMILIES**

Our Semper Fit and Recreation facilities receive more than 14 million patron visits annually, offering a series of comprehensive strength and conditioning programs for our active duty Marines and their families. Together, the Semper Fit and Recreation programs ensure quality support for Marines through unit driven programs and services in such areas as fitness, sports, and aquatics.

- For instance, the High Intensity Tactical Training (HITT) and Aquatic Maximum Power – Intense Training (AMP-IT) programs optimize physical performance and combat readiness.
Operation Adrenaline Rush (OAR) serves Marines reintegrating after a deployment, using outdoor activities such as white water rafting, paintball, and rock climbing to help Marines cope with the lingering stress of combat. Begun as a pilot program in 2012, OAR has expanded to nine installations and has seen over 17 thousand participants.

Additionally, our paramobile units, located at Okinawa, Miramar, Camp Pendleton, Twenty-Nine Palms, Quantico, Camp Lejeune, and Parris Island, allow those with mobility impairments to participate in a wide variety of recreational activities.

The Community Wellness Program is an integral part of Semper Fit and Recreation, promoting an environment that supports healthy lifestyles throughout our military community. It offers educational classes, briefs, and seminars designed to maintain physical, emotional, and psychological resiliency.

**CARING FOR OUR FAMILIES OF THE FALLEN**

Caring for the families of our fallen Marines is a sacred duty and the highest fulfillment of our obligation to take care of our own. The Marine Corps Casualty Assistance Program is committed to guiding them through this difficult time with the utmost compassion, dignity, and honor. Our Casualty Assistance Calls Officers (CACOs) assist the next of kin with burial arrangements, applications for benefits and entitlements, contact with benevolent and philanthropic organizations, obtaining investigative reports, and other pertinent issues. Specially trained and supported by teams of subject matter experts, these officers are available to the next of kin 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Once the work of CACOs is complete, the Marine Corps Long Term Assistance Program (LTAP), serves as an enduring resource for next of kin, ensuring they receive sustained, quality
care from the Marine Corps. LTAP connects survivors with a broad range of services such as grief and trauma support, peer-based emotional support and, if necessary, crisis response and intervention.

As part of its commitment to leave no Marine behind, the Marine Corps continues to work to return all of our unaccounted-for personnel from past wars: 3,047 from World War II, 650 from the Korean War; 207 from the Vietnam War; and 1 from the Cold War. We also stand ready to support the efforts of the new Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency in fulfilling the requirement set forth in the FY 2010 National Defense Authorization Act to complete 200 identifications per year of unaccounted-for service members from past years.

**SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION AND RESPONSE**

The Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program continues to evolve by addressing external influences, such as the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, which directed the establishment of a Special Victims’ Counsel (SVC) and enhanced reporting requirements among other provisions. The goal is to build upon a victim-centric framework of supportive services, preventative training, and offender accountability initiatives in place since 2005. With continued support and guidance, we are confident that we will continue to see improvement.

Since 2012, the Marine Corps has spent more than $16 million on sexual assault prevention and response and special victim legal training initiatives, which enabled a 300 percent increase in full-time SAPR personnel “in the field” and a 144 percent increase in headquarters-level SAPR personnel to better address victims’ needs. As a result of these efforts, the Marine Corps continues to experience an increase in reporting, which demonstrates an increased willingness to come forward to report and access supportive services. Additionally, the 2014
Workplace and Gender Relations Survey for Active Duty Members conducted by the RAND Corporation identified that approximately 1,000 fewer Marines experienced unwanted sexual contact in 2014 compared to 2012, which represents both a 30 percent decrease and the closing of the reporting gap that exists with the number of incidents not reported.

We are fully aware that the Marine Corps has a lot of challenges ahead with regard to SAPR. Given that the Marine Corps is the youngest and most junior of the Services with the highest rate of unmarried personnel, we have the largest population comprised of these at-risk demographics. As detailed in the Department of Defense’s Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Progress Report to the President of the United States released in December 2014, an unfortunate truth is our female service members are still experiencing the highest rate of sexual assault. With this in mind, we have focused our recent preventative training efforts, including our new, interactive, video-based bystander intervention program for junior Marines called “Step Up.” In turn, we are seeing an increased willingness to intervene in high-risk situations according to the Fiscal Year 2014 Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) Command Climate Survey. Of note, 86 percent of our junior enlisted population, who reported observing a situation they believed was or could have led to a sexual assault, intervened.

The Commandant’s Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Campaign Plan continues to guide the implementation of other large-scale efforts, and has resulted in several best practices, including a SAPR training continuum that grows along with our Marines, an Ethical Discussion Group curriculum that extends beyond annual training requirements, and the monthly SAPR “Snapshot” newsletter. In addition, our internal advocacy survey inspired the new Department
The realities of more than a decade of persistent conflict have manifested in the complex
issues facing our Marines today. The prevalence of delayed-onset symptoms means that the
Marine Corps will need to continue its diligence in the prevention, treatment, and early
intervention well into the future. To address this, the Behavioral Health Program facilitates the
collaborative efforts and resources of all behavioral health elements, including Family
Advocacy, Substance Abuse, Community Counseling, Combat Operational Stress Control, and
Suicide Prevention.
The Marine Corps continues to better address the suicide problem that plagues our institution. Each and every loss to suicide is a tragedy that has a far-reaching impact on families, friends, and our entire community. While we prevent suicide one Marine at a time, we know that suicide prevention is not a single act. Prevention efforts consist of a series of actions to foster hope and connection to those at risk. There are usually warning signs that precede a suicide, and it is important that everyone in our community both knows those signs and how to help someone seek appropriate care.

CARE FOR OUR WOUNDED, ILL AND INJURED

The Wounded Warrior Regiment (WWR) mission is an enduring commitment to care for WII Marines in times of war and peace. Since 2007, the Wounded Warrior Regiment has coordinated delivery of resources and services to wounded, ill, and injured (WII) Marines, Sailors directly supporting Marines, and their families. Additionally, the Wounded Warrior Regiment administers the Marine Corps’ federally mandated Recovery Coordination Program, which seeks to integrate Marines’ medical and non-medical care. The regiment employs a holistic approach to recovery, delivered through four lines of operation: mind, body, spirit, and family.

Recovery care for our Marines must be multi-faceted and enduring because the injuries, illnesses and repercussions of more than a decade of war are enduring. Often, the initial phase of recovery addresses physical injuries. Post-traumatic stress (PTS), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and other psychological health issues require long-term, often acute, care. Many Marines first seek treatment for these conditions years after returning from combat when they realize they can no longer face their symptoms alone. Other transition through the Wounded Warrior Regiment and find themselves periodically reaching back to the Marine family that guided them through
their physical recovery, in need of encouragement and focus. The leaders and staff of the
Wounded Warrior Regiment must remain consistently available to offer their unique capabilities
in support of Marines so that an illness or injury does not preclude the realization of a
meaningful career, cause the mental or emotional breakdown of a family, or worse, end a life.

Furthermore, approximately one percent of the total Marine force historically has been
referred into the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) for non-combat related illness
and injuries. A shift in Marines supported by the Wounded Warrior Regiment is already in
place. Currently, approximately 60 percent of the Wounded Warrior Regiment’s Marines are
ill/injured outside a combat zone. Of the total numbers of Marines in the IDES, only 22 percent
are affiliated with the Wounded Warrior Regiment. Many of the remaining Marines qualify for
and would benefit from the resources and expertise of the Wounded Warrior Regiment as they
prepare for a successful transition to civilian life or return to the force. The development of
efficient and effective programs allows the Wounded Warrior Regiment to continue expanding
its reach in support of Marines.

Wounded Warrior Regiment capabilities are longitudinal and offer access points to
Marines at various stages of recovery and transition in an effort to prevent the types of distress
that lead to suicide. First individual assistance is provided to Marines (depending on acuity)
through Recovery Care Coordinators (RCCs), who work with Wounded, Ill, and Injured Marines
and their families to develop and execute their Comprehensive Recovery Plans (CRPs). The
RCCs are part of the Marine’s command and medical team and provide essential facilitation to
optimize recovery. Throughout the past year and a half, approximately 1,000 Wounded, Ill and
Injured Marines consistently receive RCC support. RCCs support those Marines by providing
outreach and education; facilitating goals established in the CRP, offering referrals to other
Wounded Warrior Regiment programs that may assist them; and generally acting as a conduit to available resources.

Second, an additional 700 Marines are receiving assistance from District Injured Support Coordinators (DISCs). DISCs are geographically dispersed mobilized reserve Marines who provide assistance to Marines recovering away from military bases, transitioning from active duty or reserve duty to veteran status, or medically retired to the Temporary Disability Retired List (TDRL). The Wounded Warrior Regiment may also reach out to DISCs as a quick response to Marines in desperate need because of unresolved medical issues, lack of meaningful employment, or other stressors related to transitioning from active duty service.

Third, the Sergeant Merlin German Wounded Warrior Call Center provides a continuum of access by conducting an average of 9,500 outreach calls per month to Purple Heart recipients, Marines on the Temporary Disability Retired List, and Marine Veterans. The call center also receives calls for assistance on the average of 1,200 per month, available 24/7. The call center provides information about benefits, enrollment in the VA, and transition services, as well as access to licensed clinical social workers who will assist Marines calling in emergency situations. Additionally, the Wounded Warrior Battalion Contact Centers conduct outreach calls to Wounded, Ill, and Injured Marines on active duty recovering with their parent commands to ensure their needs are being met. Total monthly calls average 3,500 placed and 400 received.

Finally, the Wounded Warrior Regiment leaders and staff develop a unique perspective on the lives and challenges of Wounded, Ill and Injured Marines, which they will use to improve the Marines’ futures. The Wounded Warrior Regiment will continue to facilitate communication between the Marine Corps and Department of Veterans Affairs in order to ensure successful
transition of individual Marines as well as ongoing progress in service coordination. Wounded Warrior Regiment transition specialists consistently work to advance job placement programs and efforts, contributing substantially to the successful recovery of Marines and families. Through the Wounded Warrior Regiment’s survey and analysis capabilities, it is able to continually assess the needs to the Marines and families it serves and adjust efforts accordingly.

The mission of the Wounded Warrior Regiment endures whether in combat or relative peace, and the goals of the Wounded Warrior Regiment broaden as Marines express needs not previously understood. The Wounded Warrior Regiment maintains the personnel, expertise, and commitment essential to caring for Wounded, Ill, and Injured Marines and will continue to stand ready to support Marines who sacrifice for our Nation.

**TRANSITIONING MARINES INTO QUALITY CITIZENS**

As our focus is to train civilians and make them Marines, in turn it is important that when our Marines are ready to leave the Corps that they are ready to move into the civilian sector - whether that is to find a job, pursue educational and technical opportunities, or start their own business. In Fiscal Year 2014, the Marine Corps continued to be VOW compliant. In addition, the Marine Corps launched at the start of Fiscal Year 2015, Credentialing Opportunities Online (COOL). COOL is a credentialing awareness, information and resource capability for all Marines to ensure that they have access to civilian credentialing and licensing information related to their Military Occupational Specialties. These men and women have been trained to be the best in their specialty and often those positions translate to licensed or certified civilian jobs. It is imperative that we ensure that Marines are prepared to make that transition by having their license or certification in place.
The Marine Corps believes that it is vital to incorporate a life cycle approach to transition preparation, ultimately allowing Marines to meet most Career Readiness Standards well in advance of Transition Readiness Standards. Through the Marine For Life approach, Marines will gain awareness of career readiness preparations throughout their military career to include initial interview with their Career Planner at first permanent duty station and the development of an Individual Transition Plan. On October 1, 2014, the Marine Corps began to implement the Personal Readiness Seminar, a four-hour seminar that is to be delivered to all incoming Active Duty Marines upon check-in at their first duty station. This seminar provides an overview of the Marine For Life cycle model, including Personal and Professional Development Programs and services and introductory personal finance topics.

The Marine Corps continues to support the personal decision of our Marines to seek additional training and education. Whether this is pursuing an undergraduate, graduate or technical degree, the Marine Corps works to ensure that Marines have access to the resources available to them. This may be through helping them prepare for college using the services of Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES); work toward apprenticeship using the United States Military Apprenticeship Program; obtain academic credit from passing College Level Exam Programs (CLEP); or pursue education endeavors successfully through the Leadership Scholar Program, Montgomery GI Bill, Post 9/11 GI Bill, or tuition assistance.

The Marine Corps has and will continue to deliver all facets of our voluntary education program. In September 2013 and December 2014, the Marine Corps updated requirements for the implementation of tuition assistance that successfully ensures that Marines focus on their Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) requirements and are making informed decisions on the
use of their tuition assistance to allow them to meet their personal education and training goals for when they transition to civilian life.

**CONCLUSION**

In closing, we are a proud Corps. We take care of our own -- including our families. Whether we are discussing recruiting and retaining high quality people, unit readiness, equipment modernization, infrastructure sustainment, or providing capability and capacity to the geographical combatant commanders, as our Commandant, General Dunford, stated in his Planning Guidance, our commitment to our Marines and families is unwavering. I appreciate the Congress’ support to Marines around the world and look forward to working with you to ensure the Marine Corps remains the Nation’s force in readiness.