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HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF
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HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND
RELATED AGENCIES
OF THE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
ON
QUALITY OF LIFE
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U.S. Marine Corps Priorities

Chairwoman Wasserman Schultz, Ranking Member Carter, and distinguished members of the Committee thank you for giving me this opportunity to report to you on your Marines and the state of our Marine Corps.

Individual readiness and family readiness are combat readiness. The Commandant, General Berger, and I are proud of our Marines and their families' for their enduring commitment to the physical, mental, and spiritual strength of our Corps. We are a warfighting organization, and by ensuring the high quality of life of our Marines, Sailors, and their families, we are ensuring the success of our mission and the ability of the Marine Corps to operate as the Nation's premier naval expeditionary force in readiness.

Your Marine Corps has decided to fund modernization and recover our readiness to continue to ensure our Marines are fully equipped for today's conflict. The publishing of the Commandant's Planning Guidance was the first step in this process. During FY20, the Marine Corps will begin to implement those initiatives, placing emphasis on force design and development, revitalizing efforts in professional military education, and focusing on core values –honor, courage, and commitment. Investments in these areas will improve the quality of life for the Marines and their families - the centerpiece of the Corps.

Our comprehensive portfolio of services seeks the holistic fitness and readiness of our Marines and families - supporting body, mind, and spirit. The Commandant has directed the Corps to focus on Training, Education, Command, and Leadership as core components of the Marine Corps' future.

The Marine Corps Behavioral Programs are an integrated community-based service model that promotes the social, behavioral, and psychological fitness of Marines and families to enhance mission effectiveness. Programs include Community Counseling, Family Advocacy, Sexual Assault Prevention and Response, Suicide Prevention, Substance Abuse, Combat Operational Stress, and integrated prevention efforts. We provide a broad array of services and prevention resources that include prevention plans, training and classes, non-medical counseling, victim, and unit level prevention strategies. These are free and confidential non-medical counseling services by counselors at each installation, available to active duty service members and dependents. During FY19, we provided 12,981 assessments and 88,252 counseling hours to Marines and their families.

Suicide prevention continues to be one of the Marine Corps top priorities. Suicide prevention is a complex, challenging task, but one that we will continue to attack from many angles. Current and future suicide prevention initiatives, train individuals to recognize signs and symptoms of those at risk to include the: Unit Marine Awareness and Prevention Integrated

Training, Combat and Operational Stress Control Capability initiatives, Suicide Prevention Program Officers, Chaplains, and Behavioral Health.

Other actions include the revisions of the Inspector General Marine Corps checklist to ensure Commanders have the necessary protocols in place, at the unit level, to help prevent deaths by suicide. The rewriting of Marine Corps Order 1720.2, will provide the field with a suicide prevention policy that is realistic, actionable, and effective; both are expected to be completed this spring. By fall 2020, the Marine Corps will release Marine Awareness and Prevention Integrated Training for Families as a prevention-focused training designed to provide families with information on suicide prevention.

Further actions include the placement of an Operational Stress Control and Readiness (OSCAR) team within Marine Corps units who are there to help Marines recognize and respond to stress. Our OSCAR members are there to help and to connect Marines with other resources.

The Marine Corps DSTRESS Line is a 24/7/365, Marine-specific call center providing phone, chat, and video-telephone capability for anonymous counseling. DSTRESS Line callers can discuss stress, anger management, grief and loss, deployment cycles, parent-child relationships, couples communication, marital issues, relationships, relocations, and suicidal crisis as well as other areas of concern.

Solving the issues of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment remains one of our biggest challenges. This behavior does not reflect our Corps Values and is not part of our service culture; it only erodes unit cohesion, trust, and our effectiveness as warfighters. The Marine Corps continues to encourage reporting, including anonymous reporting, of sexual harassment and other problematic behaviors. While there is more to be done, we remain steadfast in our efforts to enhance prevention of and response to all forms of harassment. In 2018, we updated our policy, Marine Corps Order 5354.1E (Marine Corps Prohibited Activities and Conduct Prevention Response Policy) prohibiting harassment, including sexual harassment. We are committed to preventing incidents of sexual assault and sexual harassment by promoting positive behaviors, fostering healthy command climates, and building skills to identify and prevent negative behaviors. We remain committed to responding to sexual assaults, including those occurring before service, by providing victim-centered support.

Collaboration is vital in addressing sexual assault prevention and response. The Marine Corps Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program works together with the other Services, Department of the Navy Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO), Department of Defense (DoD) SAPRO, and outside entities to enhance the ability of the Marine Corps to prevent and respond to sexual assault, identify best practices, and to leverage resources. SAPR supports enterprise-wide efforts to prevent sexual assaults within the military and care for Marines, which will foster a culture of respect to all.

Updated SAPR annual training for Staff Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCO) is in development to provide more focus at the small unit level. The training's goal is to help increase SNCO knowledge about sexual assault, reporting, resources, rank-specific roles and responsibilities, and to build skills consistent with primary prevention.

SAPR updated its training for the Commander's Course to better prepare senior leadership to prevent sexual assault once they assume command. The training includes information focused on actionable recommendations for pre-command leaders and small group discussions facilitated by Marine Corps mentors and SAPR experts.

A revised SAPR Victim Advocate training was released in October 2019 and has been fully implemented. The revised 40-hour curriculum focuses on building and refining advocacy skills and includes cultural competency and prevention training. We are implementing an online evaluation tool for SAPR training to assess the effectiveness of current training, beginning with the current rank-specific training for E1 to E5 Marines. This effort will start with pilot programs in FY20. The tool will provide real-time feedback to SAPR personnel to improve the quality of instruction and will measure training participants' changes in knowledge and satisfaction.

Spouse employment can be a significant challenge for many Marine Corps families. The Marine Corps Family Member Employment Assistance Program (FMEAP) emphasizes a proactive approach for military spouses and other dependent family members. The Program enables them to formulate informed career and educational choices by utilizing employment-related referral services, career and skill assessments, career coaching, job search guidance, portable career opportunities, and education center referrals/guidance. The FMEAP provides coaching and training, such as interview techniques, resume and cover letter writing, the federal application process, salary negotiations, appropriate dress, staff-assisted computerized job searches, skills and personality assessments, one-on-one career coaching, education, training, and volunteer opportunities, as well as, entrepreneur business opportunities.

Installations provide training/workshops to assist spouses and transitioning service members with understanding the federal hiring process. Also, our Installations conduct job fairs to help veterans and family members in finding employment. FMEAP connects Marine Corps spouses with volunteer opportunities through installation Volunteer Coordinators to assist with establishing career experience throughout the permanent change of station transitions. FMEAP also helps translate volunteer experiences into marketable skills on resumes. The program's holistic approach helps support spouses throughout a Marine's service. The Marine Corps participates in the DoD Military Spouse Preference (MSP) Program, which was instituted to reduce the adverse impact on the career paths of spouses of active-duty service members.

The FY18 National Defense Authorization Act provided reimbursement authority for state licensure and certification costs of a Marine spouse arising from relocation to another state; the maximum amount of reimbursement was increased from \$500 to \$1000 in the FY20 NDAA. To date, 128 individual claims have been successfully processed, totaling \$45,660 in reimbursements back to our Marines and spouses.

To assist spouses with gaining transferable job skills, the Marine Corps participates in the Military Spouse Career Advancement Account (MyCAA) Scholarship. The Scholarship provides up to \$2,000 per year (maximum of \$4,000) for military spouses (Private to Sergeant, Warrant Officers 1 & 2, and 2nd Lieutenants to 1st Lieutenants) to pursue licenses, certificates, certifications or Associate Degrees necessary for gainful employment.

CYP provides high quality, accessible, and affordable programs and services for eligible families with children who are six-weeks to 18-years of age. High-quality child care is a family-readiness priority for the Marine Corps. Currently, USMC has a total unmet need of 1,181 children with notable waitlists at MCB Camp Pendleton, MCB Hawaii, MCB Quantico, and MCB Camp Lejeune/New River. These are primarily due to a shortage of qualified workers, high turnover/low pay, and lengthy hiring/background check process. We are addressing these issues as part of a DoD Compensation, Recruitment, and Retention Working Group and implemented a non-competitive child care employee transfer program in November 2019. The Marine Corps appreciates the additional \$20M Congress provided this fiscal year to update and repair our child care facilities. The Marine Corps is developing a prioritization plan on how we intend to execute those funds this fiscal year to improve the quality of our centers.

For families with special needs members, the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) helps ensure Marines are assigned to duty stations where the required medical services and educational support are available for their family needs. EFMP allows Marines to focus on the mission, benefiting individual, family, and unit readiness. The Marine Corps maximizes family support funds to provide critical EFMP care services, which include: (1) Effective assignment of Marines and Exceptional Family Member (EFM) continuum of care, (2) Individualized family case management support, including Needs Assessments and Service Plans, (3) Care navigation training for EFM Advocates (parents/sponsor), and (4) Access to legal services. In FY 2019, there were 8,921 Marines enrolled in EFMP with 11,264 family members with a particular medical or educational need. Approximately 70 percent of enrollees are dependent children, and 30 percent are dependent adults.

We regularly seek ways to improve the EFMP and the Services we provide to our Marines and their families. Current initiatives include continued staff training to elevate core competency and service delivery to our customers; continued robust data collection and analysis

of assignment decisions in support of our ongoing efforts to identify and communicate TRICARE network capacity issues to the Defense Health Agency; case management system enhancements to support internal and DoD reporting requirements as well as end-user experience and service delivery; and collaboration with our key stakeholders and partners to promote inclusion and remove barriers to participation where EFMP families live, work and play. We are also looking forward to the results of a comprehensive program evaluation of EFMP, expected in spring 2020.

Marines fight and win. Our Marines will have tough, realistic training with the resources to do it, with an eye always on the families who are the unsung strength of our Corps. Your Marines are the best in the world, and our Marines are our most valuable asset. By ensuring that we take care of all Marines and their families, we will continue to enhance the quality of our Corps, our overall combat effectiveness, and fulfill our responsibility to our Nation, who expect that their Marines are standing watch. Thank you for your unwavering support for the well-being of our Marines and their families. Semper Fidelis!